

Comparative Analysis of Chinese Religious Architectural Culture

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Abstract

China is a country with diverse cultures, and both material and spiritual cultures are extremely rich. Religious architectural culture is one branch of the overall culture of society. Chinese religious architecture embodies traditional Chinese culture, the superb architectural skills and the architectural aesthetic, and it is a concentrated manifestation of religious material culture and spiritual culture. While preserving its own cultural characteristics in the process of globalization, religious architectural culture is a topic worthy of exploration. It is important to explore the culture of religious architecture while maintaining its own cultural characteristics. There are many religions in China, including indigenous Taoism and foreign religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Catholicism. Each religion has its own cultural connotations, and each religious architecture has its own characteristics. After the introduction of foreign religions into China, they have been influenced by traditional Chinese culture, resulting in their religious architecture incorporating some Chinese characteristics. In the current cultural context of China, a comparative analysis of the characteristics of various religious architectures is conducive to a deeper understanding of religious architectural culture and is of certain significance for the inheritance and protection of religious architecture. This article conducts fundamental research on Buddhist architecture, Taoist architecture, and Islamic architecture from the perspectives of overall layout and architectural carving art. By comparing and analyzing religious architecture, it reveals the cultural connotations it carries. It is hoped that this will provide new ideas for the protection of religious architecture and the inheritance of architectural culture.

Keywords

Buddhist architecture; Taoist architecture; Islamic architecture; layout; sculpture.

1. Introduction

With the development of globalization, close economic and cultural exchanges between countries, various cultural trends have flooded into China and collided with traditional culture, how we can maintain Chinese cultural characteristics is a question that deserves to be explored. Under the background of globalization, we have to retain and spread Chinese architectural and cultural characteristics in the world's common religious architectural culture, but also to strengthen the inheritance and development of the unique religious architectural culture. We must realize this cultural concept and establish cultural self-confidence in order to give religious architectural culture a lasting vitality.

2. Ideas and connotation of the selected topic

Chinese religious architecture is a concentrated manifestation of religious culture, ancient architectural skills and traditional Chinese culture, which expresses a strong ideological connotation and influences the development of architectural history and the inheritance of Chinese culture. Religious architecture not only reflects the architectural skills and aesthetic of the times, but also records people's religious activities and religious values. As Liang Sicheng

discussed in "The Characteristics of Chinese Architecture", "The personality of Chinese architecture is the character of my nation, that is, a special part of national art and thought, not only in the material method of its structure itself." This paper summarizes and analyzes the cultural representations of religious architecture from the level of architectural cultural representations, and explores the propagation law of religious architectural culture, which is of practical significance for its inheritance and development.

3. Review of Domestic and International Studies

3.1. Overview of domestic study

In recent years, the study of Chinese ancient architecture is a popular academic research topic in the field of architecture, Chinese religious architecture as a branch of ancient architecture, its study results are quite abundant. There are many studies on religious architecture from the interdisciplinary perspective of history, philosophy, art, etc. to study the cultural ideas of religious architecture. For the study of traditional religious architecture, most of the papers study the regional religious architecture, collect the region of a religious building data, compare and analyze their architectural features, examine the cultural characteristics and connotations. For example, Research on Taoist Architecture in Huizhou (Lin Chaohui, 2017), Research on Taoist Architecture in Northern Anhui (Xu Minghui, 2021), and Research on Buddhist Architecture in Xi'an (Su Yiding, 2013). A few papers study religious architecture culture from the macro level. For example, Buddhist Architecture and Chinese Traditional Feng Shui (Xie Kong, Han Lixin, Wang Haiyan, 2008), Taoist Feng Shui and Aesthetics (Wang Qiaoling, 2012) and so on. There are also some dissertations on religious architectural decoration and color, such as Decoration and Color of Religious Architecture in Lhasa Region of Tibet and Its Application (Zheng Quanze, 2003), Inheritance and Innovation of Decorative Art of Modern Buddhist Architecture in China (Song Yuanyuan, 2012), and so on.

