

The Reflection of Chinese Ancient Religious Philosophy Thought in the Artistic Conception of Chinese Traditional Architecture

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Abstract: In this paper, the relationship between "Qi" and "Dao" is abstracted as a binary interactive relationship between architectural construction and religious and philosophical ideas. From the perspective of architecture, this paper attempts to select religious thoughts and philosophical concepts for analysis. At the level of religious thoughts, this paper selects the theory that man is an integral part of nature, the ideology of rites and music, yin and yang and the five elements, which have obvious mapping relationship in ancient Chinese architecture and are widely discussed in traditional religious philosophy research, makes a detailed analysis of the site selection and layout of the building, and lists relevant cases to see through the role of religious thoughts in the building. At the philosophical level, this paper selects the perspective of realistic spirit and eternal view as the starting point to analyze the construction cycle, materials and construction, highlighting China's unique architectural ideas in other regions.

1. Introduction

Space is the basic symbol of culture. If one can have a thorough understanding of a nation's concept of space, one can know more than half of its cultural significance. Architecture, as an artistic language of entity, exists in space and continues in time. Its form embodiment and the religious philosophy behind it transform and influence each other, creating rich connotations.

Confucianism's ideology of "rites and music" and its emphasis on order, Taoism's emphasis on change and integration, Buddhism's idea about the expression of intuition and connotation, and rich religious and philosophical thoughts have created the unique Chinese traditional architecture. This article attempts to take the ancient Chinese traditional architecture as the carrier, to see through the religious philosophy connotation behind it.

2. A Probe into Religious Ideas in Traditional Architecture

2.1 The embodiment of the theory that man is an integral part of nature in traditional architecture

Most ancient Chinese philosophy and religion emphasized the unity of heaven, earth and human. In the Taoist Book of Change [1], the six hexagrams are divided into heaven, earth and human beings, and made relevant statements: "Words and deeds are the things that a gentleman can influence heaven and earth. Can he not be careful?" [2]. No matter whether it originated from China such as Taoism and Confucianism, or the Buddhist thoughts that merged with religious philosophy in China. Ancient China had a unified understanding of the fact that man was an organic part of nature, that is, heaven, earth and man are a whole. Taoism further discussed "Tao" and "Qi" in the Taoist Book of Change: "The metaphysical parts refer to the Tao while the physical parts refer to the Qi". [1] As a kind of "Qi", architecture also follows the "Tao" of the laws of heaven, earth, man and nature.

This idea of harmony between man and nature can be well verified in the construction of single buildings. Chinese ancient architecture emphasized the integration of architecture and human and natural environment. Environment is the premise of architectural planning, and human scale is also taken into account. Buildings grow out of the natural environment. Beautiful buildings should adapt to the environment in colour, material, shape and size, and form a complete picture with the surrounding environment, emphasizing the expression of artistic conception [3].

Under the influence of the thought of harmony between man and nature, many architectural designs following the laws of heaven and earth emerge as the times require. [4]. Mingtang of past dynasties is one of them. "Records of Yin and Yang in Ming Tang in Rites" once recorded, the reason why the Mingtang distinguished yin and yang was the mutual echo between the royal family and the heaven.

When the Mingtang was built, a circle of water system was encircled around it, and the water was encircled to the left to symbolize the heaven. The buildings inside include Taishi, which represents the purple palace. Also, the four directions of southeast and northwest represent the corresponding stars. Mingtang inherited the design of "imitation of relationship of heaven and earth", which reflected the connection and intersection between the emperor and heaven and earth. The Zaitian Lou in Zhao'an, Fujian, adopted the structure of the square ancestor of the round building, symbolizing the round place with eight parts of the round building, each with eight bays, symbolizing eight diagrams and sixty-four hexagrams. Similar examples include Bagua Bao in Zhangpu, Zhencheng Lou in Yongding, Banyue Lou and Chengqi Lou [5].

