

The Study on the Chinese-style Decoration in Mosques

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Abstract. As the religious activity and cultural centers of Muslim, architecture of mosques is considered as the concentrated embodiment of Islamic architectural decorative arts. After it was introduced to China, it has learned and absorbed the traditional Chinese architectural style and decorative arts, integrating with Islamic features, Arabian architecture style and traditional Chinese architectural arts. Meanwhile, it has the strong Chinese-style features. And many buildings have the important artistic value.

Mosques are primary patterns in the Islamic architecture and also are important symbols of Islam. The decorative art of mosques is the materialized symbol of Islamic civilization and it has the abundant national culture connotation, showing a unique aesthetic style in the forms, contents and colors. Since Islamic culture was introduced to China, on the basis of absorbing traditional Chinese culture, a new-type culture has been formed. In addition to the profound Arabian Islamic style, architectural decorative art has fully absorbed the connotations and features of traditional decoration in Chinese culture by “adjusting measures to local conditions” and “using local materials” in decorative skills and materials, so that two different cultures can be perfectly combined to form the mosque architecture and decorative styles, which have received harmonious development with the evolution of era.

Introduction

Mosques are symbols of Islamic culture. At the beginning, they directly serve for Islam. The practical value and aesthetic value have already integrated into an indivisible organic part. The mosque architecture system and artistic form of Chinese Islam can be divided into two systems: one is wood-oriented, showing the traditional Chinese architectural style. It belongs to the special Islamic architecture. The other one gives priority to Arabian architecture style, mixing up with Chinese local or national characteristics. The existing Chinese mosques were created or reconstructed in Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. For mosques built in Ming Dynasty, the overall layout, architectural form, architectural decoration and courtyard disposal have already owned the bright Chinese characteristics. Qing Dynasty was the developmental period of Chinese Islam. The special mosque architecture system in China has been completed during this period. The Islamic architecture decoration with traditional Chinese decorative system and technology develops a school of its own in the world architecture history. Moreover, architectural styles and decorative techniques present the diversified features, due to regional and era differences.

Decoration of Mosques

The architectural decoration of mosques not only embodies the Islamic culture, but also displays the aesthetic orientation and taste of Islam and Muslims. The Islamic architectural decoration is specially reflected in decorative techniques, decorative patterns and forms. In this paper, the author will discuss the Chinese-style decoration for mosque architecture.

Architectural Decoration. The decoration of Islamic architecture develops a school of its own in the world architecture history. Islam prohibits icon duly and portrait drawing. The pattern decorative art is reflected in some abstract geometric patterns and vivid plant patterns. Moreover, it

prohibits all concrete images, especially for human and animal images. The main features of the decorative styles are shown as follows: the morphology stands out the curve. Moreover, it also has the abstract tendency of pure geometry and mathematic techniques for design. The traditional mosque architecture vividly displays traditional colored drawing, sculpture, calligraphy and colors, while noticing the overall uniformity.

The decorative emphasis of the traditional mosque architecture includes ridge, cornice, crossbeam, eaves, quiet and colonnade. The architectural decoration patterns give priority to Chinese elements. they often use peony, shochiku, lotus, fruits, leaves and cirrus cloud in traditional Chinese patients. Meanwhile, the flowers and grasses of Arabian architectural style and abstract geometric patterns are borrowed to constitute fully. The trespe plant pattern is widely applied in the architecture. It is the proper grass pattern in Islamic architecture and also the typical Islamic decorative technique. Islamic culture is also profoundly affected by Chinese culture and inevitably displays some zoomorphic decoration, such as shibi in the ridge of Botou mosque and stone lions in Dongsu Mosque. The mosque ridge decoration in the eastern coastal also has the animal and ridge patterns. However, these animals are senseless and just have the superficial appearance. It just play a decorative and beautified role, but has no shocking meaning to eliminate evil, showing Chinese artisans and early believers can display the extremely intelligent attitude of seeking common points while reserving difference when they deal with different cultural conflicts.

