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Looking back to Quiddity Between Traditional Chinese Architecture and Ancestor Worship

Mengbi Li

Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

Corresponding author: Mengbi Li, Room G302, Building G, Victoria University (Footscray Park Campus), Melbourne, Australia. Email: mengbi.li@vu.edu.au

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ABSTRACT

Ancestor worship was profound in pre-modern China, so how was it originally related to architecture and how was it associated with a notion of quiddity? This essay unravels an integration of triadic notions linking ancestry to architecture and quiddity (essence of being), even though they may be seen as discrete from a modern perspective. Architecture was viewed as an important representation of ancestry and an indicator of the sanctity of ancestors in pre-modern China. The triadic interconnected relationship can first be found in the overlapping meanings of words in ancient Chinese. It is then observed through the composition and implication of *miaohao* (literally the name of the temple, but in practice, a posthumous title for the emperor) and *tanghao* (literally, the formal name of the hall). The essay suggests that from regular reflection upon the quiddity between architecture and ancestor worship, the triad formed a mutually interconnected and mutually enhanced relationship. Although seemingly unique to pre-modern Chinese architecture, the ultimate need to periodically reflect upon the quiddity of architecture and the quiddity of family may in fact be a universal pursuit.

Keywords: architecture, Chinese ancestor worship, quiddity, *miaohao*, *tanghao*, China

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1. INTRODUCTION

The three notions of architecture, ancestry, and quiddity (essence of being) seem disparate at first, yet they are intriguingly interconnected. Many examples in research, especially studies that focus on Chinese ancestor worship and architecture, imply that the three notions had some connection^[1-6], particularly when the studies related to ancestral halls and how ancestors worshipped in domestic spaces, etc. Overall, however, what is missing is a definite confirmation of the integrated triadic relationship between architecture, ancestry, and quiddity. In particular, the last but no less important notion of quiddity has yet to be explored.

Beyond traditional studies in architecture, this study draws on textual clues to analyse the entangled relationship within the triad. When architecture is considered together with culture, there will clearly be conceptual and physical considerations. As Wu Hung notes, monuments can be as physical as a tomb or ancestral temple, but also as immaterial as a poem^[2]. In a similar vein, Xing Ruan is fascinated by the Dong built forms and their communicated meaning. Architecture transcended physical buildings and structures to convey allegorical meanings^[4]. Many other studies also echo the immaterial but meaningful side of Chinese architecture^[7-12]. How can we unpack the immaterial, more conceptual dimension of architecture? The essence of both as the thing and the concept it conveys is invariably found in language. Language not only confirms the existence of various types of being, particularly conceptual being, but can also be communicated^[13,14]. This study therefore attempts to adopt a transdisciplinary approach by inviting linguistic clues and findings from a historical and cultural perspective into the architectural discourse.

This paper first seeks to trace the semantic meaning behind the core notion of ancestor worship, the notion of ancestry. It finds that this notion had multiple

meanings in ancient Chinese, especially a noteworthy inborn connection to architecture. The study proceeds to uncover more details by examining how particular meanings were linked to the Chinese characters as well as the early pictographic symbols. Also, the historical literature where the notion appears is examined to crosscheck the validity of the overlapping meanings.

The second part of the study focuses on the composition and implication of *miaohao* (literally, the name of the temple) and *tanghao* (formal name of the hall). Previous research has contributed considerable insight into both the physical domain—such as ancestral temples, ancestral halls, altars, paraphernalia and furniture—and the immaterial domain, such as rituals^[1,3]. As a study like this is expected to explore the relationship between triadic concepts, so there is a preference for a viewpoint that can navigate between the material and the immaterial, bridging between architecture, ancestor, and quiddity. Also, *miaohao* and *tanghao* are largely overlooked in architectural study. This essay uses them as a springboard or a starting point for a discussion around the entangled triadic notions.

