

The Educational Function of Ancestral Hall Plaques and Couplets Under the Psychosocial Homeostasis

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ABSTRACT

This article is to study the educational function of plaques and the plaques in ancestral halls under the psychosocial homeostasis theoretical model. Research problems include: (1) contents of plaques in Chinese ancestral halls and their influence on people and (2) the difference between the text content in the Chinese ancestral hall and the French pantheon, and the difference in the educational function. The research uses fieldwork and systematic literature review. The results of the research are as follows: (1) the content of the ancestral hall plaques and couplets which has three aspects including not forgetting ancestors, self-cultivation, motto and encouragement; (2) the educational function of the plaques and plaques in ancestral halls lies in its restriction and guidance on people's thoughts and behaviours. The values conveyed by the plaques of the ancestral hall are generally accepted by the people. The textual descriptions in the Pantheon make people pursue eternal spiritual purity. In the ancestral hall, everyone seeks to have some kind of emotional connection with members of their clan.

Keywords: Ancestral hall, plaque and couplets, educational function, psychosocial homeostasis (PSH), socio-culture field, French Pantheon

Introduction

Background

All countries have places to worship the sages; the Chinese build ancestral halls to commemorate their ancestors and France has a temple to commemorate the great men—the Pantheon.

The ancestral hall (Figure 1) is an ancient civilian building to represent Chinese civil ritual system, and it is a place to enshrine and worship the ancestors of the same clan, with archway, stage, courtyard, hall for ancestral tablets, and bell and drum tower, etc. Two thousand years ago, the function of ancestral halls of the Han Dynasty has surpassed the sacrificial places of all the gods of the sun, moon, mountains and rivers in the past, and these have become the centre of ancestor sacrifice, filial piety

propaganda and family cohesion (Wang, 2020, 2021). The ancestral hall is an important place for the clan to organize communication activities. It demonstrates the authority of the clan and is related to its prosperity as well (Zhang & Cui, 2021).

Plaques and couplets (Figure 2; also referred to as P&C in this article) is the decoration of the building. Plaques are inscription banners hung in the hall. Couplets are a banner that hangs down or is pasted on a gate or a pillar of the hall. Ancestral couplet (the couplet in an ancestral hall) is an art form unique to the clan society after the Song and Yuan dynasties, and it is also a typical object of ancestral hall culture. Its text content is a summary and recitation of traditional ethics, a concise statement of national ordinances and family rules and precepts, as well as yearning and expectations for life. The related history of the ancestral hall can be learned



Figure 1: Archway, Ancestral Hall of Tan's family (photo by Mingming Liu)



Figure 2: Plaques and Couplets, Plaques and Plaques in Ancestral Hall of Zeng's family (photo by Mingming Liu)

through the text introduction, the story of the family can be learned through the ancestral couplet, and the plaque with a long history can show the long history and former prominence of the family. The ancestral couplets carved on the stones on both sides of the door have the beauty of calligraphy, the skill of carving, the baptism of history, and the educational significance of the content of the text. Scholars from the fields of sociology, history, anthropology and architecture conduct research on the ancestral hall. From the perspective of society and culture, they study the artistic characteristics of the lintel and plaques of the ancestral hall (Wang, Bai, & Cui, 2007) and the ancestral couplet (Ouyang & Fu, 1993) and explain their humanistic connotation and influence. A brief overview of the research on ancestral halls based on the statistics and analysis of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) during 1993 to 2020 is presented in Ning & Qi (2020). The research articles believe that an ancestral hall P&C, as a cultural element, needs to be protected and promoted. It has a great effect on moral education.

The French Pantheon is located in Paris and is a sanctuary to commemorate the great men of the French nation. Pantheon means 'all the gods' and it alternated in its role as a religious and patriotic monument. The Pantheon is an iconic retro building with a large number of reliefs and murals. The underground part of the Pantheon is where

the great people who have contributed to the country are buried. Posthumous words are engraved on their coffins, from which we get to know of the main contribution of the person, not only outstanding artistic achievements but also ideological contributions to the country and the nation.

Psychosocial homeostasis (PSH) is a theoretical model proposed by Francis L. K. Hsu to understand the relationship between human psychology, behaviour and culture. PSH describes that people are in a 'socio-culture field' where people and people, people and things, people and cultural norms, and inner world and outer world interact with each other. People are not isolated individuals, and we must grasp them from the perspective of psychological and social dynamic balance.

