

CULTURAL EXCHANGE: A CASE STUDY OF HUIZHOU ARCHITECTURE YIN YU TANG REASSEMBLY IN THE UNITED STATES

Chen Juan* and Sarawuth Pintong

Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University, Thailand

ABSTRACT

*Corresponding author:
Chen Juan
23103202@qq.com

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In 1997, the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) acquired the Yin Yu Tang (Hall of Plentiful Shelter), a historic Huizhou building situated in Xiuning County, Anhui province, China. This structure is a significant example of China's Huizhou architectural heritage. It was shipped to the United States, and underwent meticulous reconstruction at the museum's premises in Salem, Massachusetts. The objectives of this research were 1) to scrutinize the transplantation of architectural heritage within the Yin Yu Tang project, as well as its related cultural and traditional aspects; 2) to describe how Yin Yu Tang was "revitalized" in a new socio-cultural environment by providing an in-depth interpretation of Yin Yu Tang in a multicultural context; and 3) to examine the essential position of Yin Yu Tang in the overseas dissemination of traditional Huizhou architecture. This study adopts research methods in architectural culturology to conduct an analytical study, gathering information from existing documents in the United States and collecting data through interviews with key individuals in China. It is clearly shown that the "transplantation" of the Yin Yu Tang provides a valuable cross-cultural opportunity for the American public to gain insights into Chinese culture, architecture, customs, and family routines. It also encourages reflection on the importance of preserving historic buildings, not only from an architectural standpoint but also in terms of adapting to evolving values through the lens of architectural culture.

Keywords: Yin Yu Tang; Huizhou architecture; Chinese architectural culture; Sino-American cultural exchange

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of the Kangxi period (1622–1722), during the Qing Dynasty, a prosperous merchant named Huang erected an elegant mansion in the southeastern Chinese region of Huizhou. This resident was termed "Yin Yu Tang," signifying "Seeking the Shade of Ancestors, Seeking Abundance." Over the subsequent two centuries, eight generations of Huang's progeny resided in this abode until its total abandonment occurred in the late 1980s when the final residents departed from the village.

In 1997, the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) acquired the Yin Yu Tang, disassembled its structure, filled it in 40 shipping containers, transported to Massachusetts, and meticulously re-built it at the PEM; it opened

to the public in 2003. The reconstructed Yin Yu Tang is a masterpiece accomplished by Chinese and American craftsmen. Yet, it likewise serves as a "special messenger" of cultural exchange between China and the United States, indicating the unique charm of Huizhou architecture through its surviving examples. In the past decade, sustainable conservation has gradually replaced functional conservation in the theoretical study of architectural heritage preservation. According to a report by the Getty Institute, "objects, collections, buildings and places are recognized as 'heritage' through the conscious decisions and unspoken values of particular people and institutions" (Avrami et al., 2000). Currently, cultural transmission in the Yin Yu Tang is faced with several pressing practical questions. Initially, the question of the mansion's historical significance arises. Subsequently, considerations about its effective assimilation and harmonization within the American surroundings post-relocation come into focus. Lastly, the inquiry pertains to its role in the conservation efforts related to Chinese architectural heritage. This paper explores solutions to these questions through a review of the practical aspects of the restoration of the Yin Yu Tang.

2. OVERVIEW AND HISTORICAL VALUE OF YIN YU TANG

China's ancient architecture boasts a long history and a well-developed system, standing out in the global architectural landscape with its unique wooden structures. This rich architectural heritage is a crucial component of humanity's cultural legacy. The time-honored construction techniques and deep cultural roots have thrived on Chinese soil for thousands of years, remaining vibrant and dynamic.

2.1 Natural environment

Yin Yu Tang is located in Huangcun, a village in Xiuning county, southern Anhui province, China, with a history of over 1,200 years. Situated within China's subtropical climate zone, the area experiences a temperate and humid climate characterized by four distinct seasons, including relatively warm summers, cold winters, and mild, agreeable springs and autumns. The landscape consists predominantly of mountains and hills, marked by significant elevations, and traversed by rivers, with a limited expanse of plains. The geographical feature of "eight mountains and one acre and one field" gives Huangcun the geographical advantage of being surrounded by mountains, water, and a wealth of natural resources. It is due to these objective advantages that a considerable number of Huizhou merchants and entrepreneurs emerged, contributing to the construction of iconic residential structures akin to Meng Yu Tang.