2. THE INTERRELATED TRIADIC NOTIONS

In Chinese, the word for “ancestor” is *zuzong* 祖宗. In this word, there are two characters, both meaning ancestor, but with minor differences. The first character *zu* 祖 refers to the generations before the father. *Zong* 宗 means ancestors and clan. This study notes that these two characters have rich, ancient meanings. Historical literature shows that there were three primary layers of meaning integrated into the concept of ancestors. These three layers of meaning shed light on some initially connected and even interchangeable conceptions.

Approximately two thousand years ago in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE)









the dictionary used “*miao* 廟 (temple)” directly to define *zu* 祖^[15]. Long before this definition appeared, towards the end of the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE), there was an important directive concerning the planning and design of the imperial city given in *Kao gong ji* 考工記 (Records of examination of craftspeople): “左祖右社”^[16] (the temple for ancestor worship should be set to the left, and the altar for worshipping the god of earth and the god of grain should be to the right). In the text of this regulation, the word “ancestor” was used to denote the temple. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄’s study and annotation further confirm this meaning. Zheng states that *zu* 祖 represents “temple”, especially a temple for ancestor worship^[17]. *Xunzi* is a classic book that records the words, writings and ideas of influential philosopher, scholar and thinker Xun Zi 荀子 (ca. 310–235 BCE). It documents a detail of the Battle of Muye around 1046 BCE. This decisive battle marked the start of the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–256 BCE). In *Xunzi*, particular mention is made that King Wu, being very pleased with Wei Ziqi’s performance, granted him the right to live in Song State and had an ancestral temple especially built for him. The original text reads as “封之于宋，立其祖”^[18]. Here *zu* (ancestor) is directly used to designate the temple. The close connection between the building and the people to whom it was devoted integrated both entities to the point of their being interchangeable.




Apart from the meanings of “ancestor” and “a type of sacred building”, *zu* harboured the hybrid meaning of *ben* (quiddity, essence of being). Duan Yucai 段玉裁, the Qing-dynasty scholar, was an expert in exegetical studies of Chinese characters and conducted substantial linguistic research into ancient Chinese. Duan further annotated and emphasised the fact that the character *zu* had two meanings. *Zu* initially meant “temple” but also referred to “quiddity”^[19]. *Shigu* 釋詁

(The Annotation of Ancient Literature) confirms these two meanings for *zu*. *Guangyun* 廣韻 is an imperially ordered Chinese dictionary of rhymes. First published in 1008 CE, its compilation and publication were supported by Emperor Zhenzong of the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE). The connotation of origin was particularly emphasised in *Guangyun* as “祖，始也，上也，本也”^[20]. It was emphasised that *Zu* (ancestor) denoted *ben* (quiddity, essence of being). As a classic of Daoism, *Zhuangzi* 莊子 is a book first published around the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) that recorded the writings and stories from founding philosopher Zhuangzi and his followers. It depicts the process of freeing oneself from the mundane material world and enjoying supreme happiness by engaging with the quiddity of all things on earth. “浮游乎萬物之祖” (drifting and wandering within the quiddity of all beings)^[21]. The character *zu* (ancestor) was used to denote quiddity. Thus, it is very easy to associate the character *zu* directly with its literal meaning of ancestor, but it denotes a more philosophical notion of *ben* (quiddity, essence of being). *Nanhuazhenjingfumo* 南華真經副墨 was composed by Lu Xixing 陸西星 who was an authoritative scholar of Daoism in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE). *Nanhuazhenjingfumo* was a book Lu wrote expressly to elucidate *Zhuangzi*. Lu highlighted and explained what the quiddity of all things referred to. “祖，所謂‘無名之始’，能物物而不物於物者，既不物於物矣，又焉累於物哉？”^[22] (*zu* is an intriguing start. Substance is generated from it, but it doesn’t exist as substance. It is not the physical part of things, so how could [people who engage with it] be frustrated by substances from the physical world?) Obviously, *zu* here does not equate with “ancestor,” but with a more philosophical notion that is closer to quiddity or, as referred to in English, the nature or essence of being. The overall logic is that if a person could enjoy the

quiddity of all things rather than their substantial presence, that person would not be frustrated by the mundane or physical world that is composed of substance. Thus, a superior, more spiritual type of happiness could be achieved. The same notion is echoed in other scholarly works throughout history [23,24]. Cheng Minzheng 程敏政 was a scholar-official of the Ming dynasty. In his compiled book, it was clearly defined as “祖者本也，本不可二” [25] (*Zu* denotes quiddity. This is a unique essence). The same definition also finds an echo in other writings [26,27].