Also, Chinese-style mosques also strive for patterns, brick carving, stone carving and wood carving and also value the overall arts. By taking Ningxia Tongxin Mosque as an example, there is exquisite brick carving in the screen walls, walls and entrance. There is a screen wall in the opposite of the entrance of the mosque. It is made from black bricks. There is a brick craving figure of “Tibetan Evergreen” in the middle of the screen wall, showing the vivid image and lifelike style. Wood carving, brick patterns and gypsum embossment are the most exquisite in mosques of Uyghur. There are all kinds of wood engraving or applique in the gates and courtyard doors, especially for the exquisite Arabic or geometric figures. Windows present the roundness, rhombus, diamond, square, hexagonal and octagon, showing abundant changes.

The horizontal inscribed board and couplets that stand for traditional Chinese cultural customs are used as the internal and external decoration in the palaces of mosques. The Chinese couplets on the upright are generate decorated by Arabic calligraphy patterns. It is symmetric by applying the same pattern(prism or roundness). Main contents include abstract of quran. Sometimes, the first line and the second line of couplets may be not corresponding and the length may be not consistent. In order to display features of Chinese couplets, contents should be adjusted well and arranged in the geometric forms in advance, so that it may be symmetric as couplets. The palace generally doesn't allow other character patterns, except for Arabic characters. Therefore, Arabic alligraphy patterns for decoration and symmetric writings are often disposed in such a mode.

Indoor decoration. External decoration mainly displays the traditional culture. Therefore, the heavy responsibility of Islamic culture is turned to the indoor. Both traditional Chinese style and Arabic mosque buildings have the overall requirements in the international decoration, shown as follows; no idols and no decoration with figures and animal patterns. The internal setting of the mosque palace is relatively simple. The wall is white and quietly elegant without scenery paintings. It is often decorated by Arabic art font and geometric line patterns. Internal decoration basically accepts traditional Chinese painting system and technology. For example, Niujie Mosque, Dongsu and Huashi Mosque have applied the roton color paintings, but the treatment methods are slightly different. Dongsu Mosque leaves a note in the middle. Niujie and Huashi have painted flowers and plants and there are dragon broche patterns. The roton petal treatment breaks through the form paintings, but they are changed into lively patterns, showing vitality. There are columns in the great hall. Columns are red. Couplets are suspended and engraved in the columns. Pattern lines are traced in gold.

The kiln hall is the key of the great hall decoration. The arch niche edge has colored the tile carving or Arabic art font with Quran writing. The stand column in front of the kiln hall is made into the floor wood carving cover. Some kiln halls are deeper. The top is made into the caisson,

including quadrangle, octagonal and heavy beam frame. The upper layer is the circular well, including wooden beam, colored drawing or embellishment, just like a patulous gorgeous canopy, so as to render the solemnity and holiness in the central part of the kiln hall. For the horizontal upright in the hall, the upper end is made into the flower cover and painted with various flower and grass patterns, such as the Grand Mosque in Huajue Lane, Xi'an.

Colors

Islam tends to select white and green in colors. White stands for the pole in mosque colors, while the black is another pole. The yellow and green in the middle have the typical symbolic significance. Muslim tends to white and this has the double cultural significance. In Islamic architecture, yellow is also affected by traditional Chinese architectural color style to some extent. Green that symbolizes the worldly and gold symbolizing holiness are integrated, proving Muslims pursue for "auspiciousness of two generations". Chinese classical mosque architecture tends to use glass in the whole body. The color gives priority to blue, assisted by yellow, green, red and black. In this way, loftiness and brilliant images of mosques can be fully displayed. The glaucous roton paintings are painted on the bridge. The rafter is coated with green. The wall space is white. Moreover, the interval is pasted with round scriptures and patterns. Islamic architecture seldom uses red to decorate, but red is extremely important decorative color in traditional Chinese architecture culture. To uphold red is the architectural culture and architectural psychological feature in ethnic Han. It often stands for solemnity, attraction, auspiciousness and joyousness, showing the strong inheritance. In Mainland, mosques in many areas use red paintings in doors, pillars, windows, railings or even interior decoration, let alone the Langfang colored paintings.

To sum up, mosques of traditional Chinese architectural style are used as the Chinese-style Islamic external symbols and spreading places. It differs from Chinese Buddhist temples, Taoist temples, Confucian temples and Christian churches, but also has certain difference from the architectural style in foreign mosques, showing the Chinese architectural style and manner to some extent. As the constituent part of Islamic culture, it is accompanied by Islam from the Arabic Islamic style to Chinese Islamic style, adding a miracle to Chinese ethnic civilization treasury.

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