

# *The Transmission and Development of Beijing Local Culture in Traditional Quadrangle Courtyards: A Comparison with Japanese Samurai Residences*

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**Abstract:** Quadrangle courtyards have been the main living spaces for Beijing residents since the Ming and Qing dynasties, serving as a cultural calling card for Beijing and embodying the local culture and architectural features of the city for nearly a thousand years. This paper examines the unique traditional culture of the Beijing area through the study of Tan Zongjun's former residence and his hobbies, focusing on the inheritance and development of culture in the new era. It also compares with traditional Japanese architecture, such as the samurai residences. Through the research and comparison, this research finds that the quadrangle courtyard, as a place of residence for ancient and modern people, can not only reflect people's class status but also their way of life. Although the construction of the quadrangle courtyard shares similarities with the culturally similar Japanese samurai residences, it still has its own uniqueness.

**Keywords:** Beijing culture, quadrangle courtyard, architecture, cultural transmission and development, Japanese Samurai Residence.

## 1. Introduction

Quadrangle courtyards have been the main living spaces for Beijing residents since the Ming and Qing dynasties, serving as a cultural calling card for Beijing and embodying the local culture and architectural features of the city for nearly a thousand years. This paper will mainly explore the traditional characteristics of local culture within the quadrangle courtyards and how people can inherit and develop the Beijing local culture that the quadrangle courtyards carry in today's society. This paper will analyze these questions from various aspects such as architecture, culture, and diet, using the quadrangle courtyard where the Qing dynasty official Tan Zongjun lived as an example, and incorporating a comparison with Japanese space and culture.

## 2. Basic Overview of Tan Zongjun's Former Residence

Tan Zongjun's quadrangle courtyard is located at No. 77 Yangrou Hutong. The complex was built during the Daoguang period of the Qing dynasty, with a total area of about 6,400 square meters. In front of the courtyard at No. 77 Yangrou Hutong in Beijing's Xicheng District, two mounting stones and a grand gate are particularly eye-catching, forming a stark contrast with other buildings in the alley. In 1874, after Tan Zongjun won the second place in the national imperial examination, Emperor

Tongzhi allowed him to live in the courtyard at No. 77 Yangrou Hutong. Later, the warlord Yan Xishan of the Republic of China bought the estate and lived there until the peaceful liberation of Beijing.

### 3. Architectural Aesthetics and Art in the Quadrangle Courtyard

This quadrangle courtyard reflects Tan Zongjun's high social status and refined artistic taste. During the Qing dynasty, the specifications for building quadrangle courtyards were strictly enforced, and thus only high-ranking officials or famous merchants in the capital city could use three or more courtyards. The Western Road buildings of the Wan Shou Temple were royal villas in the Qing dynasty, known as the Little Forbidden City of the West. The main buildings were constructed in the style of a prince's mansion during the reign of Emperor Qianlong, with seven courtyards, but the courtyard level was that of a royal villa. Tan Zongjun's residence was also a large four-courtyard complex, indicating that Tan Zongjun's status among the officials in the capital city was relatively important at the time. The former residence was originally a complete four-courtyard complex, with the main gate being a grand gate and mounting stones on both sides. The mounting stones were essential facilities outside the gates of quadrangle courtyards in the past, but they were not part of the basic architecture of the quadrangle courtyard. Since the main modes of transportation at the time were sedan chairs, carriages, and horses, the mounting stones provided convenience for mounting and dismounting. They were also a symbol of social status [1].

The total area of the former residence is about 6,000 square meters. Upon entering the Chuihua Gate, one can see the interior buildings of the courtyard. The third courtyard is the main house of the complex, and thus we can deduce that Tan Zongjun lived and rested here. The interior paintings of the courtyard should have been influenced by the official rank of the owner of the house. Royal paintings usually featured blue, red, and yellow as the main colors, with auspicious animals such as dragons, kylin, and phoenixes. Since ancient Chinese emperors often identified with the dragon, dragon patterns were commonly found in royal paintings. These patterns were typically found in Xuanzi color paintings and He Xi color paintings. Su-style paintings included scenes of famous mountains and rivers or precious treasures within China. These paintings were usually used for officials or some buildings within the palace, and were not allowed for use by the common people. Through on-site inspections at the Western Road villa of the Wan Shou Temple, a large number of Su-style and Xuanzi color paintings can be found in the courtyard [1]. Through on-site inspections at Tan Zongjun's former residence, we can see that the existing paintings in the courtyard are almost entirely Su-style paintings. Therefore, we can understand that the Qing dynasty had very strict regulations on the level of paintings for officials and princes' residences. Any level of painting would follow the rank of the courtyard. Thus, we can understand the strictness of the Qing dynasty's official specifications.