Having enquired into the ancient meaning of the first character in the Chinese word for ancestor, *zuzong* 祖宗 (ancestor), the essay moves on to the second character, *zong* 宗. It reveals that *zong* had an even stronger connection to the spiritual side of architecture, especially as reflected by the ancient graphic form of the character. As a pictographic symbol, *zong* comprised two parts: a building and a central pillar or kneeling person. Although kneeling (also translated as kowtowing) is a posture of the body hardly viewed today as admirable, in ancient times it was an expressive symbol of considerable respect and great veneration. The ancient

pictographic form of 宗 was “”, which was a combination of “” and “”. “” symbolised the silhouette of a building with a pitched roof. What “” symbolised could be explained in two ways. Both are valid and neither affects the association between architecture and the notion of ancestry. One theory is that “” symbolised a central pillar and the other is that it symbolised a kneeling person. This association was further confirmed in subsequent literature. Wang Fuli noted that “宗 was the temple for worshiping and showing respect towards ancestors. The character contains “” and “示”... “” representing a building. 宗，尊祖廟也。從宀從示... 宀謂屋也” [28]. The shape of

the character “” evolved into “” and “” was transformed into “示” [29]. Ban Gu 班固, a scholar of the Han dynasty, clarified the meaning of “宗” and confirmed the reverential attitude towards ancestors in *Baihu tong* 白虎通 (Virtuous Discussions in White Tiger Hall, first published ca. 79 CE) [30].

Ancient literary works reveal that *zong* was directly used as a noun to represent a temple. In *The Classics of Poetry*, a collection of poems composed between the eleventh and the seventh century BCE, there is a poem titled *Fuyi* 鳧鷖 (Wild Ducks and Waterfowl) describing a pleasant banquet arranged by the Emperor of the Zhou dynasty to honour the clergy who assisted in a rite of ancestor worship. The poem states that

“鳧鷖在澤，公屍來燕來宗。既燕于宗，福祿攸降” [31] A flock of ducks and waterfowl were floating in a winding stream, happily playing in the water. The respectful clergy performed the ritual as the holy soul entered the *zong* 宗 to attend the banquet that was elaborately arranged by the Emperor. After feasting at the *zong*, fortune and fame would follow.

In the original text, the word “*zong*” was used twice, after a transitive verb, *lai* (enter or come into), and with the preposition *yu* (at or in). Therefore, in this context, *zong* was used as an object expressing a place. It did not mean “ancestor” in this context but rather referred to a temple. For another example, in *Zhouli* 周禮 (The Rites of Zhou), *zong* was used in a similar way to explain how to pray in a temple before sending an army into battle: memorial tables should be set at an ancestral temple and sacrificial animals should be offered “凡師甸用牲于社宗，則為位” [32].

The connection is further demonstrated by the interchangeable semantic relationship between the

architectural term of ancestral temple and the ancestors themselves. Furthermore, the character that denotes ancestor could be used to mean ancestral temple. Conversely, words that meant ancestral temple were used to mean ancestor. *Miao* 廟 is definitely an architectural term referring to a temple. In addition to the fact that *miao* was used to define *zu*, *zu* (ancestor) was used directly to explain *miao* in the pre-modern Chinese dictionary ^[19]. This conceptual connection is difficult to convey to an English speaker and unusual even to a modern Chinese speaker.

