Analyse the differences in origin and layout of Chinese Buddhist and Taoist architecture

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Abstract. This article mainly lists differences between Buddhist and Taoist architecture in China, and compares them in various aspects by analyzing the layout and origin of the architecture and combining religious meanings. As an important material manifestation of Chinese local religion, temple architecture not only represents the cultural core of Chinese religion, but also reflects the cultural heritage and profound connotations of Chinese religion. Chinese religious architecture combines the ideas of classical palace architecture and garden architecture design, so temple architecture can be regarded as a treasure in Chinese architectural art. As a cultural symbol and microcosm, they also greatly enhance the importance of people's understanding and protection of religious architectural art. The article combines the viewpoints of multiple experts to supplement and explain the core points of the article, and preliminarily explores the main reasons for the formation of the layout and style of Buddhist and Taoist architecture. Through research, the author aims to deeply explore the design differences between Buddhist and Taoist architecture.

1 Introduction

Religious architecture is a perfect product that combines spiritual power with spatial art. From the establishment of the oldest faith on Earth to the first Egyptian temple that rose on this land 4000 years ago, and from the stunning Sophia Cathedral to the Sagrada Familia designed by Gaudi, people constantly surpass the past in the field of religious architecture time and time again, placing new spirits on one magnificent religious building after another.

As an ancient civilization in the East, China's myths and religious legends are deeply engraved in its traditional culture. Starting from the ancient Fuxi Shennong faith, the image of a deity has been one of the few spiritual pillars of the Chinese people. People's faith in gods comes from their hearts and they treat every prayer with sincerity. However, with the irresistible development of history, the gods of the old era were replaced by new gods. The origin of the gods has had its origin since then, and the belief in gods in China usually carries a strong philosophical significance, which further confirms the irreplaceable position of religion in Chinese culture. The development of Chinese religion can be considered one of the sources of Chinese philosophy.

The introduction of Buddhism to China began during the Western Han Dynasty. It is said that Emperor Ming of Han dreamed of a golden person, and then he sent people to the Western Regions to welcome two eminent monks. They also brought many Buddhist statues and scriptures, and carried them back to the capital city of Luoyang on white horses. He also built the White Horse Temple in Luoyang. From then on, Baima Temple became the first officially built Buddhist temple in Chinese history. During the Wei and Jin dynasties, Buddhism further spread, and many Buddhist temples were built in the Jiangnan region. From the Northern and Southern Dynasties to the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism gradually separated from the content of Indian Buddhism and gradually evolved into Han Buddhism. Since then, the content of Buddhism has undergone significant changes, mainly through integration with local Chinese culture.

The prosperity of Buddhism led to the construction of Buddhist architecture in China. Today, it can be traced back to the early construction of temples in China, including not only the White Horse Temple, but also the Famen Temple built in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, as well as the Lingyin Temple and Jiming Temple in the Jiangnan region. These examples all demonstrate the unprecedented development of Buddhism during the late Han Dynasty, and although these Buddhist buildings underwent multiple major renovations, they still maintained the architectural layout of that time, providing some reference for early Buddhist architecture in China.

As a local religion in China, Taoism also has an important and profound impact on China's politics, culture, and economy, starting from the early Qin and Han dynasties' Huanglaoxue to the later formation of religionization. The period from the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties was the formation and establishment of Taoism. In the late Eastern Han Dynasty, Huang Laodao formed a solid entity, and primitive folk religious groups such as Wudoumi Dao were successively established. After hundreds of years of transformation and development during the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties,
the teachings and techniques of Taoism gradually became complete and officially recognized, becoming a new religion. Unlike Buddhism, Taoism did not initially have a belief in gods, but instead had a belief in philosophy and reason.

Taoist architecture can be described as exhibiting a complete process from nothing to something. Early Taoists mostly lived in deep mountains for cultivation, in order to "stay away from the mortal world and practice in isolation". Since the Tang Dynasty, Taoism has gradually entered a period of development. From the mid Tang Dynasty to the Song Dynasty, Taoism flourished unprecedentedly and Taoist temples were widely established in various regions. The early Taoist temples that have been preserved to this day include the Louguantai in Shaanxi, the Qingyang Palace in the Bashu region, and the Taiqing Palace in Laoshan.

