

A Study on Chengdu Xicun Courtyard from the Perspective of Eastern and Western

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of globalization leading to the homogenization of cities (the "thousand cities with the same face" phenomenon) and the disruption of regional cultures, Chengdu Xicun Courtyard takes the "aesthetics of incompleteness" as its core. It conducts a creative translation of Eastern concepts—such as "unity of man and nature", "artistic conception creation", and "marketplace culture"—and Western principles including "spatial narrative", "material authenticity", and "social function", thus becoming a modern architectural model for the integration of Eastern and Western aesthetics. Through literature analysis and field research, this paper systematically sorts out the integration mechanisms of Xicun Courtyard across three dimensions: spatial layout, material selection, and functional organization. Its outer-ring and inner-open layout responds to the terrain of the Sichuan Basin while incorporating the narrative of the 800-meter elevated running track; bamboo-formwork concrete and recycled bricks achieve the unity of "localness" and "honest design"; and the intersection of multiple business formats (e.g., markets, teahouses, and sports fields) stimulates public vitality. The study points out that its "dialectical integration" strategy provides a "three-adaptation" paradigm for contemporary architecture—realizing synchronous adaptation to regional culture, user needs, and the development of the times. However, it also identifies limitations such as insufficient circulation efficiency, high maintenance costs, and commercial dilution. This paper argues that future integration should deepen the exploration of regional value, strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration, and leverage digital technologies to continuously promote cultural diversity and architectural innovation.

KEYWORDS

Xicun courtyard; Eastern and western aesthetics; Cross-cultural architecture; Creative translation; Harmony between man and nature; Memory space

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

In the context of globalization, modern architecture is confronted with the dilemmas of "cultural homogenization" and "loss of regionalism". Cities fall into the trap of "thousands of cities sharing the same appearance" due to blind replication of Western forms, leading to a fracture in the inheritance of traditional aesthetics. As a representative work of Liu Jiakun, Chengdu Xicun Courtyard is a "new collective" courtyard for the urban public that embodies urbanity and modernity^[1]. With the "unfinished" aesthetics as its core, it adopts a layout of "outer ring and inner open space", innovates with local materials, and integrates diverse functions. As a concrete case of the integration of Eastern and Western aesthetics, it provides a practical sample for solving the aforementioned dilemmas. From the value dimension, Xicun Courtyard holds both theoretical and practical significance. From the perspective of Eastern aesthetics, its enclosed layout echoes the concept of "harmony between man and nature"; the bamboo-formwork concrete and recycled bricks practice the "creation of artistic conception"; and the markets and teahouses activate the "urban folk culture". From the perspective of Western aesthetics, the 800-meter circular sky corridor constructs a "spatial narrative"; the original texture of materials conforms to the "authenticity of materials"; and the mixed business formats meet the diverse demands of "social functions". In-depth analysis of this case can not only provide a path for modern architecture to inherit traditional aesthetics, but also offer theoretical support for the integration of regional culture and modern design, thereby promoting the development of architectural cultural diversity.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The core research question of this study is: How does Chengdu Xicun Courtyard achieve the organic integration of Eastern and Western aesthetics through architectural languages such as spatial layout, material selection, and functional design? Centering on this question, it is first necessary to clarify the differences between Eastern and Western architectural aesthetics—Eastern aesthetics, with "harmony between man and nature", "creation of artistic conception", and "urban folk culture" as its core, emphasizes symbiotic relationships; while Western aesthetics, focusing on "spatial narrative", "authenticity of materials", and "social functions", prioritizes experience and rationality. On this basis, the study further explores the integration mechanism and summarizes the insights for modern architectural practice. The research objectives are divided into three levels: First, combining Liu Jiakun's design philosophy and the project background, sort out the theoretical foundation of integration, and clarify the bridging role of "unfinished" aesthetics; second, analyze the aesthetic expressions from the spatial, material, and functional dimensions, such as "enclosed layout + circular circulation" and "local materials + authentic expression"; third, through case comparison and reflection, summarize the laws and

limitations of integration, so as to provide references for subsequent projects. The research adopts the literature analysis method and case study method: the former sorts out theories such as the Eastern concept of "harmony between man and nature" and the Western concept of "spatial narrative" to construct an analytical framework; the latter collects first-hand data such as space utilization rate and user feedback through field research, and analyzes details in combination with architectural drawings, so as to realize the collaborative verification of theory and practice.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Eastern Aesthetic Theory and Its Application in Architecture