Here are some specific scenarios where the ancestral temple is used to represent ancestors. The word *zongmiao* 宗廟 (ancestral temple) is definitely an architectural term. In it, the presence of *miao* (temple) indicates that this word refers to a type of building. The first character *zong* further defines this temple as an ancestral temple. Interestingly, *zongmiao* was used to represent ancestors. *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Strategies of the Warring States) recorded an incident between King Ke of Qi State, Meng Changjun and Feng Xuan. This happened during the Warring States Period. The King of Qi State was the local feudal ruler King Ke. Meng Changjun was an important official. King Ke exiled Meng Changjun, but some time later regretted the decision and apologised to Meng. The King expressed remorse:

寡人不祥，被於宗廟之崇，沉於諂諛之臣，開罪於君。寡人不足為也；願君顧先王之宗廟，姑反國統萬人乎！^[33] I had bad luck and suffered punishment from the ancestors (*zongmiao* 宗廟 ancestral temple is used here to represent “ancestors”). I was tricked by some lies from other officials into blaming you, which turned out to be a serious mistake. I wish you would forgive me. For the sake of the ancestors (*zongmiao* 宗廟 ancestral temple was used here to represent “ancestors”) and the

previous monarch, would you please return and help me? Let us manage our country and government together!

Then Feng Xuan suggested to Meng that he should impose some conditions on the King to make amends for this mistake. One of the requirements was “to build an ancestral temple in the place named Xue 立宗廟于薛”^[33].

In this article, the word *zongmiao* 宗廟 (ancestral temple) appears three times and reflects the intertwined concepts of ancestors and ancestral temple. In the first two instances, this architectural term is used to refer to ancestors. The third instance is in Feng’s advice to Meng and retains the literal meaning of referring to a temple. Following Feng’s advice, Meng received the King’s apology and agreed to return to the Qi State but asked the King to build a splendid temple as a sign marking their agreement^[33].

As with *zu*, beyond the combined meanings of ancestor and ancestral temple, *zong* also meant *ben* (quiddity, essence of being). Xing Bing 邢昺, a scholar from the Northern Song dynasty, concluded that “*zong* means *ben* 宗者，本也”^[34-36]. This combined meaning of quiddity was echoed by the Imperial Dictionary under the patronage of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912 CE)^[37]. In the same vein, *Daodejing* 道德經 (Tao Te Ching) underscored the invisible quiddity of material things. In the original text, *zong* (ancestor) was used to express quiddity. *Dao* was explained “as deep as the quiddity of all things 淵兮似萬物之宗”^[38]. *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the States) argues that “treating guests with *li* and empathising with disadvantaged people are the quiddity of *li*. 禮賓矜窮，禮之宗也”^[39]. *Li* 禮 is translated as ritual, decorum, rules, propriety and good behaviour in English. In this context, *zong* (ancestor) was used to represent *ben* (quiddity, essence of being). Therefore, admirable

and virtuous manners were defined as “the quiddity or essence of decorum.”

In ancient Chinese, *ben* was used to define both *zu* (ancestor) and *zong* (ancestor). This Chinese character *ben* meant quiddity (essence, nature or original form of being). This may provide an explanation as to why the concept of ancestor was so important in pre-modern Chinese architecture. A large portion of the glory that architecture had to offer was directed to ancestor-related buildings, structures and elements. In addition to the culture of filial piety, it is probable that the concept and practice of regularly reflecting back on one’s ancestors was a deliberate effort to periodically remember the quiddity of being. Depending on the context, it could be the essence of belonging to a family or clan, the sanctity of architecture or the essence of home.