Huangcun is divided into Xiamen village and Shangmen village. Resembling a swallow's nest in form, Xiamen is enveloped by verdant hills and serene waters, with Yin Yu Tang nestled within its confines (Figures 1 and 2). According to Chinese Feng Shui principles, typically, Chinese houses face south to let in sunlight and more yang energy. Furthermore, Yin Yu Tang, conversely, faces the opposite way, as it is oriented towards the north, where the stream flows into the direction of the village, and towards the south, where the rolling hills are located. Thus, the positioning of the site reflects the owner's desire for future generations to flourish while maintaining a symbiotic relationship with the environment.



Figure 1: Huangcun status map
(Drawn by Chen Juan in 2023)



Figure 2: Site Plan of Yin Yu Tang
(Drawn by Chen Juan in 2010)

2.2 Cultural landscape

Since ancient times, due to the "structural imbalance" in Huizhou's material resources and the "narrowness of the land and the density of the people", the Huizhou people have been "dependent on business" (Chenglin, 1995). During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Huizhou merchants amassed enormous profits

through their business ventures. The Chinese term “red-topped merchants” was used to describe the Huizhou merchants, whose wealth rivaled that of the nation. Huizhou merchants’ luxury consumption was mainly reflected in the creation of houses, ancestral halls, temples, and gardens for their hometowns. Yin Yu Tang is a house built by a rich merchant with the surname Huang for his own family. Huizhou is a region with strong clan power and a strict patriarchal system. Politics, economy, culture, and architecture in Huizhou have been profoundly impacted by its patriarchal system. There are numerous clans with decades of lineage, as most villages are characterized by living in clusters. Accordingly, eight generations of Huang’s descendants live in the “Yin Yu Tang.”

2.3 Architectural features

The Huizhou residential architecture of the Ming and Qing dynasties is one of the characteristic examples of Huizhou architecture. Whether analyzed from the perspectives of site selection, land use, materials, structure, modeling, or decoration, the Huizhou residential architecture indicates the characteristics of harmony and unity with the local environment.

Yin Yu Tang exemplifies a quintessential Huizhou architecture, encompassing a total area of 400 square meters. From the level of spatial distribution, it organizes its space through a central patio with two patios on the left and right. The two-story structure of the building accommodates 16 bedrooms, a central hall, and a storeroom. The eaves of the four sides of the roof are tilted towards the patio in the courtyard. Regarding institutional composition, under the patio is a fishpond, the pink bricks and tiles form the iconic horse-head wall of Huizhou architecture, the brick walls of the courtyard are carved with patterns of flowers, birds, fishes, and animals, and the hollowed-out wooden windows are engraved with deformed dragons and Ruyi clouds (Figures 3 and 4).

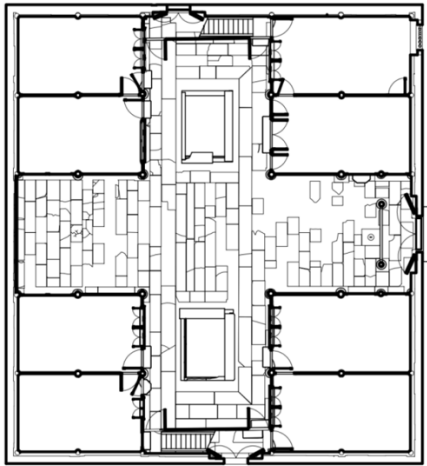


Figure 3: Yin Yu Tang floor plan
(Drawn by Chen Juan in 2010)



Figure 4: The facade of Yin Yu Tang
(Shot by Chen Juan in 2022)

3. THE PROCESS OF “REBORN” IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Since the 13th century, ancient Chinese architecture’s material forms and architectural elements have had varying degrees of influence on Western countries. Meanwhile, the Yin Yu Tang, which has traveled across the ocean, has reproduced the vitality of Huizhou architecture.

3.1 Origin

American Nancy Berliner, 65, Director of the China Section at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, who has had a passion for Chinese culture since childhood, was the catalyst for the story of Yin Yu Tang and the PEM in her “serendipity”, a story that began when China and the United States joined forces in 1979. The PEM is a museum about art and culture in Salem, Massachusetts, United States, dating back to 1799. It is the oldest and always-open museum in the United States, with one of the largest collections and exhibitions of Asian art in the country. Against the backdrop of China and the United States establishing diplomatic relations, Nancy Berliner arrived in mainland China in 1982 for studies at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. She was one of the first Americans to study Chinese culture following the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States. Throughout this time, she traveled to Anhui province and saw Huizhou architecture for the first

time. Through her collection of Huizhou folk art, she came to comprehend Huizhou's culture. Subsequently, she had an idea: the notion was to relocate a piece of Huizhou architecture to the United States and transform it into an art museum dedicated to showcasing Huizhou folk art. Her inspiration stemmed from her childhood visit to the Poston Museum, where she witnessed the restoration of a Japanese garden.