Developed communication facilities such as internet have brought ever more intensive communication between various cultures in the world. The complete independence of individuals advocated by the American culture has also become the mainstream thought in the world; however, there are differences in maintaining psychosocial homeostasis among different nations. The reality of personal hard work caused by social development has lead the Chinese to divorce from their own tribe and move away from their hometowns. The lack of people's emotions is acute with social changes. People need to

seek their own national and religious characteristics to answer the question: 'Who are we?' The core of culture is difficult to change, people's values and behaviours still have a certain continuity with their parents and even grandparents, and this continuity is the foundation of all civilizations.

The core of psychosocial homeostasis is 'intimate society and culture', which is the part of everyone's strong attachment (Shang, 2006). According to Shang (2006), people need to put more emotions on certain people, certain things and certain cultural norms to build closer relationships and to make their lives meaningful. The relationship between people and the 'intimate society and culture is generally in a dynamic equilibrium, and any imbalance will bring some kind of psychological tension and also try to restore equilibrium (Shang, 2006).

Memorial temples of sages are a commemorative space that remembers and honours the deeds of famous people in the past and educates and inspires the world (Hong & Guo, 2016). When people are in sacrificial activities, such as the Qingming Festival, the descendants of the surname travel thousands of miles back to the ancestral hall of their hometown; in large-scale activities, such as the birthday of an ancestor, they invite the opera troupe to sing and also go to the ancestral hall of their own family to pay respect. People also treat ancestral halls as an attraction and visit ancestral halls that are not of their own family.

The Pantheon (Paris) has long been a well-known tourist attraction in Europe. There is usually an endless stream of visitors here. While people remember the sages, they also take a historical journey through time and space. From the eulogy, the tourists also get to feel the wisdom, spirit and contributions of the sages, and receive spiritual education.

People invest their emotions in the temple, and they established a close relationship with the people around them and their predecessors upon reading the words inscribed in the temple.

Research Problems

- 1) *What are the contents of a Chinese ancestral hall P&C, and how do these contents affect people?*
- 2) *What is the difference between the text content in the Chinese ancestral hall and the French pantheon, and what is the difference in the educational function?*

Research Purpose

To analyse the contents of P&C of Chinese ancestral halls through literature review and field work, list and classify, and then analyse the impact on people's emotions and lives after reading these contents of P&C.

To compare the text content in the Chinese ancestral hall with the French pantheon through literature review and analyse the differences in educational functions.

Significance of the Research

Everyone has the vital "intimate social and cultural" environment (Shang, 2006). People tend to commemorate their ancestors and the great people of society, and this action changes into a kind of culture. The Pantheon is used to commemorate the great men of the nation, and the ancestral hall commemorates the ancestors of the family and the great men of the same surname. People were educated when they read the writing inside the Pantheon and ancestral halls. Many universal values are proposed in these texts, and the differences in the content of the texts also show the differences between societies and cultures. The P&C of the plaque is a summary of people's life wisdom and moral thinking, which contains multiple values such as humanity, morality and customs. The P&C remind the Chinese in more aspects and condenses the family concept of the Chinese. Studying the educational function of Chinese plaques can serve as a basis for large-scale cultural comparisons.

Methodology

The research reported in this article uses fieldwork and systematic literature review.

Fieldwork

During 2004 to 2022, the researcher visited some ancestral halls in Dongkou County once every year. During January to March, the researcher did fieldwork.

Preparation

Before the fieldwork

Dongkou County, known as the 'Cultural Capital of Chinese Ancestral Halls' and 'Chinese Couplet Culture County, was selected as the research site. There are more than 20 well-preserved ancient ancestral halls in this

location, where the essence of Chinese ancestral halls gathers. Of these, 19 ancestral halls have been included in the national key cultural relics protection units.

At the site

The researcher navigated to the research site and requested for navigation instructions from the local people whenever required.

Site research

Observation

The researcher took photos and videos with mobile, camera and drone, and observed the people who visited the ancestral halls.

Data collection and organization

The researcher checked the photos and videos, choose clear photos and photos related to plaques and ancestral halls, and analysed and formed research themes.

Systematic Literature Review

Participation

The participation was of books, journal articles and research papers that talked about ancestral hall, plaque and couplet, the psycho-culturology theory and the theories of anthropology. These materials were collected from the library or e-library of Shaoyang University and CNKI. The books were about traditional culture of China, anthropology and ancestral hall culture, and the writers of these books are experts in their research areas most of them settled as professors.