3.2. Overview of foreign studies

Although the number of foreign studies on Chinese religious architecture is not as large as that of the domestic, the study results are worth exploring and learning. The earliest more influential foreign writings on China's religious architecture, "Die Baukunst und religiöse Kultur der Chinesen" (China's Architecture and Religious Culture) for the German architect Ernst Bergschmidt. The complete set of three episodes contains: Putuo Mountain (Guanyin), Shrines, and Pagodas, and the author's expedition traveled from north to south, covering a dozen provinces. There are also other papers that examine religious architecture in China. In the study of Buddhist architecture, Stanleyk Abe, in his article Art and Practice in a Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhist Cave Temple, explores the Buddhist art of 254 early Chinese Buddhist caves at the site of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, northwestern China, during the fifth century to recognize a complete religious building from the perspective of its design, fabrication, and use of space and its decorative perspectives to recognize the art and architecture of an intact religious sanctuary; and Robert Sharf's 2018 essay Art in the dark: the ritual context of Buddhist caves in western China examines the Buddhist art of Buddhist caves in western China in a ritual context. A number of papers examine the embodiment of religious principles in architecture, such as The Wisdom of Balance: Revealing Taoist Principles through Architecture (Mandy Man Yi Tsang, 2006). As well as the influence of the three Chinese teachings on architecture, such as The Architecture of the Three Teachings (Tracy Miller, 2015), Tracy Miller has also written about the influence of the three teachings on architecture in Of palaces and pagodas: Palatial symbolism in the Buddhist architecture of early medieval China comparing the architectural language of early Buddhist narrative murals and cave temples, arguing that both masonry and wood could be used to represent architecture in order to create symbolic spaces of worship, and finally providing evidence that the towering Buddhist

monuments of early medieval China are linked to the towering temples of South Asia in both form and symbolism are linked. In the study of Taoist architecture, the paper *The Model and Strategic Design of Taoist Chinese Temples Built in the 19th Century in Klang Valley, Malaysia* (Yeong Y M, Utaberta N, aidil Abd Rahman K, 2020) examined the design typology, model and strategic design of Taoist Chinese Temples Built in the 19th Century in Malaysia. Yeong Yin Mei, Khairul Aidil Azlin Abd Rahman, Nor Atiah Ismail et al. in their paper CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINING DESIGN IDENTITY IN CHINESE TAOIST TEMPLES BUILT IN THE 19TH CENTURY IN KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA study the interior design and material application of the 19th century Chinese Taoist temples built in the Klang Valley, Malaysia based on design typology. For the study of mosques, some scholars summarize and study the earliest mosques in China, such as Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt wrote China's Earliest Mosques in 2008. Thesis Geometric Ornaments Synthesis In Chinese Mosque (Handayani T W, Cardiah T, 2016) examines mosques in terms of their decorations as a way to show the unique styles of mosques in different regions and countries.

4. Religious architecture

Religious teachings are a philosophy and a special educational system. Although religious teachings are abstract, there are concrete forms of expression to facilitate the dissemination of religious culture. Religious architecture is a material component of religious entities, but also the intermediary between religious believers and faith, reflecting the inner feelings of believers and aesthetic needs. Religion makes full use of the symbolic nature of architectural art, making religious buildings sacred symbols. (Zhang Tingping, 2004) Religious architecture is one of the figurative manifestations of religious culture, which is reflected in the form of architectural layout, paintings, carvings and other aspects.