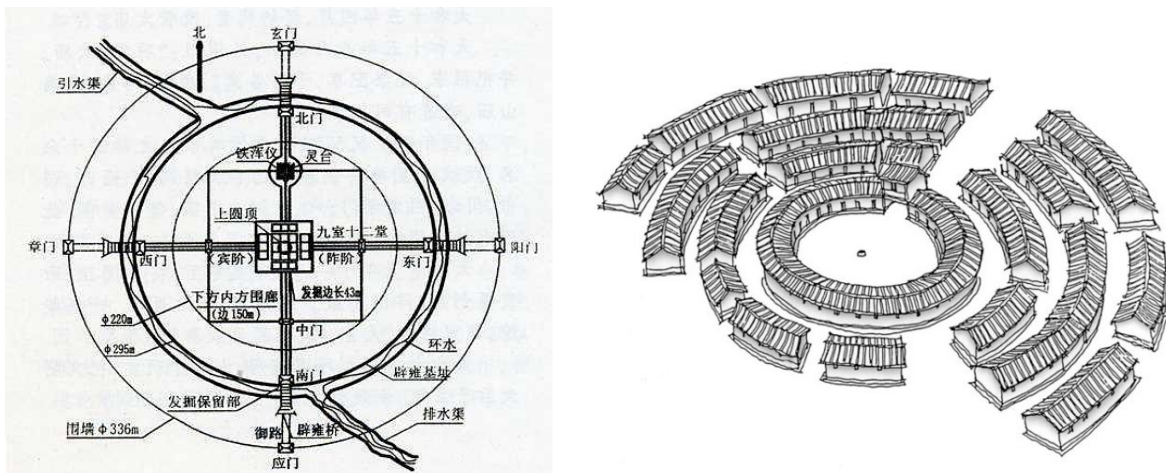


Figure 1: Plan of "Ming Tang" from internet and Plan of Bagua Bao drawn by Huang Hanmin

This aesthetic orientation is also prominent in the external space of buildings, especially in the construction of gardens. Different from the western idea that external space should be attached to architecture, ancient China emphasized the relationship between them, which was reciprocal, independent and interactive, and pursued the effect of harmony and unity. For example, gardens often imitate natural landscapes in a freehand way, while buildings are often hidden in this landscape environment. Learning from nature and following the concept of harmony between man and nature.

This orientation can also be seen in the urban scale of building site selection. Nanjing, Xi'an, Beijing, Luoyang and other cities with frequent political capital construction are basically situated on the plain surrounded by mountains and rivers, with beneficial landscape conditions. The Central Plains area was often called "Fudi" by the ancients. "Fudi" takes the meaning of the abdomen, which is flat and resides in the central part of the human body. By analogizing the central part of the country with the central part of the human body, the flat hinterland with beneficial landscape conditions naturally becomes the preferred place for capital construction.

Compared with ancient western architecture, such as ancient Rome, people's independence from heaven and earth is often emphasized by huge scale and proportional modulus. Some ancient European buildings have few windows and no corridors. The interior and exterior environments of buildings are isolated from each other. Unlike the ancient Chinese architecture in which waterside pavilions, terraces, open halls and long corridors, the architectural and the natural environment permeate each other. At the same time, curves are often used in the design of roof, ridge and decoration to avoid the abrupt feeling of buildings to the surrounding environment.

2.2 The embodiment of the ideology of rites and music in traditional architecture

Since the Western Han Dynasty, the Chinese dynasty restricted the spread of other theories, and gave prominence to Confucianism alone. As the most important ideology, Confucianism had influenced all aspects of ancient China such as the construction technology and system of ancient architecture. Confucianism pursues benevolence, righteousness, propriety, faith and wisdom, the doctrine of the mean and harmony, and values hierarchical order [6]. We can see from some famous sentences, such as "Ritual is the principle" [7], "Let monarch be monarch, courtiers be courtiers, father be father, son be son" [8], "Happiness is the harmony of heaven and earth, Ritual is the order of heaven and earth" [7], and "the height of the palace wall is high enough to distinguish the etiquette between men and women" [9]. The aesthetic taste determined by hierarchical order has been naturally reflected in buildings.

Rank order is an important standard for the construction of ancient Chinese buildings. In the layout of single buildings, we can easily see the influence of ritual and music thoughts. The residential form of the common people can distinguish the front of the hall and the back of the house, while the layout of the buildings is mostly symmetrical. The typical architectural pattern is quadrangle, and the number four represents the four directions of southeast and northwest [10]. The buildings are combined to form a mouth shape, and divided into front and rear courtyard. Buildings are arranged along the central axis [11]. Judging from the features shown on the facade, there are certain height differences and restrictions between quadrangles and quadrangles according to owners' status. The number of gates, the bay of houses, the height of steps, etc. are all related to the identity of the owner.

The inner structure of the quadrangle always reflects the rank and order. The main room is higher than the rest of the rooms, located in the central position of the house. The ancestral tablet and the central room are located in the middle of the main room. The side rooms on the east and west sides are opposite to each other and are often used by guests. The ear room is generally used as a study or kitchen and the back yard is often provided for maids and footmen. Homeowners, guests, children and servants all live in strict locations, with high-status people living in main rooms and low-status people living in side rooms. The use of building colours, the height and number of gates embody the idea of hierarchical order in many ways. In addition, the tradition of "three palaces and five gates" and "The palace is in front and the leisure area is in the back" in the building is also a good reflection of the thought of ritual and music.

