

# Study on the Evolution of Plane Shape of Guangfu Ancestral Hall Buildings and the Construction of Type Genealogy in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

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**Abstract:** This paper studies the clan temples in four periods, namely, the development period (early Ming Dynasty and before), the shaping period (mid-Ming Dynasty to early Qing Dynasty), the maturity period (mid-Qing Dynasty), and the programmed period (late Qing Dynasty), analyzes and summarizes their prototypical planform features and attempts to summarize and construct a genealogy of the architectural characteristics of the plane shape of clan temples. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Guangfu ancestral halls in general showed a journey of development from a centripetal–single-linear–multi-linear–grid pattern, forming the unique Guangsanlu classic pattern in the Guangfu area.

**Keywords:** Guangfu clan; Ancestral halls; Plane shape; Genealogy

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## 1. Introduction

The Guangfu ancestral halls in the Lingnan area of China during the Ming and Qing dynasties underwent a complete process of occurrence, development, and maturity, and their evolution was mainly divided into four periods: the development period (early Ming Dynasty and before), the shaping period (mid-Ming Dynasty to early Qing Dynasty), the maturity period (mid-Qing Dynasty), and the programmed period (the late Qing Dynasty) <sup>[1]</sup>. As a result, the evolutionary pattern of the architecture and culture of Guangfu ancestral halls can be explored. In previous studies, most of the cultural history, structure and materials, and other aspects of the Guangfu ancestral hall were studied, and very few of them were devoted to the evolution of the plane shape of the ancestral hall and the construction of their genealogical lineage in a separate and in-depth investigation. This paper analyzes and summarizes the characteristics of the four periods of halls and attempts to construct a genealogy of the characteristics of the types of their plane shapes.

## **2. The architecture of Guangfu ancestral halls and their plane shapes**

### **2.1. Guangfu ancestral hall**

The ancestral hall is a temple dedicated to ancestors and sages <sup>[2]</sup>. This paper mainly refers to the buildings used by clansmen of the clan and its branches to worship their ancestors after the clan's populism and includes various forms of building types such as the grand ancestral hall and the private hall, as well as the joint ancestral halls under the name of the academy. Since ancient times, ancestral halls have been public activity spaces for enshrining and worshipping ancestors, carrying the functions of family deliberation, educating and nurturing talents, organizing weddings, funerals, and birthday celebrations, and promoting benevolence, righteousness, filial piety, and morality. Guangfu ancestral halls are the ancestral halls of the villages where the Guangfu folk groups are located <sup>[3]</sup>.

The term "Guangfu" is not only a historical and geographical category but also a social and cultural one <sup>[4]</sup>. The Guangfu area studied in the article, whose main dialect is Cantonese, refers broadly to the present-day Pearl River Delta (PRD) region centered on Guangzhou. The geographical scope of this paper is the historical "Nanfanshun Guangfu Core Area," including Shunde, Nanhai, and Panyu counties, which is the economic and cultural core of the PRD region, and to a certain extent representative of the Guangfu area.

### **2.2. The plane shape of the ancestral hall building**

A typical clubhouse consists of a single building with a roof and outdoor elements without a roof. The building usually includes the main elements such as the front hall, the center hall, the sleeping hall, and the corridor. Some of the ancestral halls also have auxiliary elements such as the platform, the pagoda, the Yimen, and the attached room. The outdoor elements are mainly the ground hall, water ponds, patio courtyards, and other elements <sup>[1]</sup>.

The front hall, also called the head gate, is the beginning of the plane shape of most ancestral halls <sup>[2]</sup>. The head gate is equipped with a shutai, which was originally a place for educating the townspeople, but later became a place for welcoming guests and playing music in the Guangfu area. The center hall is the space where the clan deliberates and organizes events. The back room, also known as the sleeping hall, is a space for the defense of ancestral tablets. A corridor is a transitional space in a courtyard used to connect the front and back of a building <sup>[4]</sup>.