Both ritual and architectural practices echoed these related concepts of ancestor, architecture and quiddity. Zhouli 周禮 [Rites of Zhou] explains *zhaomu zhizhi* 昭穆之制 as a ritual system for genealogical order where “the first emperor is in the centre, generations of *zhao* 昭 on the left and generations of *mu* 穆 on the right 先王之葬居中，以昭穆為左右” [32]. In the system of *zhaomu*, the father would be *zhao* and the son would be *mu*, while the grandson would be *zhao* and the great-grandson would be *mu*. As a consequence, the odd numbered generations would be located on the left and those of an even number on the right [40,41]. This rule not only influenced how the imperial ancestors were buried, but also provided an order for the construction of ancestral buildings, structures and shrines such as tombs, mausoleums and ancestral temples [32,42-45]. Along with *zhaomu zhizhi*, there was the other ritual rule of *qiantiao zhifa* 遷祧之法, which governed moving the shrines of remote ancestors to the *tiao* temple). *Qiantiao zhifa* helped in limiting the number of ancestors to be housed in the busier ancestral temples. Generations

closest to the reigning emperor would be retained [46,47], and remote generations could be moved to the *tiao* temple. Interestingly, there was one exception to the rule of *qiantiao zhifa* [46,47]. According to *zhaomu zhizhi*, the choice position at the centre was assigned to the first emperor of a dynasty whose identity set the quiddity of a dynasty. That meant that the shrine or temple of the first emperor would never be moved. These formed an ideal structure for both ancestry and architecture: the centre was the position of privilege and the two sides provided a symmetrical pattern. It can be argued that, despite the similarity in physical built forms, symmetry in the context of Chinese culture was different from symmetry in the western context.

In summary, this complex history of linguistic relationships demonstrates how the concepts of architecture, ancestry and quiddity were profoundly interconnected in pre-modern Chinese culture. This connection could be so strong that the notions might be mutually interchangeable.

3. THE TRIAD’S INTERRELATIONSHIP IN BUILDINGS AND HUMAN LIVES

The triadic meanings of Ancestor, Architecture and Quiddity were intertwined. The composition and implementation of *miaohao* 廟號 (literally meaning the name of the temple) and *tanghao* 堂號 (literally meaning formal name of the hall) interestingly show their critical roles within this intertwined relationship and demonstrate how the triad interrelated. The former is arguably an effective way of validating an emperor’s authority by defining the quiddity of the emperor’s identity. The latter serves as a means of looking back on a family’s past and the origin of its ancestors. It was also a reminder of family’s traditions and the spirit it admires.

3.1. The name of the temple: a reminder of the imperial ancestor

Miaohao 廟號 is a word consisting of two characters, *miao* 廟 (temple) and *hao* 號 (name, title or code). *Miaohao* was only posthumously named after the emperor. This name would show his status among his ancestors. It was therefore critical in defining the deceased emperor's identity. It would take on particular significance for a new emperor inheriting the throne from his father. If this father's identity could be identified as legitimate, the new emperor's identity would naturally assume that same legitimacy and his reign would be more secure. There are many instances of emperors striving to achieve a sound *miaohao* [48,49]. Being named as the legitimate founder of a dynasty was especially critical, as it indicated the quiddity of the imperial lineage.

Not all the emperors would be granted a *miaohao*. In terms of architecture, those who could not be worshipped in an imperial ancestral temple would not be entitled to a *miaohao* [50]. In terms of ancestry, the deceased emperor's seniority, his position in the imperial lineage and his contribution to the reign of the dynasty would decide what level of *miaohao* he could be awarded [50,51]. For example, the usual practice was to name the founding emperor with a *miaohao* that included the character *zu* (ancestor) [50,51]. The founder of the Han dynasty was Liu Bang and his *miaohao* was Emperor Gaozu (literally meaning senior ancestor) of the Han. The founder of the Tang dynasty was Li Yuan and his *miaohao* was Emperor Gaozu (literally meaning senior ancestor) of the Tang. The founder of the Ming Dynasty was Zhu Yuanzhang and his *miaohao* was Emperor Taizu (literally meaning great ancestor) of the Ming. The next generations were conventionally titled with the word *zong* (ancestor) in their *miaohao*, such as Emperor Taizong of the Tang, Emperor Taizong of the Song and Emperor Dezong of the Qing [50,51].