Chinese religious architecture is a witness to the development of religion over thousands of years, and a perfect fusion of Chinese architecture and ideology. After fully understanding the meaning of Chinese religious architecture, one will also have a new understanding and perception of Chinese religion.

As a hot topic of discussion in recent years, the protection of cultural relics and ancient buildings has gradually been taken seriously. The first step in protecting buildings is to understand their form and characteristics. So, the author hopes to use this paper to compare the differences between Taoist and Buddhist architecture, and the author hopes this article can be adopted by other authors.

2 Differences in the Origin of Religious Architecture

2.1. Indian Buddhism

In India, there were no temples in the early days of Buddhism. Buddhists follow the Buddha's system of "begging for food outside to nourish the body, and begging for Dharma inside to nourish wisdom and life". During the day, they go to villages and towns to preach, and at night, they return to the mountains and forests to sit under trees, specializing in meditation [1]. Buddhism was originally aimed at philosophy and advocated for self-cultivation. However, it was not until the construction of the Bushkalan Garden by King Pinavishara (456-493 BC) that Buddhism had its first temples. The first official temple in China, the White Horse Temple, was built in the 11th year of the Yongping reign of the Eastern Han Dynasty (68 AD). Therefore, by comparing the two temples, Indian Buddhist temples had already developed for a considerable period of time at that time, while Chinese Buddhist temples had only just begun to develop.

Indian Buddhism designed the samgharama, divided into two types; One type is a house-style samgharma with a monk's room, pagoda, and main hall, while the other type is a grotto-style samgharma built on the mountain and carved out caves for monks to live in. Of course, both of these architectural styles were promoted after being introduced to China, and commonly seen Buddhist temples referred to as the samgharma style of houses, while the samgharma style of grottoes evolved into cave architecture such as the Yungang Grottoes in Longmen.

Due to the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, the practice of begging for food and living in the wilderness was no longer popular, and monks began to settle down. The Buddhist temple gradually expanded, and the temple economy began to develop. From then on, the temple became a social organization and economic entity. In addition, there are also some academic-style Buddhist buildings that focus on teaching and practicing, and their forms are very free. There is no strict boundary between it and Buddhist temples. It is generally different from officially established Buddhist temples, equivalent to later Aranya [2]. Chinese Buddhist temple architecture began to rise with the rise and reverence of Buddhism, and was integrated with traditional Chinese ideas. Through historical evolution, it gradually broke away from Indian Buddhist architectural design and began to develop towards Chinese design characteristics. Chinese Buddhist architecture has also become a unique branch of architectural design.

2.2 Taoism

On the other hand, Taoism, as a local religion in China, originated from folk witchcraft and divine alchemy. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, Zhang Daoling established the "Wu Doumi Dao", which ultimately led to the formation of Taoism. Taoism revered Laozi as its leader, borrowed Laozi's philosophical ideas, and used the "Tao Te Ching" as its main classic [3]. The earliest Taoist temples in China can be traced back to the Louguantai during the Qin and Han dynasties. Later, in order to strengthen the concept of divine power, the name of the Taoist temple was changed to "Gong", which means the palace where gods reside.

In the late Eastern Han Dynasty, when Taoism was founded, most of the Taoists living in the mountains followed the Taoist philosophy of "nature first" and settled in deep mountains or caves, reflecting their natural inclination. During the Tang and Song dynasties, Taoism began to flourish. During this period, Chinese wooden structures with wooden roofs and a high degree of unity in decoration and structural functions were the main characteristics [3]. After a hundred years of development, they reached a relatively mature stage in terms of architectural form, group layout, and technological level. The size, decoration, and color of imperial palaces and tombs, as well as the entrance halls of royal officials and civilians, were strictly regulated by feudal etiquette, laying the foundation for the large-scale development of Taoist architecture.

Both Taoist temples and Buddhist temples began to be built during a period of prosperous development, and their names and forms also began to change due to historical factors. Therefore, most of the existing Taoist temples and Buddhist temple buildings in China were renovated or built nearly a century ago, but still maintain
the original architecture and main content before the renovation.

3 Comparison in layout

3.1 Buddhism architecture layout

The typical form of traditional Chinese residential space is a low-rise courtyard. On the one hand, this is due to the limited volume and span that the traditional wooden framework system of Chinese architecture can bear. On the other hand, influenced by Chinese feudal factors and the demand of the aristocratic group for etiquette and appearance, it has gradually formed a courtyard style layout form and aesthetic that is different from Western architectural spaces. It can be said that the courtyard space of architectural clusters is the essence of Chinese residential space.