4.1. Buddhist Architecture

According to evidence that Buddhism originated in the 6th to 5th century BC in ancient India, the founder is the ancient Indian Suddhodana's son—Sakyamuni. Buddhism in China was introduced from India in the early years of the Eastern Han Dynasty. Before it was introduced to China, Buddhism was widely spread in the Western Region. After that, the countries in the western region had frequent interactions with mainland China, which paved the way for the introduction of Buddhism. After the introduction of Buddhism to China in order to facilitate the spread of Buddhism in China, Buddhists began to translate Buddhist texts, and Buddhism developed in China by combining with traditional Chinese ethical and religious concepts. With the large number of translations of Buddhist scriptures, various schools of Buddhism rose to prominence. This was followed by the proliferation of monasteries and cave temples, and the rapid expansion of Buddhist power throughout the country. From the cultural background, Chinese culture has always emphasized inheritance, a lineage is a consistent portrayal of Chinese culture, and religious architecture is no exception (Liu Ren, 2021). Since the introduction of Buddhism into China, it has been integrated into Chinese culture, and Buddhist architecture has been constructed in conjunction with Chinese realities. Due to the different time, way, region, folk background and historical background of the introduction of Buddhist architecture, three major families of Buddhist architecture were formed. Chinese-speaking Buddhist architecture, distributed in the Central Plains, was integrated with the national culture, and palace-style architecture was its main architectural form; Tibetan-speaking Buddhist architecture, adapted to the ethnic culture of the Tibetans and the plateau environment to form a unique architectural form; and Pali-speaking Buddhist architecture, distributed in China's Yunnan Province, was deeply influenced by the architecture of Myanmar and Thailand due to its proximity to both countries, and such Buddhist monasteries were often in the form of pagodas.

4.1.1. Buddhist Building Layout

In general the layout of Buddhist buildings follows the distribution of traditional Chinese courtyard layout structure. In general, from the main gate, various single buildings are arranged in sequence along the north-south oriented central axis, and the larger the scale of the buildings, the more important they are. The earliest stupa is often located in the central axis, and later the stupa building is not in the central axis, but in the vicinity of the Buddhist temple or the distance from the more distant place to build. Han Buddhist buildings were influenced by the shape of ancient Chinese architecture, and were distributed in a courtyard style, with the main halls and Buddha statues arranged on the center line. The main halls and statues of Buddha are arranged on the center line. From the mountain gate, the arrangement are as follows: the hall of the heavenly king, the main shrine hall, the sansheng hall or the hall of avalokitesvara buddhisatva, and the tripitaka suta pavilion. Influenced by the layout of the Chinese court, the larger temples will have symmetrically arranged small courtyards on both sides of the main hall and pavilion; Tibetan Buddhist architecture was built in the Tang Dynasty and reached its peak in the Qing Dynasty. Its sutra hall, the Buddha hall and the monk's house is mostly supported by wooden pillars, and trapezoidal watchtower-style building with thick walls, there are many pseudo-windows on the wall, with horizontal trim above windows. Tibetan Buddhism complex has no central axis, the main building for the Buddha Hall and Dratsang, and other buildings are arranged around the main building. The exterior is surrounded by thick walls, and the whole looks like a castle; Southern Buddhist architecture (Pali-speaking Buddhist architecture) is influenced by the ethnic architecture of the Yunnan region, and has no obvious central axis or courtyard-style buildings, with a pagoda and the statue of Sakyamuni Buddha as the main body, which is matched with the hall and surrounded by houses;