Architecture, particularly as determined through the rules of building ancestral temples, played a critical role in confirming authority in the ancestral culture as well as in political life. Marking the start of a new reign and a new imperial city, the construction of the ancestral temple was given top priority. After the ancestral temple, it would be the turn of other civic buildings and infrastructure to be constructed [2,52,53]. Also, to mark the end of a reign, the imperial ancestral temples would be demolished. This symbolised the end of the dynasty, the start of a new dynasty and the advent of new rulers to assume power [54].

The priority given to build an ancestral temple and the number of ancestral temples to be built followed strict rules. "The emperor can build seven temples. A minister can build five temples. A grand master can build three temples. A serviceman can build one temple and people in general cannot build temples [46]." During the Song dynasty with the rise of the class of scholar officials, the pertinent cultural and social rules were gradually changing. "People in general could not build a temple, but could build a hall with images [55]." The phrase "hall with images" meant ancestral images that could be placed in a hall and worshipped by the family. The debate as to whether images of ancestors or memorial tablets were best able to serve the ritual function was rife among scholars at the time [56] but not relevant to this essay. What can be confirmed is that for families, the hall served as an important place for ancestral worship.

3.2. The formal name of the hall: a remembrance of ancestry and a daily reminder of family tradition

Traditional Chinese dwellings were largely built in the shape of a courtyard house [10]. The Chinese courtyard was known as *siheyuan*. Buildings were placed on four sides around a central rectangular or square courtyard. Most important still in a

Chinese courtyard was the hall. The name of the hall and its use shed light on how the triadic concepts were integrated into people's lives.

Within a Chinese courtyard, the spaces followed a hierarchy. The hall was the nucleus. Typically, the pre-modern Chinese courtyard house contained three spaces: the *ting* 庭 (courtyard), the *tang* 堂 (hall) and the *shi* 室 (inner room). They had different purposes and each had a different status in the domestic space hierarchy.

The hall ranked highest culturally and this was demonstrated by its position within the physical building. The hall was distinguished from the courtyard by its height and appeared to be more dominant than the inner room. The hall was built on an elevated platform and reached with stairs. “堂下謂之庭”^[57] (the area downstairs was called the courtyard). The *shi* (inner room) was located further inside and was the more private part of the house. Usually, only family members or very close friends were invited inside. Confucius therefore used the image of the

radical difference between *tang* (hall) and *shi* (inner room) to explain the stage where one has knowledge but not yet a profound understanding of a particular subject. He depicted this as an individual who has stepped up into the hall but had not yet gained entrance to the inner room^[58]. The great hall (in some literature is translated as the main hall) was a special domestic space not used for daily living but for negotiating affairs as well as conducting meetings and rites.

Tanghao 堂號 literally means “formal name of the hall.” This word is a combination of two characters: *tang* (hall) and *hao* (name, title or code). Interestingly, it could also be used as the name of a family or clan^[59]. In practice, the popular convention was that the family would inscribe its *tanghao* in large characters and beautiful calligraphy on a board (*ebian* 額匾 also known as plaque in English) and hang it either outside above the door to the hall or inside the hall itself [Figure 1].



Figure 1. Photos of plaques with the formal name of the hall inscribed in calligraphy and placed above the hall door or inside the hall (photos by Yu Xiuli)

The meaning and function of the plaque reflect a connection between architecture, ancestry, and quiddity. The plaque was important in traditional Chinese architecture, serving as a name tag. This was usually an indispensable component for buildings, especially important buildings. The term *ebian* 額匾 (plaque) was an architectural term consisting of two characters, *e* 額 (forehead) and *bian* 匾 (literally, this can be translated as plaque in English). The reason for the first character meaning forehead was easy to understand. This plaque was usually installed above the door of the great hall. In terms of its position, the plaque acted precisely as the “forehead” of the façade. The second character, *bian*, in Chinese needs further explanation. This character can be found in *Explaining and Analysing Chinese Text and Characters*, which explains that “*bian* (plaque) followed a record of the lineage. The record of the lineage was the text about the family” [15]. In the original text of this quotation taken from ancient Chinese, the “family” was represented by two characters *men* 門 and *hu* 戶. In many other contexts, *men* was definitely used as an architectural term for door or gate. The entangled relationship between architecture, ancestor worship, and family origin somehow finds expression in many aspects, including the significance of one of the key architectural elements, the plaque.