And the journal of the articles is the core journal of related disciplines. China's core journals are comprehensively measured according to the following principles: quantity (i.e., the quantity of article published on the journal subject), Citations (cited by secondary literature, or readers). This article refers to the "Chinese Core Journals" of Peking University Library, or the 'Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) Source Journals', of Nanjing University. And also research papers from some researchers in some specific regions.

Variable

While the independent variable is the content of the ancestral hall P & C, the dependent variable is the educational function.

Instrument

Some of the research papers are listed below.

Procedure

Step 1: Search research papers and books Using following keywords: ancestral hall, plaques in ancestral hall and couplets in ancestral hall.

Select the papers related to the text content of the ancestral hall P&C, educational function of ancestral hall P&C.

Study documents and research papers related to educational function of ancestral hall P&C.

Step 2: Analyse the content and identify the kinds of general educational function of Ancestral hall P&C.

Make a list and composite.

Content analysis

Not forgetting ancestors

The location of the ancestral hall, the hometown of the family, the family name of the ancestral hall was written in the P&C to remember ancestors.

The first scroll sentence of the couplet speaks as if seeing the figure of the ancestors, hearing the sigh and missing the deceased relatives in Tan's Ancestral Hall (Figure 3).

Table 1: Checklist form of the subject articles researched

Researcher (Year)	Article
Chen Wenyuan (2017)	Explanation of the value of couplets in ancient Huizhou ancestral halls.
Bao Shilin (2017)	The Panoramic Collation and Interpretation of the Couplets in Hakka Ancestral Halls -On the Couplets in China's Hakka Ancestral Halls
Huang Xiaozhen (2016)	The Cultural Connotation and Artistic Characteristics of the Couplet Writings on Hakka Temples -A Case Study of Fujian Sanming
Wang Yansong, Bai Bing & Cui Qian (2007)	A Brief Analysis of the Humane Connotation, Causes and Influence of the Lintels and Plaques of Ancestral Halls and Folk Houses in Yangxin County
Zhao Zhongzhong (2020)	The Connotation of Filial Piety Culture of Huizhou Couplets and its Spreading and Influence in Traditional Society
Ouyang Zongshu & Fu Yongli (1993)	The ancestral couplet and the culture of ancient Chinese ancestral halls.

Table 2: Ancestral hall couplets

Couplet Content	Hall Location
Tracing back ancestors, generations ethics last long, thousands autumn enjoy worship. Rebuild ancestral hall, descendants assemble, thousands generation to prospers. 追溯先祖, 世德悠长, 千秋享祀; 重建祖祠, 子嗣云集, 万代昌隆	The Chen's Ancestral Hall in Chahugang, Ninghua, Fujian (Bao, 2017)

Table 3: Ancestral hall plaque

Plaque Content	Connotation	Hall Location
Longmen offspring celebration 龙门衍庆	Li family from Longmen	Lijiajing Branch ancestral hall, Yucheng Village, Futu Town, Yangxin County, Hubei Province (Wang, Bai, & Cui, 2007)

The two sentences making up the couplet can be called the “first scroll sentence” and the “second scroll sentence.” Couplets are read from top to bottom where the first line starts from the right. So, the first scroll sentence is on the right-hand side when people read the couplets on the wall.

The ancestral hall of Tan's in Shitian, Shijiang Town, has a couplet ‘ancestors’ virtues are high in the mountains, and their ancestral merits are great in the waves’ (Figure 4), which describes the mountain shape where the ancestral hall is located, and the geographical location of the

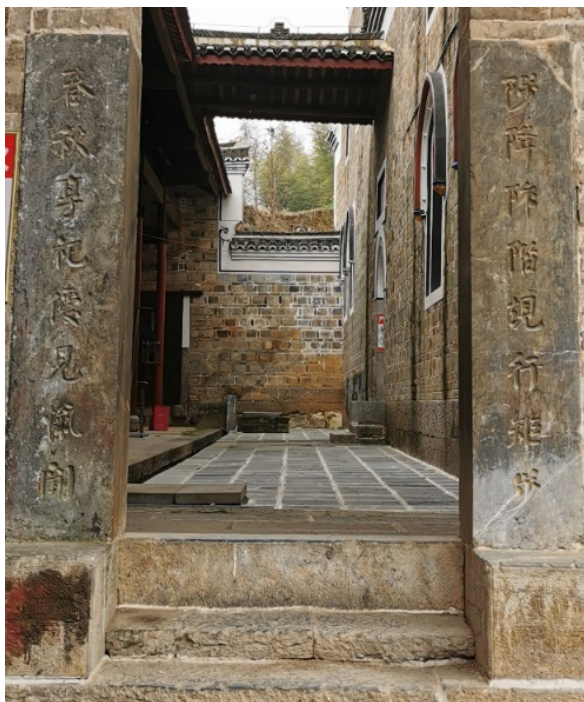


Figure 3: Couplets on the door carved in stone in the ancestral hall of Tan's family (photo by Mingming Liu)