In 1996, Nancy Berliner was working in a museum in the United States. During her career, she befriended an American who was particularly interested in Chinese culture and willing to fund the realization of Nancy Berliner's "dream": "transplanting" a Huizhou building to the United States. Nancy Berliner communicated with the Chinese Government and searched for a Huizhou building in the United States. The owner of Yin Yu Tang, the 28th generation of the Huang family, was a pawnbroker in Hankou and Shanghai, and following acquiring a great deal of wealth, he returned to his hometown and built this typical Huizhou architecture. He hoped that his wealth would be passed on to future generations; accordingly, he gave the name "Yin Yu Tang", which has been inhabited by eight generations of Huang's descendants. As medical and living conditions in rural China during the 1980s were relatively poor, the Huangs decided to sell the residence to Nancy Berliner and move to Shanghai. They approached the Huangshan City Cultural Relics Management Office and the Xiuning County Cultural Management Office for assistance, and the relevant government departments were very supportive of the project, predominantly because it represented Chinese culture going to the United States. Furthermore, the project was subsequently reported to the Anhui Provincial Government, which supported it, as did the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. The endeavor concluded in 2003 with the public opening of Yin Yu Tang in the United States, coinciding with an outbreak of atypical pneumonia. Despite the absence of the then-Chinese Ambassador to the United States, Yang Jiechi, a congratulatory message was sent on his behalf. As a representative, the former Secretary of the Huangshan Municipal Party Committee attended the ceremony in the United States and delivered a speech reaffirming the Chinese Government's endorsement and acknowledgment of the Yin Yu Tang project.

3.2 Demolition

In July 1997, the Yin Yu Tang project entered the process of demolition. In the 70's and 80's in Huizhou, numerous valuable old houses were demolished. In the rural areas of China at that time, the state had not yet issued regulations for the protection of old houses, as well as the farmers did not realize the value of old houses. However, two-story buildings with bright tiles on their facades were popular in rural China at the same time. More than 8,000 pieces of ancient Huizhou architecture, including residences and ancestral halls, are dispersed throughout villages in three districts and four counties of Huangshan City, according to relevant statistics. Every year, they are torn down, collapse, and eventually disappear into history at a rate of exponential growth in percentage terms (Story FM, 2023). In September 1997, Anhui province promulgated the earliest provincial-level, regional residence protection regulations, "Regulations for the Protection of Ancient Residences in Southern Anhui Province", which intended to protect several vanishing ancient structures to some extent at the policy level.

Before the demolition, the descendants of the Huangs paid homage to their ancestors in front of the old mansion following the Huizhou tradition. They burned paper houses and paper money to their ancestors and informed them that the house would be relocated to the United States, where it would remain "alive" (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Scenes of worship before the demolition of Yin Yu Tang (Story FM, 2023)

To better restore Yin Yu Tang, prior to commencing the demolition, Nancy Berliner enlisted skilled artisans to meticulously paint and record Yin Yu Tang, meticulously annotating each component of wood and brick. Meanwhile, in order to maintain the integrity of the building materials, the entire wall could not be brought down during the demolition; even the rotting wood was brought to the United States for restoration.

Not only was the architectural structure "relocated," but also the coins beneath the foundation, the wallpaper adorning the walls, the furniture within the interior, and even the debris within the premises. Nancy Berliner presumed that the value of these items, including wallpaper, newspapers, deeds, letters, and diaries, is as substantial as the structure itself. Moreover, the information from these items can reflect the life of the villagers in Huizhou and even rural China at that time.

Over four months, 2,735 wooden pieces, more than 8,500 masonry pieces, and more than 500 stone pieces were disassembled and packed into 40 shipping containers for shipment to the United States.

3.3 Reconstruction

The utilized approach for Yin Yu Tang's "off-site reconstruction" adheres to the principle of "preserving the old as the old". The fundamental concept entails the complete disassembly of Yin Yu Tang, followed by its relocation to a new site. The foundation is then reconstructed utilizing original materials, ensuring the replication of the initial architectural structure. This meticulous restoration yields an outcome that faithfully reflects the original appearance of Yin Yu Tang in Huizhou, representing the pinnacle of ancient Chinese building preservation.