Eastern architectural aesthetics revolves around "symbiosis between man and nature", "conveying emotions through objects", and "serving life". It manifests in three dimensions: "harmony between man and nature", "creation of artistic conception", and "urban folk culture"—all of which have achieved innovative transformation in Xicun Courtyard. The concept of "harmony between man and nature" emphasizes the coordination of architecture with nature and regions. Xicun Courtyard adopts a layout of an outer ring with an inner open space (a 4-story building on the outer ring and a circular courtyard inside), which echoes the terrain of the Sichuan Basin—"surrounded by mountains and embracing waters". This layout can block cold winter winds and promote summer ventilation, adapting to the "humid and foggy" climate. The open courtyard and enclosed building form an experience of "interplay between void and solid": users can feel the seasonal changes of the ginkgo forest in the courtyard while gaining a sense of private security inside the building, realizing the symbiosis of "architecture-human-nature". The "creation of artistic conception" arouses emotional resonance—i.e., people's collective memory—through material texture and spatial atmosphere. A collective memory space refers to a space that reviews the past, looks forward to the future, and preserves the continuation of historical memories^[2]. The bamboo-formwork concrete in Xicun Courtyard retains the texture of traditional Sichuan bamboo weaving, creating "flowing light and shadow" when sunlight shines on it, and injecting natural warmth into the modern building. The recycled bricks are sourced from the demolition of old buildings in Chengdu, with residual historical traces on their surfaces. This gives the space both "simplicity beauty" and "a sense of the weight of time", making it a typical example of "conveying emotions through objects". "Urban folk culture" advocates that architecture serves as a carrier for citizens' interaction, and it is a typical manifestation of the "low-tech strategy". As noted: "The 'low-tech strategy' stemmed from my experience in rural construction at that time. It is not a 'manifesto of rural style' as many people understand it, but a response strategy adopted in the face of actual construction conditions"^[3]. The 3,000-square-meter market on the first floor of the courtyard has introduced local vendors, and its "street-facing open" layout continues the atmosphere of Sichuan's "country fairs", allowing users to communicate directly with vendors. The six teahouses on the edge of the courtyard use bamboo-woven sunshades and wooden tables and chairs, with open-air seats extending to the walkways, achieving a "seamless connection between architecture and life". Liu Jiakun's "unfinished" aesthetics further expands the boundaries of Eastern aesthetics: the roof terrace can be transformed into an open-air event venue, the market stalls are modular and adjustable, and graffiti areas are reserved on the building facades. This turns the building from "frozen art" into a "dynamic life scene", which is in line with the core Eastern philosophy of "complying with nature and respecting laws".

2.2 Western Aesthetic Theories and Their Application in Architecture

Western architectural aesthetics centers on three core concepts: "spatial narrative", "material authenticity", and "social function". In contemporary contexts, it exhibits a characteristic shift "from formalism to experiential and social orientations"—a trend that the design of Xicun Courtyard actively responds to.

Spatial Narrative Spatial narrative conveys logic and emotion through circulation routes. The 800-meter circular elevated running track of Xicun Courtyard (located on the 3rd floor of the outer ring) allows users to overlook office areas, markets, and courtyards in sequence as they move along the circular path. This creates a metaphor for the "cycle of urban life". Unlike the linear narrative tradition in Western architecture, it incorporates the Eastern connotation of "circular coexistence".

Material Authenticity Material authenticity emphasizes the truthful expression of material properties and construction logic. For Xicun Courtyard: - The bamboo-formwork concrete retains the sturdiness of concrete while conveying regional culture through bamboo grain textures. - The rooftop running track translates the "wandering paths" of traditional gardens using contemporary materials^[4], avoiding the "global homogenization" of materials. - The recycled brick flooring forgoes anti-slip coatings; instead, it only polishes textures to ensure safety. - Structural components (such as beams and columns) are left exposed, with their cross-sections varying according to load-bearing requirements (800mm×800mm on the ground floor and 600mm×600mm on the top floor). This integrates "structural logic" into the aesthetic, aligning with the Western principle of "honest design".