Confucianism advocates the supremacy of monarchical power, and the ritual and music system is more prominent in the construction of the imperial city. The imperial city complex is centered on the palace. On a central axis of the orderly arrangement of the imperial city's buildings, there are strict requirements on the bay space, shape, colour and even the type of backbone and decorative patterns of the buildings. Apart from the small-scale central axis control of the imperial city, starting from Yecheng in Caowei dynasty, the city's control central axis has also begun to be widely used. The planned houses are symmetrical around the central axis, and the centre of the city has naturally become the highest point of power and rank.

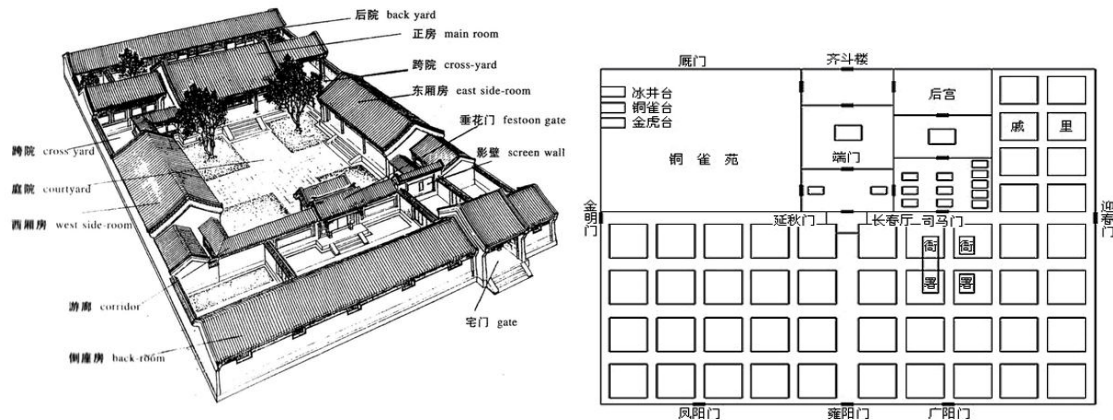


Figure 2: Quadrangle and Yecheng in Caowei dynasty from internet

As an ancient Chinese architectural manual, "building formulas" summarizes the architectural achievements of past dynasties, and formulates the design module and the quota system of labor and materials, setting a good example for the subsequent construction industry. At the same time, it is an embodiment of a system, a building system and a political system. The contents in the standard always express the thought of ritual and music.

In a word, the layout, orientation and size of Chinese traditional buildings are all in accordance with the order, with emphasis on grades and the order of seniority. Monolithic buildings with different functions are interrelated, organized in the same set of order rules, just like the epitome of ritual and music system in ancient China.

2.3 The embodiment of Yin and Yang and five elements in traditional architecture

The theory of yin and yang and the five elements is China's simple materialism and dialectics thought, "yin and yang are the way to establish heaven, and softness and rigidity are the way to establish earth." The Opposition and Unity of Yin and Yang is the origin of the universe, and its derivation and expression is rigid and flexible benevolence and righteousness. [11] The five elements are a systematic view of Taoism since ancient times, explaining the five mentalities of the evolution of yin and yang, i.e. water moistening down, fire burning up, metal convergence, wood stretching, earth neutralization. From the design of individual buildings to the planning of buildings, palaces, temples, mausoleums and houses are all symbolized by geographical location, wind direction and the change of star direction [12]. Yin and yang and the five elements are the guiding ideology throughout.

In addition, before the building is built, the choice of building shape and address will be made according to the topography and geomantic omen. Generally speaking, the best position is "facing the sun and water, sitting on the back of the mountain and facing the south while sitting in the north", which is the ancient "geomantic treasure land". This site selection criterion seems superstitious, but in fact it makes sense from many aspects, such as from geology and meteorology. The back mountain is convenient for drainage, soil and water conservation, and resistance to cold wind under the north. Nearby water provides

convenient conditions for living water, and cool south wind comes in summer. Harmonious landscape conditions can form a good microclimate.

The "Five Elements Theory" also plays an important role in the layout of buildings. The five elements simultaneously symbolize the orientation and direction. South is the front, representing fire, north is the back, representing water, east is wood, representing civil, west is metal, representing military. This is how the cultural palace "Wen Hua" and the weapon-laying palace "Wu Ying" were set up, and the positions of the military and civilian officials also came from this.