4.1.2. Buddhist architectural sculptural art

Stone carving, stone pagoda, stupa as a typical representative of Buddhist monastic architecture, they are important for the dissemination of Buddhist culture. Stone stupa is not only rich in the number, but also decorative art style has a typical Buddhist characteristics and Buddhist art style, for the dissemination and development of Buddhism and stupa construction process has a very important significance. They are usually carved with a variety of botanical patterns, geometric patterns, scriptures or Buddhist figures sculpture and so on. The decorative plant patterns are often on the Buddhist pagodas, and the plant patterns often choose lotus. In ancient time, the Sumeru seat of stupa decorated with stone lotus support the body of stupa, on the middle part of Sumeru seat usually engraves with blooming lotus. Geometric patterns generally include the swastika, the flame pattern and the linking beads pattern. The swastika comes from Sanskrit, meaning the collection of auspiciousness and virtue; the flame pattern can fully reflect the spiritual light and power of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas and their disciples, and its shape is abstract and simple (Zhu Mengchuan, 2008); the linking beads pattern is characterized by the use of a circle of consecutive round beads as the edge of a pattern or decorations, and the linking beads pattern is usually composed in a way that has the qualities of being close to the masses of the people, and it implies a good moral meaning, which has become a symbol of good fortune and auspiciousness. Buddhist buildings will be carved some of the scriptures, as a building to show Buddhist culture to the Buddhists, the precious scriptures are bound to be carved on it, with a certain degree of propaganda and decorative. From the point of view of the stone carving works preserved nowadays, the main scriptures used include the Great Compassion Mantra, the Dharma Flower Sutra, the Heart Sutra of Prajna Paramita, and other important scriptures. Let the believers meditate on the scriptures to promote the spread of Buddhist culture. Some Buddhist architectural body will choose some of the Buddha figure, using relief to carve, common Buddhist figures such as the four heavenly kings, Maitreya Buddha, Sakyamuni, eighteen Luohan, Guanyin and so on. People can

appreciate the long history of Buddhist culture when they see the superb carving of this stone stupa.

4.2. Taoist Architecture

Taoism originated in China and was founded by Chinese people, so it is called a native religion. The history of Taoism can be traced back to the pre-Qin period, and was officially formed in the middle and late Eastern Han Dynasty. Taoism has had a profound impact on the politics, economy and culture of China, and is one of the three spiritual pillars of the ruling class. The unique and deep thinking of Taoism is not only reflected in the written records and dissemination, but the architecture that serves this religion should also be unique. Taoist architecture is an important part of Chinese architecture, which distinctly expresses Taoist philosophical thought and features on religious artistic conception. Taoist architecture can be broadly divided into gong and guan. In addition to inheriting the traditional architectural ideas, architectural patterns and construction methods in its layout, scale and structure, the ancestral buildings also injects Taoist and Taoist aesthetic ideas and values, forming its own unique style (Geng Jipeng, Zheng Xiaohong, 2014).

4.2.1. Taoist building layout

Taoist buildings are mostly built in the mountains, generally speaking, the temple backed by the mountains, facing the north, focusing on the artistic conception and the extraordinary atmosphere, emphasizing the integration of human and nature. The layout of the Taoist temples is very exquisite, and it is generally divided into two forms: one is the traditional architectural technique of progressing forward and backward along the central axis, and symmetrically unfolding according to the central axis, and the other is the architectural technique of determining the main building location according to the direction of the Chinese Five Elements and Eight Diagrams, and then radiating around the direction of the Eight Diagrams. The former takes Chengdu Qingyang Palace as an example, through the mountain gate, along the central axis, there are Lingzu Hall, Hunyuan Hall, Bagua Pavilion, Sanqing Hall, Doumu Hall, Yuhuang Hall, and there are Jiangsheng Platforms and Pulpit on both sides. Ancillary buildings such as canteens and rooms are also arranged on both sides of the axis. The latter takes the meridian as the central axis according to the Bagua orientation, sits in the north and faces the south, and the halls worshiped to the Taoist immortals are located on the central axis. The rest of the buildings are arranged according to the direction of the Eight Diagrams, and the side halls are set up to worship the immortals. This symmetrical layout embodies the hierarchical idea of "His Holiness in the center". To summarize the above, Taoist architecture makes rational use of the main characteristics of wooden architecture, which is not based on a single building, but on the whole, and the building is characterized by a group layout, which is linked, communicated, cooperated, and restricted by each other, forming an organic arrangement of a flat whole (Wang Chunhui and Shan Qianru, 2019).