When Yin Yu Tang arrived in the United States and was stored in a warehouse, the first step was to translate the Chinese labels on all of the constructs into English and to categorize and store them based on beams, columns, bricks, and tiles (Figure 6). In the process of classification, if some of the tiles were determined to be broken, the American artisans used a type of local wear-resistant clay for firing and then applied a layer of grey pigment to the appearance of the burnt tiles, which not only restored the hue of the Huizhou architecture but also adapted to the local wind and snow conditions. To maintain the raw material, some of the rotting wooden components, the craftsmen would rot part of the peel and accordingly attach it to new wood to maintain its stability.

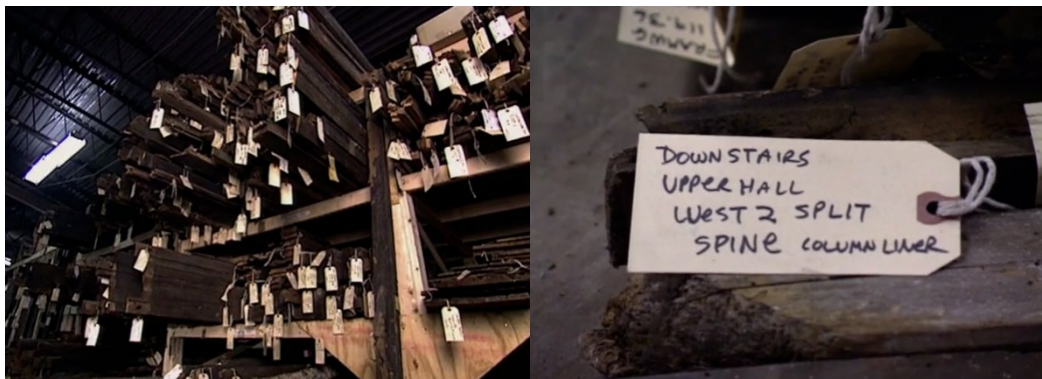


Figure 6: Record labels for wood components (Story FM, 2023)

The restoration process is a significant factor in determining whether the building can be "restored to its former glory." Owing to American craftsmen lacking experience in building traditional Chinese architecture, the Government of Xiuning County selected over a dozen local craftsmen with rich experience in repairing ancient buildings, including carpenters, bricklayers, stonemasons, as well as other craftsmen to carry out the reconstruction of the Yin Yu Tang. Americans were astounded by the Chinese craftsmen's ability to complete the entire structure with precision and tenacity without the use of modern tools. Besides the archives related to the restoration process, the American workers employed a laser to measure the horizontal line, whereas the Chinese craftsmen adopted a stone and a line, and only needed to use their eyes to determine whether the surface was level or not.

Mortise and tenon is a prevalent technique within traditional Chinese architecture, frequently employed in crafting timber frame constructions. This method involves a fusion of columns, beams, purlins, and other principal elements that seamlessly interlock to create a versatile framework. Mortise and tenon is an extremely sophisticated technique; its stabilizing technology makes the traditional Chinese wooden structure become a unique flexible structure beyond the architectural rows of today's frames. Similarly, it can withstand a large load as well as allow a certain amount of deformation, in the case of seismic loads through the deformation of a certain amount of energy to offset and reduce the structure of the Earthquake Response (Baidu Encyclopedia, 2023a) (Figure 7). After five and a half years of preparation, erection, experimentation, as well as restoration under the guidance of Chinese craftsmen and through the cooperation of Chinese and American artisans, Yin Yu Tang welcomed the beam-up ceremony in July 2002 (Figure 8) (beam-up takes place on the condition that the wooden frame of the house is ready for the installation of the final ridge pole). The

pivotal beam-up ceremony holds great significance in the construction of traditional Chinese architecture. Following Huizhou tradition, the "auspicious day of the zodiac" is selected as the main beam's installation day, typically at around nine in the morning. This occasion involves rituals like sacrificing chickens, burning paper money, igniting firecrackers, and making offerings, all aimed at invoking the protection of the deity Lu Ban. At the end of the ceremony, candies are sprinkled for the onlookers. The ceremony was held at the construction site of the Yin Yu Tang in the United States and was an essential manifestation of the spread of traditional Chinese culture overseas. The ceremony was also captured on film as a documentary, which is currently being screened in Yin Yu Tang.