Formally, the plaque was not a complex item. It was crafted as a large rectangular board and installed above the door and columns but beneath the eaves. Some plaques also appeared inside and were located high, just beneath the ceiling or the beam. The plaque could be crafted in timber, metal, or stone.

The *tanghao* served multiple purposes in people’s lives. It often appeared in the format of “XX *tang*” (“XX hall”). One of its main roles was to give the family tree book a name. The book that recorded the family tree of a clan might be called “The

Family Tree of XX *Tang*” along with the Family Name, for example, *Ziyang Tang Zhu Shi Zongpu* 紫陽堂朱氏宗譜 (The Family Tree of Ziyang Hall of the Zhus). The *tanghao*’s role in denoting the identity of a clan appeared both in speech and in writing. For instance, “XX hall” was invariably used in conversation and in writings to represent a family or clan.

The significance of each *tanghao* (formal name of the hall) can be further explained by understanding how it was generated. Usually used by prestigious families, a *tanghao* can be seen as a quotation from the family’s ancestors. There were four main types of quotation. The first was an ancestor’s actual words. For example, *Sizhi Tang* (Four Know Hall) was the *tanghao* of the Yangs because their ancestor Yang Zhen had persuaded his friends never to do anything against their conscience as “The god in heaven will know. The god in the earth will know. You and I know. All four know.” [60] The second could be an ancestor’s written words. The third was the name of the place from where the family’s ancestors came, for example, *Taiyuan Tang* 太原堂 (Taiyuan Hall) for a family whose ancestors came from Taiyuan and *Longxi Tang* 隴西堂 (Longxi Hall) for the Li family, whose ancestors came from Longxi. Another option might be a story about an ancestor, a brief reference to the family tradition or an admirable philosophy of life left by ancestors, such as *Sanhuai Tang* of the Wangs. The clan whose family name was Wang adopted the *tanghao* of *Sanhuai Tang* 三槐堂 (Hall of Three Chinese Scholar Trees) [61]. *The History of the Song Dynasty* records that a highly literate scholar named Wang You 王祐 had a unique way of educating his sons. He planted three Chinese scholar trees, saying “among my descendants there should be three outstanding young men, just like these three Chinese scholar trees.” [62] On reaching manhood, his sons all distinguished themselves, especially Wang

Dan 王旦, who attained a senior position, equivalent to prime minister today, in the Song dynasty government. As a result, this honourable history was enshrined when the clan adopted the name of Hall of Three Chinese Scholar Trees, thus adding the expectation on all descendants to be well educated and have bright futures, just like Wang You's sons.

The *tanghao* embodies the three concepts of ancestor, architecture, and the quiddity of the family in many other aspects. For example, the *tanghao* not only appeared in the building in the form of the plaque, but could also determine the *tanglian* 堂聯 (the couplet of the hall). The couplet consisted of a pair of antithetical lines of poetic words. In traditional communities, it was an honour reserved for literati to choose and document the couplet of the hall in reference to their *tanghao*, such as those observed in Xingning, Guangdong Province and Chenzhou, Hunan Province [63-65]. Each *Tanghao* had its corresponding couplet that was usually inscribed or written on both sides of the main doorjamb. The *tanghao*, which also appeared in shrines, was used in domestic houses as a reminder of the quiddity of the family in the everyday life [66]. The primary and secondary branches could use different *tanghaos* and apply different construction standards to their own ancestral halls. For instance, in Ji'an in Jiangxi Province, *Dunben Tang* 敦本堂 (Hall of Honest and Dedicated Character) was the *tanghao* of a primary branch, so the corresponding ancestral hall was built with three courtyards [67]. *Xulun Tang* 叙倫堂 (Hall of Ethical Appraisal) and *Kuiguan Tang* 奎觀堂 (Hall of Observing Constellation) were the *tanghaos* of two secondary-branch families, so their ancestral halls were built with just two courtyards [67].