4.2.2. Taoist architectural sculptural art

Taoist architecture also embodies exquisite carving skills everywhere. The use of carving in architectural decoration mainly includes wood carving, stone carving and brick carving (Yang Yanxia, 2012). In Taoist architectural carvings, stone carvings are predominant, for example, the stone gates of Taoist temples can be preserved for thousands of years. Taoist stone gate carving techniques mainly include round carving, relief carving, translucent carving, inlaid carving, etc., and the design of carving patterns is basically the eight immortals, cranes, peonies, curly grass, and other auspicious motifs. In addition to the commonly used Taiji pattern in Taoist gate carving, the Eight Immortals relief carving is also an essential carving pattern, the Eight Immortals refers to the eight immortals in the Taoist immortal system, but before the Ming Dynasty, the saying is different, to the Ming Dynasty was eventually designated as Tie Guaili, Han Zhongli, Zhang Guolao, Lan Caihe, He Xianfu, Lv Dongbin, Han Xiangzi, Cao Guoyu,

and their magic weapons are also known as the "Eight Treasures". In the Taoist architectural carving and decoration, the patterns of plants, birds and animals are used more than other patterns. Among them, plants are mostly lotus, plum, orchids, bamboo, chrysanthemums, peonies, etc. These subjects symbolize the highest ideal personality in Chinese traditional culture. Many fairy tale to Taoist immortals are related to the lotus. Plum, orchids, bamboo and chrysanthemums are known as the "Four Gentlemen of Flowers" in traditional Chinese culture, symbolizing the four qualities of pride, seclusion, tranquility and ease, which to a certain extent fits the idea of Taoism. Animal decorative motifs are represented by bats, cranes and four spirits. Bat decorative motifs represent good fortune, and there are often one or two bats on the demon hunting portraits of the celestial master Zhong Kui. Immortal cranes represent longevity, and most of the people who practice monasticism like cranes that symbolize long-lived. Immortal cranes mostly reside in places with beautiful mountains and waters, showing the Taoist vision of pursuing a purer and more natural life. The Four Spirits, or what we call the Green Dragon, the White Tiger, the Xuanwu and the Vermilion Bird, symbolize repelling evil and guarding the four directions.

4.3. Islamic Architecture

Islam was introduced into China since the Tang Dynasty, and then began to spread by Chinese commercial exchanges with other countries. After the Song Dynasty, there was a gradual increase in the number of Muslims who came to China, and after marrying local residents, their descendants stayed in China and gradually integrated with the Han Chinese people in life style and custom. Islamic architecture is an important part of Islamic art, which mainly influenced Uyghur architecture and Hui architecture after its introduction to China. The main types of Islamic architecture are: mosques, tombs, palaces and fortresses. The Islamic architecture in China is a unique type of architecture in China's traditional architecture, which was influenced by Chinese traditional culture after it was introduced into China. After the formation of the Hui in the Yuan Dynasty, Islamic architecture developed greatly, and Chinese-style Islamic mosque architecture based on traditional Chinese architectural layout and structural system, combined with the unique functions and requirements of Islam, began to appear (Yu Xiaoheng, 1995). Islamic architecture has inherited some of the traditional aesthetics of Chinese architecture in terms of architectural spatial layout and decorative aesthetics, forming Chinese-style Islamic architectural features that are different from those of other regions. Most of the existing Islamic buildings were built or rebuilt since the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. The representative buildings of Islam - mosques are mainly divided into two main families: traditional Chinese architectural styles and styles dominated by Arab architecture.

4.3.1. Islamic building layout

The basic setup principle of Islamic architecture, generally there are worship halls, lecture halls, water rooms, Beik House or Moonrise House, Mihrab set at the center of the back wall of the worship halls, and Xuanli Building (Beik House) set at the north-west corner. The early stage of the introduction of Islam, Islamic architecture is mostly masonry structure, the layout of the Arab style, the layout is not symmetrical, such as Quanzhou Qingjing Temple. Yuan Dynasty period, the layout of Islamic architecture still retains some of the Arab Islamic architecture, and at the same time gradually absorbed the traditional Chinese architectural layout, the use of courtyard formations composed of complexes, initially formed with Chinese characteristics of Islamic architecture, such as Dingxian Mosque in Hebei. Ming and Qing dynasties, most of the mosque with Chinese characteristics, the overall layout using the Hall of Worship as the center, the North and South Lecture Hall opposite, along the central axis of a number of sequential arrangement of courtyards, forming a complete set of courtyard groups. According to the teachings of Islam, believers must worship toward the holy land of Mecca, all of the Hall of Worship are sitting in the west toward the east, so the central axis of the mosque complex is