Figure 7: Mortise and tenon joinery at Yin Yu Tang (Story FM, 2023)



Figure 8: The beam-up ceremony (Story FM, 2023)

4. THE ROLE OF YIN YU TANG IN THE OVERSEAS DISSEMINATION OF TRADITIONAL HUIZHOU ARCHITECTURE

Yin Yu Tang was officially opened in 2003, marking two decades since its opening, not only conserves a Huizhou structure within the PEM but also meticulously reinstates the entirety of life's settings encompassed within the edifice. This encompassing restoration encompasses the architecture itself, furnishings, domestic articles, diaries, and correspondences, all meticulously revived to their original states. Tens of thousands of visitors have discovered the Huizhou architectural culture and traditional Chinese culture through the Yin Yu Tang building and its display of Huizhou life. Yin Yu Tang wasn't initially regarded as one of the most exceptional Huizhou architectures, and prior to Nancy Berliner's involvement, it was on the brink of demolition due to its lack of designation as a protected architectural asset. Nonetheless, when PEM chose to acquire it, its significance underwent a profound shift. For Yin Yu Tang, it was transformed from an ordinary old house to architectural heritage, mainly because it provided an opportunity to establish a link between Huizhou culture and the world. Moreover, for the Government of Xiuning County, the transaction was characterized as a cultural exchange, promoting international awareness of traditional Huizhou heritage, and a major political and economic achievement. Furthermore, concerning PEM, the importance of the Yin Yu Tang undertaking is rooted in the convergence of the curator's lifelong aspiration and individual scholarly enthusiasm, accomplished through this initiative. Yin Yu Tang has since evolved into the most emblematic representation of Chinese culture within the PEM.

4.1. Providing a sample for overseas exchange of Huizhou's traditional architectural heritage

The relocation of Yin Yu Tang also introduces novel preservation strategies for China's architectural heritage. In China's geographic map, the Huizhou region has the largest number of ancient residences, decreasing yearly as China's rapid economic development and urbanization accelerate. Moreover, the Huizhou government was caught in a dilemma of how to safeguard Huizhou's historic architecture effectively. In the 1980s, the Anhui Provincial Bureau of Culture established the "Qiankou Folk House Museum" modeled after the PEM, which relocated typical Ming and Qing Dynasty houses, ancestral halls, pagodas, ancient bridges, and pavilions. In contrast to the PEM, Yin Yu Tang was reborn in a foreign country, but it still fits in well with the local natural landscape. Conversely, the structures within the Qiankou Museum have been relocated a brief

distance. They exist in isolation from external influences due to stringent local government safeguarding and now serve solely as museum exhibits. As Daniel Bluestone has noted, "Material heritage is not understood and valued apart from an act of education and interpretation" (Bluestone, 2000), the consequences of which suggest that for tourists who are unaware of Huizhou's culture, the Qiankou Museum's preservation of the old houses merely proves the existence of these old buildings in Huizhou and that the contained value is not effectively communicated.

As we enter the twenty-first century, the concepts and strategies for conserving Huizhou residences have undergone substantial changes. In comparison to the 1980s, current policies emphasize the protection of the environment and cultural ecology of tangible heritage. In 2008, the Huizhou Cultural and Ecological Reserve was recognized as a national nature reserve (Department of Culture and Tourism of Anhui Province, 2021), a qualitative breakthrough at the level of China's architectural heritage protection. The creation of the Huizhou Cultural Reserve has had numerous effects. In the first place, the new model is no longer a closed museum paradigm but emphasizes the protection of the village as a whole. Second, in comparison with the previous practice of state-led, boutique conservation, the new model protects a much larger range of houses and villages. To put it differently, the revised approach aims not only to conserve individual houses as mere artifacts of the past but rather to safeguard complete village communities where both the essence of "living" history and the inherent "spirit and energy" are passed down and rejuvenated. Unsatisfactorily, the reality is that the government does not have sufficient funds to compensate families for old houses that are not considered "old" or "valuable" enough. Despite homeowners being willing to support the cause of preserving cultural heritage, the government is unable to do so due to the combined pressures of deteriorating old houses and a lack of repair funds.

In 2019, the City of Huangshan launched the "100 Villages, 1,000 Buildings" campaign, which included a new "Adopt-A-Lease" model of preservation assistance. Previously, donors could only assist in preservation efforts by donating (providing financial support for the preservation of a specific house) or purchasing (acquiring title to one or more houses). In the contrary, the new model allows an investor to co-finance the maintenance of a home with the current homeowner at a pre-determined percentage (typically with the investor paying most of the cost). In this arrangement, the homeowner retains legal ownership of the maintained and renovated home, whereas the investor possesses specific occupancy and usage rights. This model encourages more groups to participate in the program. Additionally, it encourages multiple uses of the houses, gradually transforming a purely tourist activity into a broader socio-cultural project, in line with the revitalization of the village as a whole. This new model resembles the relocation of Yin Yu Tang in that it encourages investors interested in Huizhou culture to participate in the preservation of the old house, as opposed to limiting themselves to a single preservation technique.