Figure 4: Couplets in the ancestral hall of Tan's family (photo by Mingming Liu)

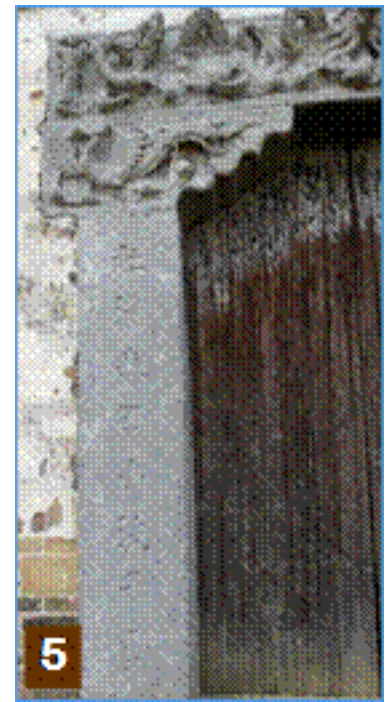


Figure 5: Couplet on the door carved in stone in the ancestral hall of Tan's family (photo by Mingming Liu)

mountains and rivers. The description of ‘spring rain’ and ‘thousands of mountains’ (Figure 5) make people get the true feeling of a sweet and beautiful home.

There are many couplets describing the martial arts deeds of ancestors in the ancestral hall. After artistic processing, their exploits may be exaggerated and finally deified. One of Tan's Ancestral Hall couplets has a ‘horse riding in Kunlun Mountain, the great achievements shocked the world’ (Figure 6). Some century-old families believe that their ancestors have become gods. The Tan's Ancestral Hall Couplet deified the ancestors as the Queen Mother of the West, Taoist supreme goddess (Figure 7).

The plaque of the ancestral hall reminds visitors not to forget the ancestors, respect the ancestors and educate the descendants about them.

Self-cultivation

The ancestral hall P&C contains requirements for treating family descendants. There are norms from thought to behaviour.

It describes how stepping up and entering the court, the guest and host meet with proper etiquette and posture. In the ancestral temple, all the rituals required for



Figure 6: Couplets in the ancestral hall of Tan's family (photo by Mingming Liu)

Figure 7: Couplet in the ancestral hall of Tan's family (photo by Mingming Liu)



Figure 9: Couplets on the door carved in stone in the ancestral hall of Tan's family (photo by Mingming Liu)



Figure 8: Plaques in the ancestral hall of Tan's family (photo by Mingming Liu)

Table 4: Ancestral hall plaque

Plaque Content	Hall Location
Inherit the past and link the future (Figure 8)	Tan's Ancestral Hall

Table 5: Ancestral hall couplets

Couplet Content	Connotation	Hall Location
A good living room only hope for perfection Like reading book, determine self-cultivation and discipline family 善居室惟杯完美; 好读书立志修齐	The life ideal to cultivate oneself and improve family	Wu's Shuangzhuo Hall in Peitian, Liancheng, Fujian (Bao, 2017)

the sacrifices were well handled according to the etiquette, and they walked forward respectfully and quickly (Figure 9).

Motto and encouragement

An ancestral hall in Zhushi Town was built in 1783. Above its gate is a stone plaque of 'Yang's Ancestral Hall', and the upper part of the stone plaque has three characters 'QING BAI DI' (meaning: innocent). It reminds the younger generation to maintain the family name and good reputation at all times, like their ancestors. Owing to the traditional ethics and morality, the Chinese nationals are often proud of their ancestors' loyalty and patriotism, and the fine traditions of innocence and family heirlooms.

Comparison

The coffins of great men in the Pantheon have eulogies written on them.

Not forgetting great men

A sentence is written on the outer wall of the Pantheon: Great men the grateful country (*Aux grands hommes, la Patrie reconnaissante*) (Deng, 2008). But times are different, and the definition of 'great man' is constantly changing (Liu, 2021).

Universal values slowly replace the trends of thought in special times. The words describing ancestors in Chinese ancestral halls, from actual description to exaggeration, completed the process of deification of people.