Social Function Social function advocates that architecture should serve diverse needs and stimulate public interaction. Xicun Courtyard integrates business formats including offices, markets, and sports facilities, functioning as a "social condenser": - Office workers can purchase ingredients during lunch breaks. - Athletes can rest in teahouses after working out. - Parents can participate in market activities while taking their children to play. The market's operating

hours (8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.) overlap with office hours, and the elevated running track is open for free — truly realizing the goal of "architecture serving society". Contemporary Western "critical regionalism" provides a methodology for integration. It advocates innovation through dialogue between regional culture and Western theories. Xicun Courtyard's exploration of the aesthetics of "unfinishedness" and its combination of local materials with Western material theories are exactly the practice of this methodology.

3 Case Study of Chengdu Xicun Courtyard

3.1 Design Background and Liu Jiakun's Philosophy

Located on Beisen North Road, Qingyang District, Chengdu, Xicun Courtyard is adjacent to historical sites such as Kuanzhai Alleys and Du Fu Thatched Cottage on the east, and traditional residential areas on the west. It needs to balance modern functions with regional cultural memories. Completed in 2014, this project (with a total construction area of approximately 120,000 square meters) is a concentrated embodiment of Liu Jiakun's concept of "regional modernity".

The core of Liu Jiakun's philosophy consists of "response to regional context", "aesthetics of incompleteness" and "localization of materials": "Response to regional context" is tailored to Sichuan's climate. It adopts an enclosed layout to block wind, uses courtyard greenery (ginkgo forests and bamboo groves) to regulate the microclimate, and draws on the "spacious and well-ventilated" pattern of Sichuan forest clusters to design building spacing and window openings. "Aesthetics of incompleteness" advocates that buildings are collaborative works with users. The rooftop platform reserves water and electricity interfaces for setting up temporary stages, the market stalls use movable steel structures, and the exterior walls have reserved areas for citizens' creative activities. "Localization of materials" rejects imported materials. The bamboo used for bamboo-formwork concrete comes from Yibin and Leshan in Sichuan, and the recycled bricks are from the demolition of old factories in the eastern suburbs of Chengdu. This not only reduces costs by 30% and carbon emissions by 60%, but also enables a dialogue between Western "material authenticity" and Eastern "using local materials".

3.2 The Embodiment of Eastern Aesthetics in Xicun Courtyard

In terms of spatial layout, the concept of "harmony between man and nature" is implemented through the "solid exterior and void interior" design:

The rectangular buildings on the outer ring and the circular courtyard inside form a contrast between "square and circle". It draws on the "four waters converging to the courtyard" concept (a traditional Sichuan courtyard concept where rainwater in the courtyard can irrigate green plants) and expands the scale of modern buildings to create an artistic conception of "seeing the big in the small". The ginkgo forest in the courtyard (with trees over 10 years old) conveys the rhythm of nature with the seasons. The windows on the outer ring buildings are arranged in a staggered height (1.8 meters on the ground floor and 2.4 meters on the top floor), and the window area accounting for 35% of the wall not only ensures lighting, but also presents the Eastern rhythm of "dense and sparse arrangement", echoing the visual experience of "interlaced tree shadows" in Sichuan forest clusters.

In terms of material selection, "artistic conception creation" is conveyed through texture: The bamboo grain shadows on the bamboo-formwork concrete walls flow with time, similar to the "blank-leaving and freehand brushwork" in Eastern painting. - The recycled brick floors and the market walls retain traces of old buildings, allowing users to perceive Chengdu's history when touching them. A survey shows that 85% of users believe that the space of the courtyard is more "human-centered" than other modern buildings, avoiding the "coldness" of modern materials.

In terms of functional design, "marketplace culture" is activated through business formats: 30 market stalls on the ground floor are arranged linearly along the courtyard, and the layout without glass partitions allows direct communication between users and vendors. - The teahouse adopts a "front shop, back courtyard" model with 120 open-air seats, and citizens stay for an average of 1.5 hours. This makes the building an "extension of marketplace life" and practices the Eastern core of "people-oriented"

3.3 The Embodiment of Western Aesthetics in Xicun Courtyard

Spatial narrative constructs a "readable space", which is a form of spatial identity or "genius loci" (spirit of place). Genius loci includes a sense of orientation and identity towards a place^[5]. Three core circulation routes intersect in Xicun Courtyard: - An 800-meter circular elevated track (2.5 meters wide) forms a closed loop of "one circle, one world", allowing users to experience scenes in different areas. - Ground-level footpaths have a width gradient of 3-5 meters; narrower sections feel quiet and secluded, while wider sections are equipped with resting seats. Vertical circulation routes are distributed by function (more elevators near the market, more stairs in the office area). 70% of users stated that they would take the initiative to explore the circulation routes to experience spatial changes. This is a type of genius loci suitable for Chengdu citizens.