Through the Yin Yu Tang project, the Huangcun village, where the building was located, has become a model for other ancient villages to perform conservation efforts. In addition, Huangcun is home to Huangcun Primary School and Jinshidi (builtin 1531) (Huangcun Primary School originated as an old private school of the Huang family in 1910 and later became one of China's first elementary schools to adopt modern educational standards, a milestone in the history of modern education in China. Jinshidi was built around 1531 by Huang Fu, a scholar from Huangcun. It is currently the oldest and most well-preserved structure in Huangcun (Baidu Encyclopedia, 2023b). Consequently, the slogan of Huangcun is "Millennium Ancient Village, Centennial School, Home of Jinshi, International Community," which offers pragmatic concepts for safeguarding historical architectural heritage by succinctly outlining the key aspects of Huangcun while establishing connections between traditional and contemporary elements, as well as local and global perspectives.

As an extension of the Yin Yu Tang project, PEM has also contributed significantly to the preservation of two houses constructed during the Kangxi period, the Jinshidi and Zhong Xian Di. Work in these two houses included modernizing the bedrooms of the Zhong Xian Di to enable them to be adopted to host scholars and students from the United States who come to the Huangcun village, advancing Hui cultural exchange and dissemination between China and the United States.

4.2. Promoting traditional Chinese construction technology

Huizhou ancient architecture is a great treasure of ancient Chinese architectural art, and its construction technology represents the outstanding wisdom of the past. This architecture not only reflects the unique local cultural characteristics, but also embody superb craftsmanship and architectural aesthetics.

The protection and inheritance of cultural relic buildings are in principle in situ to preserve their true historical environment and geographic identification. In addition, various cultural relic buildings cover a large area and have a substantial base. The structure is complex and cannot be relocated, and most significantly, cultural relic buildings cannot be detached from their original geographic location, historical roots, social and cultural background, and independent existence (Yue et al., 2017). Nonetheless, when faced with special circumstances, for the purpose of better protecting historical buildings, there are also examples of relocating

ancient buildings off-site. This special case is Yin Yu Tang, which was relocated to the United States as part of a cultural exchange program. Every brick, tile, wood, and stone was cautiously disassembled and labeled, and experts from China and the U.S. worked with Chinese architects and craftsmen to process and rebuild the building based on its original condition. In essence, the pivotal element for the triumph of off-site reconstruction is regarded as "authenticity." This encompasses not only the preservation of heritage structures to their initial condition but also entails the harmonious interplay between tradition and innovation (Li, 2014).

Huizhou's ancient architecture mainly uses wood, employing complex mortise and tenon structures (i.e. concave and convex connections between wooden components). This technique does not use nails or glue, but relies on precise fit and balanced forces between components to ensure the stability of the structure. The restoration of the wooden structure and the mortise and tenon joinery are instances of the "transplantation" process of the Yin Yu Tang. Certain sections of wood had succumbed to decay and damage. To reinforce the original components, architects introduced planks made from American wood that have similar strengths and properties. While the fresh planks serve a structural purpose, the aged timber retains the imprints of history. These interactions between the new and the old foster the essence of "authenticity." Conversely, the success of the reconstruction depends on whether the relocation of Yin Yu Tang can be effectively integrated into the United States, blending with the local environment and culture rather than simply being relocated and reassembled.

Architecture needs to adapt to the local climate, which is an important principle to ensure the comfort, durability, and energy efficiency of the architecture. When Yin Yu Tang was moved from the warm climate of southeastern China to the harsh winter conditions of a northern coastal town in the United States, challenges arose regarding the patio and roof. Huizhou architecture features a pitched roof that efficiently drains rainwater and prevents seepage. The design of the eaves is not only aesthetically pleasing but also offers shade, protects against rain, and shields the walls. The foundational shingles of the roof were substituted with robust local American materials while retaining the original top cap shingles, ensuring both the preservation of the initial appearance and adaptation to local climate conditions (refer to Figure 9).