Self-cultivation, motto and encouragement

When people read these words in the Pantheon, they realize that the French great man's standard is not only his outstanding artistic achievements but also his ideological contribution to the country and nation.

The posthumous phrase 'Man of Nature and Truth' is engraved on Rousseau's coffin. Voltaire's coffin is engraved with gold inscriptions: 'Poet, historian, philosopher, it expands the human spirit, he makes it understand that the spirit should be free.' Such a great ideal gave birth to the French Revolution in due course. The researchers noted that the requirements to enter the Pantheon were demanding, and that only a very few had passed the long-term test of history (Chen, 2016; Li, 2016).

The Pantheon does not require people to behave in a specific way but affects people at a spiritual level, carrying the French values of freedom, equality and fraternity. There are now 70 great men who have made extraordinary contributions to France, including thinkers, politicians, scientists, writers, artists, etc., buried in the Pantheon.

Results

Through researching the literature, the author found two answers to the research questions:

1. The content of the ancestral hall plaques focuses on three aspects: Not forgetting ancestors, self-cultivation, motto and encouragement, which is consistent with Bao (2017)'s research results. The themes of couplets focus on ancestor worship, self-cultivation and exhortation (Bao, 2017).

The plaques in the ancestral hall praised the ancestors' noble moral character through simple texts (Huang, 2016) and admonished the children of the clanship for the importance of education (Zhao, 2020). It conveys the values to live without forgetting the origin or forgetting the ancestors, and to survive by studying.

2. The educational function of the P&C in ancestral halls lies in its restriction and guidance on people's thoughts and behaviours. The values conveyed

by the plaques of the ancestral hall are generally accepted by the people.

The textual descriptions in the Pantheon make people pursue eternal spiritual purity.

The content of the ancestral hall P&C restricts the younger generations from violating the national laws and family rules and not to commit moral corruption, and it guides the younger generations on the right method to survive and live a life.

Discussion and Conclusion

Psychosocial homeostasis describes the process whereby every human individual tends to seek certain kinds of affective involvement with some of his fellow humans (Hsu, 1971). Because of cultural differences, the content of intimate society and culture is also different; it may comprise parents, brothers, spouses, etc., but also contain social and cultural norms, ideas and ideas of great appreciation.

Under the reflection of European and American cultures that emphasize individual power, the content of the plaques in the ancestral halls commends the clanship or emphasizes sacrifices; it inspires people to remember their ancestors and emphasizes the importance of family power. The P&C in the ancestral hall present in a simple form, the family name origin, the place of offspring, the place of residence of the ancestors, ancestors' names, their official positions and their achievements and moral practices.

The plaques in the ancestral hall use self-cultivation and inspiring sentences to discipline future generations, and encourage and admonish the clanship to become ethical and talented to glorify the family; it is also a form of drive and spur of filial piety responsibility (Chen, 2017). In the ancestral hall, people lifted their psychological guards; complained to each other; received comfort, sympathy and support; and obtained cultural norms including beliefs and ideals from the plaques. Filial piety is a traditional thought recognized by Asians. People are willing to abide by the core values of P&C in ancestral halls. Ancestral hall P&C do not go obsolete from society because they are part of historical traditional culture. Their inspiration to pay attention to study and understand the social rules should be advocated and developed.

In each core family, there are several kinds of role 'relation', such as father and son, husband and wife, brothers

and so on. In different types of core families, one type of relationship will be more dominant than the rest (You, 2010). The kinship of Chinese people is dominated by the father–son relationship. A family membership emphasizes blood source and male offspring. Chinese people have the ideal of a big family and have strong cohesion and centripetalism. The sub family group is typified by clan, and people automatically become a member of the group based on blood relationships (You, 2014). Japan is also dominant in the ‘father–son relationship’, but Japan’s ‘mother–child relationship occupies the ‘sub-dominance’ in the kinship relationship. As a result, the eldest-child inheritance system prevailed in Japan, and the Japanese tended to organize in the ‘Jiayuan’ style. For example, the Chinese tend to seek the satisfaction of social needs in the ‘clan’ (You, 2010). In the United States, the relationship between husband and wife is dominant (You, 2010). Due to the lack of a permanent family and clan foundation, individuals are self-dependent (Luo, 2011). Every Chinese has to establish feelings for his own clan; people in the ancestral halls come into contact with people who have close relationships and obtain the core content of the traditional culture on the plaque, which can repair people’s emotional distress and achieve psychological and social balance.

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