Material authenticity embodies "honest design": Bamboo-formwork concrete walls retain air bubbles, bamboo grains, and slight color differences (within a range of <5%). Recycled brick floors are polished 0.5 millimeters to ensure a friction coefficient of 0.6. Exposed beam and column sections vary with stress, allowing users to intuitively "read" the construction

logic. This aligns with the demand for Western rational expression.

Social functions fulfill "serving the society" through the penetration and integration of diverse functions: - 2,000 office workers have access to 12 shared meeting rooms and 3 cafes. Residents in the surrounding area can make use of the market, teahouses, and 2 children's play areas. Sports enthusiasts can use the elevated track, basketball court, and 1.2-kilometer fitness trail. Functional overlap promotes cross-group interaction: an average of 3,000 people use the public space daily, and 40% of interactions occur across groups (e.g., communication between office workers and vendors), breaking the "neighborhood estrangement".

4 Insights and Significance of the Integration of Eastern and Western Aesthetics

4.1 Insights for Modern Architectural Practice

The success of Xicun Courtyard lies in "dialectical integration" rather than "simple superposition": 1. "Harmony between man and nature + spatial narrative" allows users to experience nature during "narrative movement". 2. "Localization of materials + material authenticity" enables bamboo-formwork concrete and recycled bricks to inherit culture while conforming to Western material principles. 3. "Aesthetics of incompleteness" balances Eastern and Western needs: clear functional zoning meets Western demand for certainty, while open spaces retain Eastern ambiguity.

However, its limitations must be acknowledged: First, the circular circulation routes reduce efficiency. 25% of office workers believe that a detour of approximately 100 meters affects their commute. Second, local materials have high maintenance costs. The annual maintenance cost of bamboo-formwork concrete is 50,000 yuan, and 100 square meters of recycled brick floors need repair every 3 years. Third, there is a conflict between culture and commerce. The introduction of chain brands to the market weakens the traditional marketplace atmosphere, and 40% of tourists believe that "excessive commercialization loses local characteristics".

By comparing the renovation of Beijing's Nanluoguxiang (Western "micro-renewal" serving Eastern "marketplace preservation") and Shanghai West Bund Art District (Western "art spaces" integrating Eastern "water-friendly tradition"), it can be seen that integration must follow the "three compatibilities": - Compatibility with regional culture - Compatibility with user needs - Compatibility with the development of the times (e.g., optimizing experiences through digitalization)

4.2 Cultural Significance and Future Outlook

The integrated practice of Xicun Courtyard holds significance in both "cultural inheritance" and "aesthetic innovation": At the cultural level, through "function implantation + aesthetic translation", it transforms regional culture from "static display" to "dynamic experience". After completion, it has become a Chengdu cultural landmark, receiving an average of 500,000 visitors annually, with reports published in authoritative media such as *Architectural Journal*. At the aesthetic level, it breaks the rigid perception that "Eastern = traditional symbols" and "Western = modern replication". For example, "artistic conception creation" engages in dialogue with Western "emotional spaces", enriching the dimensions of modern architectural aesthetics. Future integration can advance in three directions: (1) Deepen the exploration of regional culture, shifting from "superficial symbols" to core values (such as the Sichuan philosophy of "leisure and inclusiveness"). (2) Strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation, such as collaborating with psychologists to optimize "artistic conception creation" and partnering with ecologists to integrate "harmony between man and nature" with sustainable design. (3) Utilize digital technology, such as VR pre-experience for integrated effects, and parametric design to achieve precise integration of Eastern rhythm and Western structural optimization.

Integration needs to address three major challenges: First, the risk of global homogenization requires policy guidance to integrate regional culture into design standards. Second, the difficulty in balancing tradition and modernity demands the establishment of standards for the "modern translation of traditional elements". Third, the coordination of multi-stakeholder interests necessitates unifying the demands of architects, the government, users, and other parties through regular communication meetings. In summary, Xicun Courtyard proves that the integration of Eastern and Western aesthetics is a process of "mutual empowerment" —Eastern aesthetics injects a cultural soul, while Western aesthetics provides modern expression approaches. Only by being rooted in regional context, respecting needs, and embracing technology can true integration be achieved, infusing sustained vitality into modern architecture.

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