The patio is the core element of Huizhou architecture (refer to Figure 10). Regarding spiritual function, it symbolizes family harmony, inherits culture, and provides a place for spiritual relaxation. Concerning material function, it provides lighting, ventilation, and drainage, and improves the indoor environment. To restore the patio's functionality, a crane is used to install a clear paneled skylight on the roof each fall, which is then removed when spring arrives. These transparent panels allow light to pass through and prevent snow from accumulating.



Figure 9: The roof of Huizhou architecture (Shot by Chen Juan in 2023)

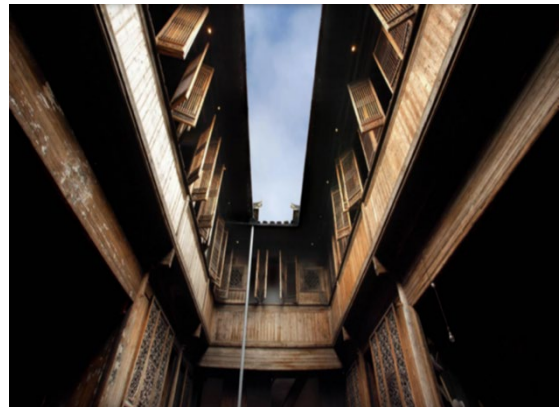


Figure 10: The patio of Huizhou architecture (Shot by Chen Juan in 2023)

In addition to preserving the "authenticity" of the original, the "authenticity" of Yin Yu Tang had to comply with the Massachusetts Building Code. Elements including the flood detection and suppression system, electrical wiring, drainage system for the undercroft sink, heating, ventilation, etc., needed to be installed most inconspicuously and reversibly feasible. To meet seismic requirements, all electrical and mechanical piping is made of stainless steel. As a public structure with barrier-free access, electric screws have been installed at the thresholds to enable disabled visitors to enter and tour the interior (PEM, 2023).

To summarize, in the face of unfamiliar geographic locations, climatic environments, and cultural backgrounds, workers tried to restore as much of the "authenticity" of Huizhou architecture as possible. From the point of view of architectural culture dissemination, not only is there a transfer of architectural elements from Huangcun, but there is also a fusion with contemporary American culture, vividly reflecting

understanding of Huizhou's architectural heritage. From an architectural cultural standpoint, it not only showcases the construction methods and cultural ideologies of Huizhou architecture but also furnishes abundant resources for the interaction and communication between humans and materials.

4.3. Broadening the window for an overseas understanding of traditional Chinese culture

The most productive aspect of Yin Yu Tang's relocation is that it is a cultural exchange program, not merely a "collector's item" for PEM investors. Upon its arrival in the United States, it bore the mission of disseminating Chinese culture, with the Huizhou houses serving as a representation of "the quintessence of Chinese culture" that people can witness.

The cultures of different regions radically diverge from one another; to put it another way, they contain unique cultural characteristics and temperaments as well as exist independently as cultural phenomena with strong individual characteristics. Huizhou architecture is affected by the local culture of Huizhou, creating a distinctive architectural style. Through the analysis of the architectural characteristics of "Yin Yu Tang", it is evident that the tone of Huizhou architecture is based on the whitewashed walls, horse-head walls, the patio, and the exquisite Huizhou three carvings (Jun, 2018); rainwater flows into the gutter through the waterspouts around the patio, which is commonly recognized as the "four glasses of water returning to the hall", implying that the "wealth does not flow out", reflecting the idea of Huizhou merchants to gather and collect money (Juan & Pintong, 2023). Huizhou residences are also highly intricate when it comes to interior adornment and furnishing. The central hall boasts a central painting, while the flanking pillars are embellished with couplets.

"Reading is good, doing business is good, having a positive impact is good; it is tough to begin a business, it is hard to monitor a business, and it is not difficult to understand the difficulties.", and "hundreds of years of the family is nothing accumulating goodness, the first good thing is just reading" indicate a profound philosophy, represent a Huizhou merchants' idea of being good at Confucianism and emphasizing literature and learning. On both sides of an ancient mirror, the table on the east side of a vase in the center of the clock suggests that Huizhou merchants will always be safe in the outside world (Jun, 2018). Yin Yu Tang, in accordance with the original appearance of the "reconstruction", including indoor living scenes, household items, etc., has been restored, and the cultural attributes of the relevant objects in the Yin Yu Tang are displayed in their entirety. In the early days of the exhibition, the descendants of the Huang family couldn't help but shed tears when they visited Yin Yu Tang at PEM, residing in the same manner as in the past in the old house. Furthermore, the rooms and objects that visitors see on tour experience the physical space of Huizhou architecture as well as absorb the characteristics of Huizhou vernacular architecture and decorative arts with the history of the Huang family, and in turn, gain knowledge from them about the history of China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Figure 11).



