

Cultural Differences Reflected in the Differences between Chinese and Western Traditional Architectures

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Abstract: There are many significant differences between Chinese and Western cultures, which developed independently in their unique natural environment, in cultural deposits, ethical concepts, ways of thinking, aesthetic systems, and philosophical thoughts. Architectural culture developed under different historical and cultural backgrounds has its unique characteristics and development system. This paper analyzes the differences between Chinese and western traditional architecture in architectural style, architectural aesthetics, spatial layout, and building materials to find Historical and cultural differences reflected in architectural cultural differences between the Chinese and West.

1. Introduction

For a long period, Chinese and western cultures developed independently in a relatively closed system, and there were few opportunities to communicate with each other, which made the system of Chinese and western cultures quite different. The cultural system of each region has its unique historical origin, cultural deposits, a philosophical system, mode of thinking, psychological structure, ethical concept, and aesthetic concept. Architecture, as an ancient art category, is a solidified culture, a witness and recorder of history and culture, and an important part of people's life. It is constantly evolving and developing under the promotion of history and culture. The cultural systems of different countries give birth to different architectural histories and cultures. Therefore, there are many differences between Chinese and western architectural cultures under the influence of Chinese and western cultures. Through literature review, this paper summarizes the differences between Chinese and western traditional architecture in architectural style, architectural aesthetics, spatial layout, and building materials, which show the differences between Chinese and western culture.

2. The Source of Civilization

The Chinese civilization is one of the oldest and most tenacious human civilizations in the world, which can be divided into two main periods: primitive civilization and agricultural civilization. The primitive civilization period was from ancient times to the establishment of the Xia Dynasty, during which the continuous development of agriculture and animal husbandry and the increasing population promoted the rapid increase in the size and number of villages. The farming civilization was from the Xia Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, during which there were many dynasties, and the state system, etiquette system, culture, and education were gradually formed and improved in this period. In the long history of Chinese civilization, the development of culture has promoted the generation and development of folklore, ancient poetry culture, ritual and music culture, Pre-Qin scholars' thoughts and hierarchy in various dynasties, and has similarly affected the prosperity of the country and keep civilian's living and working in peace and contentment. In a word, the extensive and profound traditional Chinese culture has the characteristics of inheriting history, conservatism but inclusiveness, emphasizing collectivism and implicit comity.

The origin of western civilization is ancient Greece and Rome, which are located in the Mediterranean region of southern Europe. Democracy, freedom, science, and the legal system are the characteristics of this period. The richness and stability of life make people optimistic and happy, which contributes to the formation of hedonism and individualism. Living and working in peace and contentment also promotes the development of all kinds of disciplines, and further promotes the development and progress of science. In ancient Greek mythology, which is dominated by hero myth, gods all have emotions, desires, and personal prestige, reflecting hedonism and individualism. The Romans then developed the rule of law and the spirit of democracy, which are the cornerstones of modern society. After the ancient Greek and Roman periods, Western civilization entered the feudal Christian culture, which emphasized salvation, love, and chivalry. The main spirits of modern western culture are humanism, individualism, and religious reform, during which people pursued the balance of body and soul, and individual creativity. Generally speaking, the important ideas of western culture are freedom, uniqueness, individualism, and religion.

3. Architecture Style - Individualism and Collectivism

Mainly being a semi-closed farming civilization, Chinese civilization achieves the purpose of living and working in peace and contentment through a routine and tacit cooperation. Ancient China is located in the center of the land, self-sufficient and welcome guest all over the world, therefore collectivist China is stable, tolerant, attaches great importance to traditional history (10), harmony and cooperation between man and man, and emphasizes individual responsibility and obligation to society (2), which are reflected in the traditional Chinese architecture of various historical periods. Quadrangle Dwellings is a very typical form of traditional Chinese domestic building, which is composed of four enclosed single buildings and internal courtyard space, giving residents a sense of conservativeness, privacy, and closure. Usually, several generations with blood relationships live in a Quadrangle Dwelling, each of which is independent but closely connected, showing the interdependence and cooperation of ancient families. In addition, China's emphasis on tradition and history can be seen from the continuous and little changing traditional Chinese architectural style. Although Chinese traditional architecture has gone through many dynasties, it is often impossible to identify the specific age of the building without carefully identifying the details.



Figure 1. Quadrangle Dwelling

Since Marine civilization is an important part of western civilization, the adventurous spirit of Marine scientists has been deeply inscribed in the hearts of westerners. Westerners often dare to take risks and pursue innovation (6). The west emphasizes individualism, individual uniqueness and freedom, and advocates equality between people (4). These cultural characteristics are not difficult to find in the varied western architectural styles. From the ancient Greek temples, Roman pantheon, unification-conscious Byzantine architecture, Mysterious and sublime Gothic architecture, the gaudy and extravagant style of Baroque and Rococo architecture, to concise and elegant classical architecture, different periods of western civilization has their uniqueness, which makes the different periods of western architectural style differences in shape, proportion, sculpture, or decoration. Thus, it is often easier to tell when a western building was built.



Figure 2. Byzantine, Gothic, Baroque, Rococo

4. Architectural Aesthetics - Void and Solid/ Form and Spirit

Poetry culture is one of the important components of traditional Chinese culture, which is to create an artistic conception to make people full of empty imagination to express the author's thoughts and emotions. Building the beauty of artistic conception and paying attention to the illusion are also common design methods in traditional Chinese architecture. Curves are often used in many Chinese traditional buildings to express implicit beauty, so there are many aesthetic concepts such as implication and symbolism in traditional Chinese buildings (1). Combined with the realization of the planar and spatial extension of the single building in a specific area (17) and the landscape construction, the viewer's senses can be stimulated to transfer emotions, and images can be created to express the symbolic meaning. The creation of space makes the building community have different beautiful pictures from different angles and heights, as well as form a complete picture when looking down from above.