### 4. The Culture of the Scholarly Circle in the Quadrangle Courtyard

Tan Zongjun was a lover of literature, and besides being an official, he was also a traditional scholar [2]. Born in Nanhai, Guangdong in 1846, he was influenced by his father Tan Ying from a young age and developed a love for literature and was clever and sharp-witted. After coming to Beijing upon winning the second place in the imperial examination, he wrote poems such as *Spring Rain and Pantang Evening Stroll*. In the later part of his life, he also wrote poems like *For Inquiry*. This reflects Tan Zongjun's love for poetry and his appreciation of nature. In today's quadrangle courtyard, people can see many famous historical sites in the corridor paintings, perhaps reflecting the magnificent scenes Tan Zongjun witnessed firsthand. In the sixth year of the Guangxu era 1880, Tan Zongjun arrived in Beijing for his official duties and was appointed, along with Miu Quansun, as the chief

editor of the National History Office. During his tenure, he revised works including *Biographies of Confucian Scholars* and *Biographies of Literary Figures* [2]. Tan Zongjun would meticulously proofread various anthologies at home several times a day and frequently corresponded with Miu Quansun to discuss compilation matters [3]. This shows Tan Zongjun's love for literature and his high demands for his work.

Tan Zongjun and his father both had the habit of socializing with scholars. Tan Ying, Tan Zongjun's father, was a scholar of the 24th year of the Daoguang era. When Tan Zongjun was young, he formed the Xiyuan Poetry Club with several scholars and established the Xuehaitang Hall of Learning Sea, with a wide reputation for literary excellence. Influenced by his father, after coming to Beijing as an official, Tan Zongjun frequently hosted gatherings at his home to discuss literature, art, and Zen Buddhism, recreating the scene described in *Record of the Xiyuan Gathering*: From Dongpo and onwards, there were sixteen people, with their articles and discussions, extensive knowledge and discernment, elegant words and fine writings, a love for antiquity and extensive learning, a demeanor that was unmatched and extraordinary, the best of monks and Taoist priests, truly noble aspirations, famous throughout the four barbarians. Future readers will not only find the paintings enjoyable to view but can also almost feel the presence of these individuals [4]. People can see Tan Zongjun's pursuit of art and his love for ancient cultural masters.

## 5. Food and Drinks in the Courtyard

"There is no way to learn Tan in the theater world, and there is no mouth in the food world to praise Tan" is a famous sentence circulating in Beijing, and the second "Tan" refers to Tan's cuisine. Because Tan Zongjun was born in Nanhai, Guangdong, he has a deep knowledge of Cantonese cuisine. After Tan Zongjun lived in Mutton Hutong in 1874, he often held banquets at home to invite guests to entertain friends in the imperial court. Because he combined Cantonese cuisine with Beijing cuisine and pursued the original position of the ingredients, he attracted countless imperial court officials. Therefore, this kind of family banquet was gradually preserved [5]. In the first year of Xuanton in the Qing Dynasty (1909), Tan Yuqing, Tan Zongjun's son, returned to Beijing and moved out of the mutton hutong. At first, he served in the government of the Republic of China, but with the relocation of the capital to Nanjing by the Kuomintang government, Tan Yuqing lost his job. Therefore, relying on the pure taste of "Tan's cuisine" and the Hanlin status of Tan's house, "Tan's cuisine" has officially entered society and opened to the outside world.

Tan's cuisine is widely spread. It is characterized by giving full play to its original flavor of various high-end ingredients, supplemented by high-end tableware, furniture, etc. It is a very distinctive high-end cuisine in the capital. As the founder of "Tanjia Cuisine", Tan Zongjun has laid a solid foundation for the development of Tanjia Cuisine. Its cuisine uses a variety of seafood, such as the famous dish "Yellow braised shark fin" in Tanjia Cuisine, which has always been praised by people. Folks call shark fins in a variety of cooking methods, such as "stewed shark fin", "shark fin in soup", "sea braised shark fin", etc., but among all shark fin dishes, "stewed shark fin" is the best. Tan's cuisine can make seafood extremely delicious, which is influenced by Tan Zongjun's life in Nanhai County. And the pursuit of the original taste of ingredients is one of the pursuits of Tan's cuisine. After "Tan Jiakai" entered the society, its business became more and more prosperous, and many people who didn't know each other came to seek fame and asked them to prepare a banquet with a lot of money. Even government leaders during the Republic of China were influenced by Tan Jiakai and went to Beijing to taste delicious food. After the peaceful liberation of Beijing, with the support of the government, the inheritor of Tanjiakai was invited to open the signature restaurant of "Tanjiakai" in the Beijing Hotel, showing the wonder and deliciousness of Tanjiakai to domestic and foreign tourists. The Tan family's old house in the mutton alley was transformed into "Hefangyuan" after the millennium, and based on the Tan family's official cuisine, it was innovated in combination with other cuisines, and

gained new development. Tan family cuisine is one of the most prominent examples of Chinese government cuisine. Tan family cuisine is like a living fossil, providing people with complete and accurate information on the study of government cuisine in the Qing Dynasty.