Three words are commonly used to describe the plane shape and spatial sequence of a Guangfu ancestral hall: road, entry, and room <sup>[3]</sup>. An ancestral hall that distributes space along a longitudinal axis is a road <sup>[5]</sup>. In the Guangfu area, one-road and three-road ancestral halls are the most common, and to a lesser extent, there are five-road ancestral halls. The ancestral halls are, from front to back, the front hall, the front yard, the middle hall, the back yard, and the back hall. The three roads' ancestral halls, on the other hand, add a vertical sub-axis on each side of the middle road, consisting of the attached room and Qingyun Lane, or it could be without Qingyun Lane. Qingyun Lane is the lane between the middle road and the side road that runs through the shrine. In the horizontal direction, the space of the single building parallel to the direction of the face of the main building is the entry, entry to the majority of the shrine affects the size of the depth of the ancestral hall. Guangfu ancestral halls are usually referred to as the front hall, the center hall, and the back hall as the first, second, and third entries. Therefore, most of the ancestral halls in the Guangfu area are three-entry, and there are also many two-entry ancestral halls. If there are auxiliary elements such as pagodas, worship pavilions, and Yimen, it will become a four- or five-entry ancestral hall. In describing the plan of Guangfu ancestral halls, it is common to describe the room of the front hall as representing the architectural pattern. The smallest is a single room, three rooms are the most common, and five rooms are the highest in rank.

### **3. The evolution of plane shape characteristics of Guangfu ancestral hall architecture and the construction of type genealogy**

#### **3.1. The evolution of plane shape characteristics of Guangfu ancestral hall architecture in four periods of development**

The early Ming Dynasty (early Ming Dynasty to before 1460) was the period of development of the Guangfu ancestral hall. At the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, there was social unrest, and the state set up a patriarchal system, which followed the ancient system and continued the form of the Tang and Song dynasties. According to *Zhuzi jiali*, the ancestral halls built by officials and large clans were mostly “one-road, three-entry, three-room” and “one-road, three-entry, five-room”<sup>[6,7]</sup>. The Guangfu area did not suffer from the serious violations of war, economic development, or population increase, so the number of ancestral halls in the Guangfu area gradually increased, and “one-road, three-entry, three-room” became the architectural prototype of the Guangfu ancestral hall in the Ming and Qing dynasties. During this period, the common people were not allowed to build ancestral halls. However, there were still several halls, either by converting residential houses into shrines or by building new ones. The construction of small shrines was numerous and popularized in later times<sup>[6,8]</sup>. The “one-road, two-entry, three-room” has become the basic type of small ancestral halls in Guangfu. Due to the influence of residential remodeling, the Guangfu ancestral halls show a centripetal style. The “one-road, three-entry, three-room” pattern gradually became popular, while the pattern of Guangfu ancestral halls also developed towards the single-line style<sup>[6]</sup>.