The formal name of the hall acted as a link between the clan and its ancestors, connecting the family tradition to an architectural representation. An illustrious

family tradition or the family's origin was inscribed in calligraphy on a large plaque, which served as a notice to propagate the spirit of the lineage. The plaque inscribed with the formal name of the hall was not only adopted in actively occupied buildings, but in ancestral halls sometimes standing apart outside dwellings. The *tanghao*'s frequent use served as a constant reminder to refer back to the quiddity of the family and to reflect upon the spirit that had supported the family over generations.

4. CONCLUSION

The essay first reveals an integration of triadic notions that interconnected the notions of ancestry, architecture, and quiddity by exploring ancient Chinese and relevant historical literature.

In keeping with this conceptual foundation, the study proceeds to delve into the composition and implication of *miaohao* and *tanghao*. When these two terms are literally translated, they seem to be architectural terms. Interestingly, they were profoundly related to the temple and hall, but the former was a posthumous imperial title and the latter served more as a representative title for a clan.

At a national level, *miaohao* retraced the quiddity of the imperial family and demonstrated the legitimacy of the emperor. As a material representation, the ancestral temple embodied the legitimacy of the imperial authority. Among the many different types of civic buildings, the ancestral temple had priority and served as a symbol of the imperial family's reign.

At a domestic level, *tanghao* retraces the quiddity of the family and evokes the family's admired traditions and spirit. As a material concretisation of these, the *tanghao* was inscribed on an *ebian* (plaque) hung on the façade of the hall or inside the hall among domestic buildings. In family life, *tanghao* was used to represent the family. In a temporal manner, *tanghao* evokes the bond that kept the family together and nurtured that consolidation.

The triad of architecture, ancestor, and quiddity were profoundly interrelated in pre-modern Chinese architecture. This essay suggests that the relationship of the triad could be viewed as a cyclical reminder of quiddity through physical architectural representation working in conjunction with Chinese ancestral worship. That is why this essay sees reviewing quiddity as an ultimate goal of the triadic notions. Confucius had a conversation with Zai Yu 宰予 (courtesy name is Zaiwo, 522–458 BCE) about the reason for worshiping ancestors and erecting buildings for this purpose. Zai Yu started the conversation by questioning “I heard the names of ghosts and deities, but don’t know what they are for. May I ask you? 吾聞鬼神之名，而不知所謂，敢問焉 [68]”. Confucius first explained a conceptual system in which the spirits and bodies of ancestors would develop into ghosts and deities. He then explained which practices were accordingly enacted to show them respect and veneration. For example, their descendants undertook rituals to worship them and erected buildings and structures as monuments to demonstrate their veneration. What was this for?

教民反古複始，不敢忘其所由生也 [68] [these practices] would help remind people of the ancient past and reconsider their origin and quiddity. This way, people could not forget where they came from.

Confucius went on to elaborate that “[in this way,] people can be better instructed, thus sooner will they advocate and follow the rules. 眾人服自此，聽且速焉 [68].” To be a better family member, one may need a better knowledge of the quiddity of being a family. To build better, one may need to enquire into the quiddity of architecture. To turn a house into a home, one may need to delve into the quiddity or essence of both architecture and family. It is probable that periodically reflecting back on their ancestry was a way

for pre-modern Chinese to remain mindful of their quiddity or essence.

It is easy to lose sight of the original point of departure during a customary daily routine. It is also easy to allow forward progression become a means of escaping the past. Looking back may mean the rethinking of customary practices and reconsidering the direction ahead. This is probably why Joseph Rykwert tirelessly seeks traces of the primitive hut in his studies into many influential architects’ works, thoughts, and architectural theories [69]. By applying himself to this, he discovers a long and seemingly cyclical progression that involved a constant reflection back to the quiddity of dwelling.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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