Figure 11: Interior furnishings of Yin Yu Tang (Peabody Essex Museum [PEM], 2023)

In addition, there are three documentaries on a loop, which are *Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home* (Peabody Essex Museum [PEM], 2023); *Guo Nian: Passage into a New Year* (Yue & Lin, 2024); and *Guo Men: A Village Wedding* (Hao, 2009). Important moments in the "reconstruction" of Yin Yu Tang also reflect the revitalization of the architectural heritage, specifically the traditional Huizhou "beam-up ceremony" performed by Chinese craftsmen when the wooden frame of the house is prepared to install the final spinal column. A group of craftsmen burn incense and chant auspicious words in the dialect to pray to Lu Ban, the patron saint of Chinese craftsmen. In order to ensure the seamless progress of the project and to invoke blessings upon forthcoming

residents, a crimson cloth is draped over the section of the beam about to be elevated, accompanied by a selection of diminutive "auspicious pouches." Throughout the ceremony, the principal artisan meticulously gauges and gently strikes the beams to affirm their appropriateness, concurrently expressing gratitude to the deities for their benevolence.

The second documentary, *Guo Men: A Village Wedding*, documents local wedding customs, which also express some gendered content. Moreover, the film follows the weddings of two Huizhou women from different eras: Huang Cui's wedding in the 1920s and a younger woman's wedding in 1999. At the beginning of the film, 96-year-old Huang Cui recalls being carried in a sedan chair to the house of the groom on her wedding day. In comparison to *A Chinese Home*, which is told from a male perspective, *Guo Men* indicates more of the Huizhou women's view of social history. It further illustrates the Chinese populace's perception of social transformation.

In the third documentary, *Guo Nian: Passage into a New Year*, the New Year is the most ceremonial festival for Chinese people. For Huizhou families whose men are constantly away on business, New Year is even more expected; conversely, New Year implies that the family can be reunited. However, ancestor worship is one of the things that must be done during the New Year.

These tales intertwine the private recollections of individuals and families with the collective recollections of social and cultural values. In experiencing the physical space of Yin Yu Tang, visitors understand the ethical, social, as well as cultural values behind the lives of the members of the Huang family at various times through some of the old objects and by empathizing with the scenarios of rural life in Huizhou. Yin Yu Tang is ultimately converted from a single residence to a living, academic matrix of Huizhou's architectural, cultural, and social heritage.

5. CONCLUSION

It has been 20 years since Yin Yu Tang was relocated, and despite the magnitude of the project and the complexity of the process, it is undeniably an accomplishment to be proud of. The architecture contains the soft power of the spirit, morals, and feelings of the Huizhou residents and is likewise a physical vehicle for the spirit of the Huizhou craftsmen. Initially, the relocation of Yin Yu Tang facilitates the exchange and spread of culture between China and the United States from the perspective of the international dissemination of Huizhou culture. Its advantage can let the American people interact closely with the ancient architecture and culture of Huizhou and enhance the cultural cognition between the two peoples through the understanding of Chinese traditional architecture and history. In the meantime, the Yin Yu Tang project is a kind of link between Chinese and American tourism and culture. It entices American tourists to visit and experience traditional Chinese architecture and culture, while also allowing Chinese living abroad to experience the culture of their home country in the United States. Secondly, from the perspective of overseas artisan exchange, the restoration of the Yin Yu Tang has triggered a collision of ideas between Chinese and American artisans. Under the direction of Huizhou artisans, American artisans utilized modern production techniques and new materials to overcome the challenging problems of restoration work, while adhering to traditional recipes and procedures. In this process, they built a bridge between traditional Chinese craftsmanship and modern Western techniques, which is of practical significance to the construction of the traditional craftsmanship system in Huizhou. Ultimately, regarding architectural and artistic interaction, the unique style and design of Huizhou's ancient architecture may be attractive to American artists and architects. They use borrowed techniques to incorporate elements of Huizhou architecture into architectural artworks that integrate Chinese and American cultures, thereby promoting art exchanges and innovations between China and the United States.

This study highlights the essential impact of cultural exchange on architectural concepts. Through the case of Yin Yu Tang, it is clear that cultural exchange enhances our understanding and appreciation of architectural diversity. The insights gained suggest that integrating distinct cultural elements can result in innovative developments in architectural practice. Future research could explore additional ways in which cultural exchange may contribute to the advancement of the architectural field.

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