The first temple in China during the Eastern Han Dynasty, the White Horse Temple, did not actually have a clear Buddhist architectural layout standard. The overall layout of the temple was actually based on the architectural style of houses in India. When the White Horse Temple was first built, there was a wooden pagoda, and the environmental spatial layout of the temple was centered around the pagoda, indicating that it was greatly influenced by the Indian primitive Buddhist architecture at this time. After a hundred years of evolution, Buddhist temple architecture has begun to develop towards a traditional Chinese architectural layout. The Jiming Temple in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province was officially built during the Southern Dynasty and has undergone multiple renovations, still retaining its original architectural layout. As early as the Northern and Southern Dynasties, the dominant position of Dangta was gradually replaced by Buddhist temples, and the prevailing trend of "giving up houses as temples" led to the almost unchanged layout of the central symmetric official buildings used for the construction of Buddhist temple complexes. The Jining Temple in Nanjing was first built by Emperor Wu of Liang in the Southern Dynasty according to royal regulations, emphasizing the layout of the central axis to demonstrate the solemnity of the building and the noble status of its users [4]. During the Northern Wei Dynasty, the Xianbei people ruled China as a minority ethnic group, and at that time, the Central Plains culture of China was greatly integrated with the northern culture. At that time, a new temple named Yongning Temple was built in Luoyang. The Yongning Temple in Luoyang was built with a sequence of temple gates, pagodas, and scripture halls. This layout was a typical example of the layout of Buddhist temples at that time [5]. After the Northern Wei Dynasty, the form of Buddhist temples remained largely unchanged, but many temples added more individual buildings, such as the Heavenly King Hall and Bodhisattva Hall.

The spatial awareness of the central axis of Buddhist temple architecture is actually a reflection of the "Chinese concept" in ancient architectural aesthetics. The site selection and layout of the theory of choice not only have the value of formal beauty, but also have the significance of patriarchal etiquette, emphasizing the supreme authority of the monarch [4]. The towering pagoda gives believers a sense of solemnity, and Buddhist architecture is also very important for the integration of artistic conception; for example, building a temple on the mountain makes it easier for monks to relax their minds and body during practice. This series of layouts fully embodies grandeur and solemnity, giving people a sense of admiration, which also integrates traditional Chinese political ideology. This layout is in a sense of political and religious unity.

3.2 Taoism architecture layout

The so-called halls, rooms, frames, etc. all refer to traditional Chinese architecture with a wooden frame structure as the main structure. Chinese ancient architecture has a concise organizational pattern in terms of plane layout. It is to form a single building based on the unit of "space", then a courtyard based on the single building, and then form various forms of groups based on the courtyard as a unit [3]. Taoist architecture strictly follows this system for development. As a local religion, Taoist architectural design itself originates from traditional Chinese architecture. However, Taoist architecture does not place the same emphasis on pagodas as Buddhist architectural design. The core idea of Taoism lies in following nature, governing without action, and living in harmony with nature; This is different from Buddhism, which emphasizes precepts, as Taoist thought is more liberal. Those who are Taoists are mostly in the mountains and forests, and choosing "Famous Mountain Caves, Blessed Places, and Ancient Monuments and Spiritual Altars" as their Taoist sites is an important condition for establishing a Taoist sect [6].

Taoism in China is divided into different sects in different regions, such as the more common Zhengyi and Quanzhen sects, while some sects are relatively rare, such as Taiyi and Zhenda sects. Different sects and regional cultures create differences in the architecture of various authentic temples. This is completely different from the unique Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, where Taoist cultures in different regions are combined with local customs to change. The areas where Taoism is more popular in China include the Sichuan region, the Northeast region, and the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River.

Sichuan region is one of the birthplaces of Taoism, and Zhang Ling, one of the ancestors of Taoism, founded his own sect here. Moreover, the Bayu region also has the Qingyang Palace, which holds an important position in Chinese Taoist temples. According to incomplete literature statistics, there were about 6 Taoist temples in Bayu during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. During the Han Dynasty, Daoist temples or palaces were established in Tudong, Jiangzhou, Bajun, Pingdu Mountain, Fengdu County, Zhongzhou, Mowei Mountain, Pengshui, and the east of Shizhu County; During the Jin Dynasty, Taoist temples were built in Duolong Mountain, Bi Mountain, and Fengdu in Hechuan; The Northern and

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Southern Dynasties repaired the Pingdu Mountain Taoist Temple in Fengdu County [7].