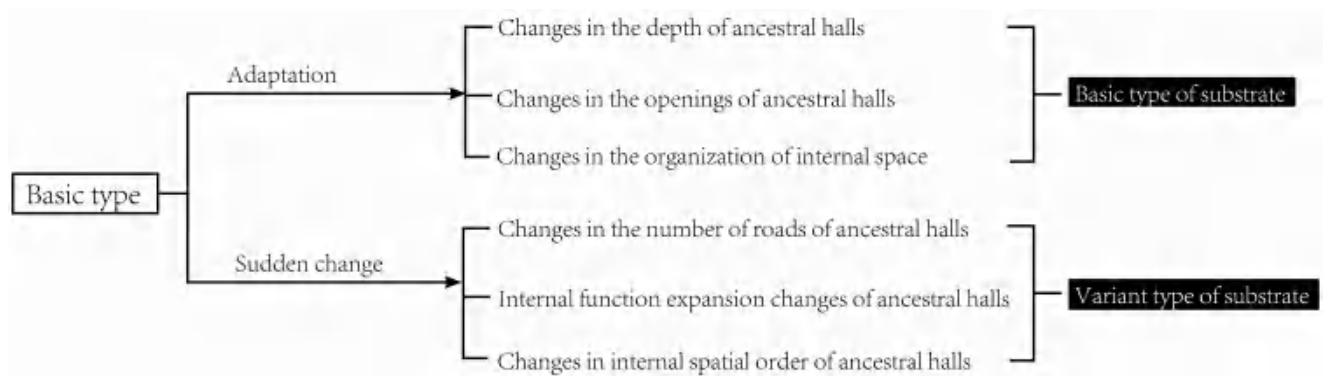
The period from the middle of the Ming Dynasty to the beginning of the Qing Dynasty (1460–1732) was the period when the Guangfu ancestral hall took shape. The Order of Tui'en created the precedent of family temples for ancestor worship, and a large number of ancestral halls were built in the Guangfu area. Government officials established family temples and great ancestral halls as required, and many commoner clans in the private sector followed suit. At the same time, smaller halls also appeared in large numbers. During the period, “one-road, two-entry, three-room” ancestral halls were mostly converted from “three rooms and two corridors” residential houses, and this kind of small-scaled ancestral halls was popularized in the later generations. Consequently, the “one-road, three-entry, three-room” became mainstream, forming the basic type of Guangfu ancestral halls, and under the demand for expanding the scale and influence, the basic type of “one-road, four-entry, three-room” and “one-road, four-entry, five-room” were derived from the subtypes. Due to the accumulation of wealth, clan power expansion, and diversified functions, resulting in variations in the ancestral hall types of “three-road, three-entry, three-room” and “three-road, three-entry, five-room,” showing the transition from a single linear pattern to multi-linear pattern<sup>[9-11]</sup>.

The middle of the Qing Dynasty (1734–1841) was the period of maturity of the Guangfu ancestral hall. For more than a hundred years in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, the Guangfu area experienced rapid economic development through merchant transit and the development of Shatian, coupled with the prevalence of virtual clans, and the overall strengthening of the clans, the ancestral halls and the lineage halls were constructed in large numbers and rebuilt and enlarged<sup>[1]</sup>. Using architectural aids such as attached rooms and pagodas, small shrines were expanded, and a variation of the “three-road, two-entry, three-room” type of shrine appeared. Large ancestral halls were rebuilt and expanded or built on a large scale with a high level of formality. The complete emergence of lining ancestral halls and Qingyun Lane changed the spatial sequence, mutating into the “three-road, three-entry, three-room” and “three-road, three-entry, five-room” variants of ancestral halls and presenting a multiline pattern, forming the classic wide three-road pattern. Due to the need for accessibility, the horizontal linear space was developed, showing a development towards a grid pattern.

The late Qing Dynasty (1842–1906) was the period of the programming of the Guangfu ancestral hall. The development of national capitalism and the need for the restoration of ceremonial rule under the war pushed

the last peak of the construction of Guangfu ancestral halls. The virtual clans united their forces to build an ancestral hall in the form of a lineage hall <sup>[1]</sup>. As a result, in addition to the construction of a large number of small shrines, there was an expansion of the scale, emphasizing the functionality of the changes, and mutated into the grid-like “three-road, three-entry, three-room” and “three-road, three-entry, five-room” shrines, forming a variant of the Gwangsan, a pattern that was accessible from both the horizontal and the vertical. “five-road, three-entry, three-room” and “five-road, three-entry, five-room” variations of the ancestral halls, presenting the ultimate form of the large-scale ancestral hall grid format in the Guangfu area <sup>[12]</sup>.