The winding path makes visitors wonder where it ends, and the layering landscape arrangement makes the distant landscape appear faintly, which makes the architectural community full of implicit beauty. However, in more solemn building groups, buildings are often arranged along the central axis. Under the layout planned along the straight central axis, there are often winding paths and informal planting. In a word, traditional Chinese architecture often stresses that there are twists in the straight, and twists in the straight, which are often difficult for viewers to see through.

To overcome the challenge of nature, the ancient west emphasized logic, firmness, and beauty when designing architecture. The applying of straight lines, axes, and simple geometric figures in the architectural design and overall planning can increase the stability of the building (7), make the view wide and straight, and show the grandeur and solemnity. Many western traditional buildings give people a sense of sculpture in shape and a sense of volume in architectural form, which is the "void" of western architectural design (2), which is closely related to the fact that stone is used as the traditional building material in the west.

5. Spatial Layout - Open Liberal and Conservative Order

Traditional Chinese architecture often has grand overall planning and hierarchical architectural layout. Central axis symmetry is one of the important layout methods of traditional Chinese architectural communities, and it is a symbol of solemnity and rank (10), which is often used in grand palaces, stately temples, and the residences of powerful people. The spatial sequence of many buildings is all along the central axis, which demonstrates the importance of hierarchical order in Chinese civilization.

The buildings on the central axis are symmetrically distributed and their grades are progressive giving people a sense of majestic grandeur, which shows the beauty of order and the Golden Mean in the traditional Chinese cultural system. The Forbidden City is one of the most typical examples of symmetrical aesthetics in traditional Chinese architecture. From the overall planning to the architectural decoration is built symmetrically along the central axis, following the balance of Yin and Yang. In ordinary residential buildings, the elders with the highest status in the family live in

the main room in the middle, while the descendants live in the side hall. The more faraway the room is, the lower the status of the residents is, which shows the strict hierarchy system in traditional Chinese culture.



Figure 3. The Forbidden City

Wall, which plays an important role in traditional Chinese architectural components, is often a beautiful scenery line. Regulated and tall walls often give visitors and residents a sense of solemnity and isolation from the outside world, which shows tradition, conservatism, and reserve (6). Due to the step-by-step development of buildings and the changing landscape, the evolution of architectural space within the walls is often colorful and ever-changing (3). Therefore, under the regular and unified planning layout, the interior space of buildings is often secret and private. Combined with the installation of architectural elements such as the Screen Wall, the exterior of traditional Chinese buildings is so rigorous that only looking down from the air the full picture can be seen.

On the contrary, the walls of traditional western architecture are often dispensable or invisible, so the building is extroverted and interconnected with the outside space (1). Viewers can enjoy the overall appearance of the building community everywhere. The West pays more attention to the exterior space and the overall planning of the region. The architectural community is often dominated by the architectural space, and the square is subordinate to the building (17), which makes each public space accessible, which echoes the freedom and openness pursued by the West.

6. Building Materials - Nature and Eternity

Traditional Chinese culture emphasizes the idea that nature and man in one, and regards nature as a living entity that can be communicated (3). People fear, love, and respect nature, and pay attention to a high degree of harmony between humans and nature as well as between people. Chinese advocate the idea that nature and man in one which can be seen from the fact that wood is often used as the building material in traditional Chinese architecture (13). Wood comes from nature, and trees continuously reproduce in endless succession, with the meaning of growth. People use it as a common building material to show people's desire and respect for nature and life, hoping to blend into nature. In addition, the classical Chinese garden is the embodiment of harmony between man and nature. When designing architecture, ancient scholars often follow nature, imitate mountains and rivers, integrate architecture with landscape and geographical situation, make soil and water become a part of the architecture, make architecture into nature, and create natural landscape inside the building so that residents can feel the nature and the change of seasons without leaving home.



Figure 4. Timber construction in China

Westerners have separated the natural world from the human world a long time ago and observed the natural world as an independent system (8). Moreover, the West regards nature as a mechanical and transcendent subject, thus forming the eternal pursuit of truth, deity, and God of Western civilization. Regarding hunting as the original economic center, the West needs to resist foreign invasion, so the builders and users pay attention to the long-term stability and security of the building. To sum up, most traditional buildings in the West are religious buildings and spread from place to place, and stone is the most suitable building material with hard, stable, and long service life (14).

7. Summary

Buildings keep people away from wild animals and inclement weather, greatly improving the quality and stability of life, which is an important milestone in the development of human civilization. The architecture produced in a specific historical culture and historical period is not only a necessity of life but also a manifestation of cultural, regional, and historical differences. Different cultural backgrounds promote the emergence of different architectural styles, while different buildings show different cultural characteristics. The two supplement each other and develop together. The Chinese and Western cultures with their respective development and distinct personalities lead to the great differences in traditional architecture, which are closely related to the natural environment, resource distribution, social development, technological level, ideological concepts, cultural deposits, and religious culture. The overall architectural style of the Chinese building has not changed much. Under the regular, conservative, and closed overall layout, the detailed design with profound artistic conception and implicit integration with nature is implicated. The overall architectural style of the Chinese building has not changed much. Under the regular, conservative, and closed overall layout, it implies a profound, implicit, and nature-integrated artistic conception and design details. The overall architectural style of the Western tradition, which varies greatly from time to time, pursues freedom, practicality, solidity, sculpture, and logic.

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