generally east-west. Overall the traditional Chinese mosque layout is flexible and varied, rich in spatial hierarchy and orderly arrangement.

4.3.2. Islamic sculptural art

Islam does not have idolatry, so unlike Taoism and Buddhism, which have idols, shrines and altars, the interior facilities of mosques are simple. Most of the mosque carvings are brick carvings, and most of the decorative patterns use plants, words, geometry, etc. Although Islam prohibits idolatry, the fictional auspicious objects favored by the Central Plains, such as dragons, phoenixes and unicorns, can be accepted by Muslims, because some of them represent people's psychology of avoiding harm and some of them represent the hope for a better life. Brick carvings with botanical motifs are favored in the central and northwestern regions. Plant motifs are mostly adopted as the "Four Gentlemen" (Plum, Orchid, Bamboo and Chrysanthemum), "Three Friends of the Year" (Pine, Bamboo and Plum), Lotus, Lotus, Peony, Peach, etc., etc., which represent different symbolisms of different plants, and form a unique art and culture. Different plants represent different symbols, forming a unique artistic culture. Calligraphy is also a common theme of brick carving, Chinese calligraphy has a long history. Chinese calligraphy has a long history, and the carvings are often in two styles, the official script and the seal script, and the common carvings include the Chinese characters "福", "禄", "寿" and others representing good luck. In addition to Chinese calligraphy, part of the mosque brick carving works cited the Islamic classic the Koran verses as the content of the carving. The handwriting of Arabic, including angular script and cursive, together with the unique rhythmic rhythms and fluttering lines of Arabic, combined with the decoration amplifies the artistic and cultural value of Islamic architectural ornamentation. Geometric motifs demonstrate the uniqueness of Arabic culture and are usually based on circles and squares, which are combined and created by artists in a rich variety of combinations, resulting in highly varied and aesthetically pleasing decorative motifs.

5. Conclusion

Religious buildings in China, whether they are traditional religious buildings originating from the local area or those imported later, are deeply imprinted with the cultural imprints of various eras. While maintaining the unique architectural styles of their respective religions, these buildings have also skillfully incorporated the characteristics of traditional Chinese architecture. Looking at the spatial layout of these religious buildings from a macroscopic point of view, we can find an obvious trend: no matter what kind of religion, the spatial layout of its buildings has been influenced by the traditional Chinese garden architecture, with the symmetrical layout of the central axis being particularly prominent. With the passage of time, the spatial layout of these foreign religions has gradually integrated with the natural and cultural environment of China, forming a unique spatial layout with Chinese characteristics. If we look at the decorative arts of these religious buildings from a microscopic point of view, especially the art of carving, we can feel the deep influence of traditional Chinese culture. For example, although some mosques prohibit idolatry and do not use animal motifs as decoration, they have accepted auspicious motifs from Chinese mythology in the process of Chineseization. This integration not only reflects the respect and absorption of foreign religions into Chinese culture, but also demonstrates the inclusiveness and pluralism of Chinese culture. On the basis of retaining their own unique architectural features, religious buildings in China have incorporated cultural elements from different regions of China, resulting in religious buildings with Chinese characteristics. This is not only a valuable cultural heritage, but also a valuable asset that we need to continue to inherit and develop in the future. While respecting the cultural characteristics of each type of religious architecture, we should study and dig deeper into the

symbolic culture of traditional Chinese spatial layout and carving art, so that these unique art forms can take on a new life in modern society.

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