Comprehensive early Ming and before, the middle of the Ming to the early Qing shaping period, the mid-Qing period of maturity, and the late Qing programmed period, the Guangfu ancestral hall plane shape characteristics showed the ephemeral nature of the characteristics of the type. With the mainstream form of “one-road, three-entry, three-room,” combined with the auxiliary elements of the building and the actual needs of different eras, a rich variety of ancestral halls have been developed, and the overall pattern shows the evolution of the centripetal–single-linear–multi-linear–grid pattern. Based on the architectural evolution path, the basic type, variant type, basic subtype, and variant subtype of Guangfu ancestral halls are classified according to the two paths of mutational development and adaptive adjustment of the architectural types, and the genealogy of the Guangfu ancestral halls’ architectural plan types is constructed (**Figure 1**) <sup>[13]</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Basis for judgement of building type subunits and variants

### 3.2. The genealogical construction of the plane shape types of Guangfu ancestral hall architecture

This section summarizes the law of typological evolution of the architectural plane shape of Guangfu ancestral halls in each period of development, and constructs a typological genealogy (**Figure 2**) <sup>[14]</sup>.

The development period of the building plane shape can be divided into two stages of evolution, the first stage for the formation of “one-road, two-entry, three-room”; and the second stage for the formation of “one-road, three-entry, three-room,” and the later development of “one-road, three-entry, five-room” form. The shaping period of the building plane shape spans a large period and can be summarized into four stages. The first stage is “one-road, two-entry, three-room, doorway (concave bucket doors)”; The second stage is “one-road, three-entry, three-room, doorway (concave bucket doors) and one-road, three-entry, five-room”; The third stage is “one-road, four-entry, three-room, and one-road, four-entry, five-room”; The fourth stage is “three-road, three-entry, three-room (without Qingyun Lane), and three-road, three-entry, five-room (without Qingyun Lane).” The mature period of the building plane shape, in addition to the mainstream form “one-road, three-entry, three-room” and the formation of large ancestral halls of the Guangsanlu pattern, the unique features of the Guangfu ancestral hall are specifically divided into three stages of evolution. The first stage is “three-road, two-entry, three-room”; The second stage is “three-road, three-entry, three-room (with Qingyun Lane)”; The third stage is “three-road, three-entry, five-room (with Qingyun Lane).” During the programming period, the building plane

shape system is fixed, but a Guangsanlu pattern continues to lateral scale development and grid format pattern formation. It is specifically divided into three evolutionary stages, the first stage is “three-road, three-entry, three-room”; the second stage is “three-road, three-entry, five-room”; the third stage is “five-road, three-entry, three-room, and five-road, three-entry, five-room.”

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Guangfu clan temples evolved from development, and shaping, to maturity and programming. Through peaks and valleys in the construction of ancestral halls, and the plane shapes evolved with the times, presenting an ephemeral nature. Existing ancestral halls with “one-road, three-entry, three-room” and “one-road, two-entry, three-room” are common, accounting for three-quarters of the total number of ancestral halls, but with the changing functional needs. Based on the basic form, Guangfu ancestral halls have changed into richer plane shapes. As can be seen from the construction of the genealogy of plane shape type characteristics, Guangfu clan temples in general show a journey of development from centripetal–single-linear–multi-linear–grid pattern, forming a unique classic pattern of Guangsanlu in the Guangfu area.