Among the existing Taoist buildings in Sichuan, due to their respective natural environment and geographical conditions, the mountain Taoist architectural complex not only emphasizes coordination with the natural environment, but also emphasizes its own harmony, unity, and rich changes.

The Shaolong Temple in Beibei, is located in Chongqing. This building adopts a typical central axis design and is built facing water and facing mountains. According to Taoist teachings, it is a treasure land of feng shui. The Sichuan region is mountainous, so most Taoist temples choose to build a feng shui treasure land containing mountains. Its central axis design is completely in accordance with the traditional Chinese architectural layout, with the overall building divided into three courtyards. The first courtyard has five groups of halls on both sides of the north and south, while the second courtyard is relatively open, with only a side hall on the right side. The third courtyard has the highest Taiyi Hall and its side halls [8]. These three courtyards are completely arranged in the order of the gods in Taoism, which can also be understood as a complete replication of the heavenly style in Taoism.

For the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, the most important geographical factor is the river. The factor of rivers also contrasts with another major element in Taoism: water. So in this area, it is common for Taoist temples to be built along water. As far as Hubei Province is concerned, Taoist culture is particularly prosperous in the Hubei region, and Changchun Temple, known as the "largest blessed land located south of the Yangtze River". The Taoist temples in Hubei exhibit a characteristic of distribution along the river, particularly in the east-west direction. The north-south region is mainly composed of Suizhou, Jingshan, and Jiangling regions, and the east-west axis distribution is even completely consistent with the direction of the water network, such as Jiangling County, Xiangyang County, Qizhou, and other regions [9].

For the Northeast region, the history of practicing Taoism is also very long. As early as the Jin and Yuan dynasties, Taoism spread to the Northeast region. In ancient books, it is recorded that there are over a dozen famous Taoists in the Northeast region, including Li Yuanjiu and Ma Zhenyi. Most Taoist temples in Northeast China have unique styles and layouts. For example, the Fushou Palace in the Liaoyuan area of Jilin Province is designed entirely along the central axis and is also divided into three courtyards, arranged in order of deities. However, it is interesting that this Taoist temple preserves a Taoist tower, which is very unique. The design of this tower is also very exquisite. The tower is divided into nine floors, which is the number of heaven and earth. The overall architectural complex of Fushou Palace is designed according to the Taoist principles of "Tai Chi, Liangyi, Sancai, Sixiang, Wuxing, Liuhe, Qixing, Bagua, and Jiugong", which is in line with the number of heaven and earth, combined with the natural environment, and is magnificent and grand [10]. The layout of this building makes it not only a building, but also a miracle that resonates with nature. This also reflects the subtleties of traditional Chinese Taoist architectural design.

4 Conclusion

The differences in various aspects of Buddhist and Taoist architecture are closely related to the teachings, and it can be said that it is precisely because of these differences that the design concepts and site selection of the two buildings differ. The concept of Buddhism lies in individual practice and adherence to precepts, so most architectural styles are grand and imposing; The Taoist philosophy lies in the unity of heaven and man and the passage of nature, so architectural design is mostly combined with nature, and the location selection is closely related to feng shui theory.

However, the architectural design of the two still cannot break away from the scope of traditional Chinese architecture, which is also related to historical factors. The central axis and courtyards will always be symbols of traditional Chinese architecture. So analyzing the differences between these two types of buildings can only draw the best conclusion from the perspective of doctrine and origin.

Currently, Buddhist and Taoist buildings in China are slowly undergoing renovation and restoration, which has further led to a gradual decrease in the number of such buildings. Excessive commercialization has gradually begun to replace the substantive role of religious architecture, and the changes and damages caused by human development to ancient architecture are completely irreversible. The commercial renovation of newly built buildings will disrupt the original architectural layout and exert pressure on the already unstable foundation of the building. Exquisite relief murals and so on will also be damaged or covered up. At this point, people should also reflect on whether they should appropriately retain architectural samples to provide support for future architectural research. The author also hopes that in the future, relevant management laws can be introduced internationally to slow down the artificial development of ancient buildings and leave a mark on future humanity.

References