After the peaceful liberation of Beijing, the food culture of Tan Zongjun's former residence went through a series of transformation and restoration processes, condensing the cooperation between the government and the commerce. In 2006, Hefangyuan officially opened its business. At the beginning of its opening, it had become famous as "the rare four-in courtyard restaurant in the capital". Later, it was famous for its delicious dishes and quiet and elegant environment. It was praised by customers: "Dining here is like returning to the prosperous period of this courtyard at the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the People's Republic of China." Hefangyuan has also attracted the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and other state organs to receive foreign guests here, such as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary and others, who have made unremitting efforts for the dissemination and development of traditional Chinese culture.

In addition to the inheritance of food, the combination of food and art has also been carried out. In January 2024, in order to promote traditional Chinese culture and Beijing's characteristic culture, Fangyuan and China Oriental Performing Arts Group of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism jointly created Beijing's first courtyard mansion-style immersive play "See the East the First Feast". The story begins with Tan Zongjun's visit to Beijing at the end of the Qing Dynasty, showing the story of Tan Zongjun creating Tan Jiakai and his son to carry forward Tan Jiakai in the courtyard of No. 77 Mutton Hutong. In the play, drama and catering are combined, and the development of the plot is watched during the meal. During the development of the plot, every audience can interact with the actors at zero distance, just like reproducing the scene of Tanfu in the late Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the People's Republic of China. On top of this, the combination of ancient Chinese traditional art and excellent dance has let more people know about Tan's cuisine.

## 6. A Comparison with Japanese Samurai Residences

From Tan Zongjun's quadrangle courtyard, people can see the integration of space and culture, a characteristic also reflected in the Japanese samurai residences known as buke-yashiki. These residences of the samurai class were most prevalent during the Edo period and once occupied most of the land in important Japanese towns.

Firstly, let's look at the spatial structure. Buke-yashiki during the Edo period were often shoin-zukuri style residences, a style that evolved from the ancient aristocratic shinden-zukuri through gradual changes in the medieval period, and was largely established by the late medieval and early modern times. A main house and several other buildings formed a compound layout, with rooms inside the buildings separated by paper sliding doors and tatami mats on the floor. The public reception area for guests was separate from the private living spaces. The Beijing quadrangle courtyard also features a compound layout with a main house and several buildings, and similarly separates living and public spaces. However, the internal division in Beijing quadrangle is more rigid, with different rooms designated for specific uses. In terms of building materials, the Beijing quadrangle courtyard often uses wood, bricks, and tiles, while Japanese buke-yashiki typically used thatched roofs and even paper. Therefore, it is undeniable that the overall structure of Beijing quadrangle is more rigid, but the construction of buke-yashiki would be more convenient and faster.

In terms of privacy, buke-yashiki were isolated from the outside world by high walls, with strong defensive characteristics. The residential buildings in the courtyard were independent, with asymmetrical architectural layouts and a variety of changes. The roofs were made of thick thatch or tiles. In contrast, the Beijing quadrangle courtyard abandoned defensive functions, focusing instead

on the symmetry and aesthetics of the courtyard. Both residences share the similarity that the entrance to the courtyard does not allow one to see inside, indicating the ancient people's emphasis on privacy.

The tea ceremony was an important element in entertaining guests in samurai society, and thus the tea room known as *sukiya* was considered an indispensable part of the *buke-yashiki*. The entrance to the tea room was a low, small door, the purpose of which was to show humility and also to limit the carrying of swords and prevent guests from entering and exiting from affecting the light and dark in the room. The architecture of the tea room not only influenced the residences of the samurai class but also permeated the lives of citizens and upper-class peasants, with tea rooms of similar style appearing in houses of any class in Japan, reflecting the strong tea culture of the local area.

## 7. Conclusion

Through the research and comparison in this paper, people can see that the quadrangle courtyard, as a place of residence for ancient and modern people, can not only reflect people's class status but also their way of life. Although the construction of the quadrangle courtyard shares similarities with the culturally similar Japanese samurai residences, it still has its own uniqueness. Due to the lack of clear pictures of the relevant buildings, this study still has shortcomings in comparing the relevant buildings in Beijing's traditional quadrangle courtyards and Japanese Samurai Residences. With the development of the times, countless quadrangle courtyards have disappeared into the dust of history. As lovers of traditional Chinese culture, people should strive to protect more quadrangle courtyards, allowing these cultural and historical buildings to not vanish but to become witnesses of time and history.

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