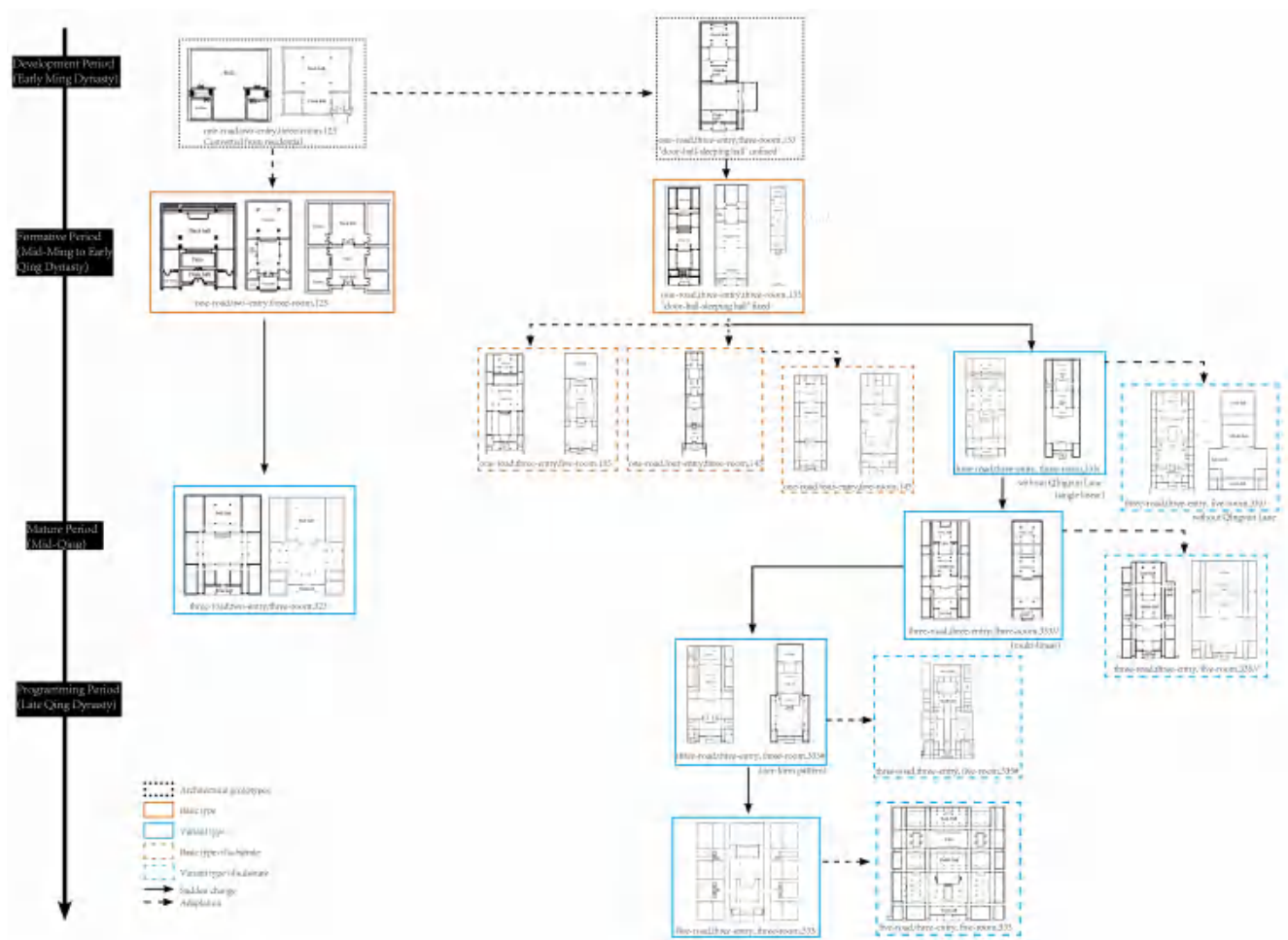


Figure 2. Genealogical chart of Guangfu ancestral hall's plane shape characteristic type<sup>[15-19]</sup>

#### 4. Summary and outlook

There are many ancestral hall buildings in Guangfu, which are the essence of the architectural technology and culture of Guangfu area in Lingnan. This paper summarizes the evolution of the plane shape of the Guangfu ancestral hall building, constructs its type and characteristic genealogy, and summarizes the evolution of the Guangfu ancestral hall architecture. In the exploratory research, it is not difficult to find that the evolution of the

shape of the ancestral hall of Guangfu is closely related to its historical background, socio-economic conditions, and the evolution of the construction process. Therefore, in-depth and integrated research in future research is more conducive to showing the charm of the Guangfu ancestral hall architecture. The plane shape genealogy of the Guangfu ancestral hall building constructed in this study hopes to provide a guideline for further research on the spatial sequence and plane shape of the ancestral hall building.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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