The Forbidden City in Ming and Qing Dynasties is an example of planning based on Yin and Yang and five elements. The first is the design of the city gate. The three main palaces symbolize earth, the "Donghua" Gate symbolizes wood, the "Xihua" Gate symbolizes metal, the "Wu" Gate symbolizes fire, and the "Xuanwu" Gate symbolizes water. The three steps are a huge character of "Tu", facing south, in line with the direction in which the emperor sits facing.

The main building of the Forbidden City is located on the north-south central axis of Beijing, with the three palace of Taihe, Zhonghe, Baohe in the front and the palace of Qianqing and Kunning in the back. It is a typical model for "the front is the palace, the back is the bedroom, the outside is the court and the inside is the courtyard."

The outer court is yang, with yang number, like five gates and three palaces, the inner court is yin, with yin number, two palaces and six bedrooms. The palace of Taihe is yang in yang, the palace of Qianqing is yang in yin, the palace of Kunning is the place where the emperor lives, and the palace of Kunning is yin in yin, the place where the queen lives. There is the Jiaotai Palace between those two palaces. Jiaotai takes the meaning that the "qi" takes the essence of heaven and earth and gives birth to all things in the world. At the same time, it also shows that heaven and earth are in harmony with each other and that yin and yang are peaceful.

3. A Probe into Philosophy in Traditional Architecture

The ancient Chinese philosophy reflected the understanding of the ultimate problem. The ancient Chinese understanding of the ultimate, eternal, life and death is very different from most civilization. This way of thinking naturally reflects into architecture.

Taoism believes that all things in the world are in eternal change and all things are in such a process of movement. "The Book of Changes", the Chinese name implies the meaning of change. Confucianism also said: "Never talk about weirdness, courage, rebellion, ghosts and gods", advocating the pursuit of the present world and not discussing about ghosts and gods. Taoism emphasizes change rather than firmness and certainty. Confucianism focuses on the present instead of the afterlife. These viewpoints all point to the emphasis on the present.

Corresponding to the architecture, it is not difficult to find that most of the ancient Chinese buildings have disappeared in the long river of history with the passage of time. To some extent, only a few of them still exists today, such as the Tang Dynasty's Great Hall of Foguang Temple and Song Dynasty's Dule Stone Guanyin Pavilion. Ancient Chinese wooden structures are rarely preserved for a long time. They are often burned down with the change of dynasties or decayed with the passage of time. In addition to the differences in material selection and geographical climate of buildings, the pursuit of the present world in ancient China is revealed behind the construction technology and construction cycle.

The construction period in ancient China is quite short compared with that in the west. St. Peter's Basilica Church took a century to construct and went through several generations of architectural masters. The palaces of Chinese emperors were often built in a few years to enjoy in their lifetime. As Ji Cheng said in "Yuan ye", "the life span of people and things is not commensurate. Things can be passed on for a thousand years, but Life is not more than a thousand years old." [13]

In the construction of ancient Chinese buildings, more consideration was given to adapting to the expected service life of the users, rather than pursuing the long-term preservation of the buildings. In the concept of many countries in ancient Europe and west Asia, life in reality is a moment, while the world after death is eternal. In architecture, memorial mausoleum and church are often built on a larger scale and with exquisite layout. The contrast between the ancient Egyptian city of Kahun and the pyramids illustrates the difference. The former is poorly built, with narrow residence and incomplete equipment, while the latter is large in scale and stands on top of the sky in the desert. One represents the world before death and one represents eternal life after death. Look again at the ancient Greek Acropolis, built of stone, reflecting an eternal value expectation. The same is true of medieval church buildings, which can be said to have used up almost all their resources in scale and design, to reach the peak. This difference is exactly the embodiment of the secular spirit in building construction.

4. Conclusion

Architecture, as an important "Qi", carries rich and diverse thoughts of ancient Chinese religious and philosophy. China's unique architectural form contains various details of national culture and customs, and these forms have changed correspondingly with the changes of the content of "Tao" in different times.

The category discussed in this article is more general and does not strictly distinguish between time periods. Instead, it focuses on sorting out the relationship between the relatively mainstream religious philosophy and architecture, which lasted for a long time in Chinese history, to establish an intuitive connection between these macroscopic representations.

On the other hand, architecture covers a wide range of areas. From group architecture to single architecture, even into the study of architectural details, traces of religious philosophy can find corresponding mappings. There are also many contents worthy of study and excavation. Due to limited space, this article cannot present them one by one. Hope the future discussion can further promote these contents.

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Appendix

1. Mingtang, One kind of Palace, in ancient times, a place for an emperor to declare punishment and prize or instructions.
2. The bay means the standard width of a room in an old-style house.
3. Civil officials stand in the east while military officials stand in the west.
4. Tu, Chinese characters, the meaning of earth.