Research on the Entrance Space of Tibetan Temple Buildings

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Abstract. The entrance space of the Tibetan temple building serves as the “facade” of the entire building, which embodies the architectural style of the Tibetan temple. Based on the field investigation of temple buildings in Tibet, the paper analyzes the plane shape and decorative art of the entrance space, and summarizes the evolution of the plane shape of the entrance space and the characteristics of decorative art of the entrance space. Therefore, the paper contains analysis and inheritance of Tibetan traditional architectural culture for certain reference.

Introduction

Under the influence of Tibetan Buddhism, the Tibetan temple architecture brought together the Han culture and the exotic culture, forming a unique architectural style [1]. As the “facade” of the entire temple building, the entrance space presents different architectural features in different developing periods. The “Temple Buildings” discussed in this article is limited to the scholastic buildings and palace buildings in Tibetan Buddhist temples in Tibet. The so-called scholastic building is a type of temple building in which the Buddhist hall and Oratory are set up together. It has two functions of worship and assembly. The so-called palace building is a type of temple building in which the Buddhist hall exists alone. It only has the function of worship [2]. The “entrance space” in this paper also refers to the main entrance space of these two types of buildings. Based on the field investigation, this paper explores the characteristics of the entrance space of Tibetan temple architecture from the two aspects of plane shape and decorative art.

The Plane Shape of the Entrance Space

The development of temple buildings in Tibet has experienced three periods: germination, development and maturity [3]. The plane shape of the entrance space has different characteristics at different times.

Budding Period

During the Tubo Dynasty, Buddhism was introduced to Tibet. Temple buildings began to sprout in Tibet, and the temples that were built during the budding period include the Jokhang Temple and the Sanye Monastery. The entrance space of the temple buildings showed the following characteristics during this period: 1) the space was on a small scale; 2) the form of the entrance was simple and direct; 3) the orientation wasn’t been limited.

Located in Lhasa, Jokhang Temple is the oldest temple building in Tibet. The first and the second floors of the Buddhist temple in the center of the Jokhang Temple (figure 1) are the remains of the budding period temples. The west side of the first floor has a protruding gate, and in the middle of the gate, there is the door of the Main Hall. This form is very similar to the monks’ dormitories according to the Indian Buddhist temple buildings. The closest thing to the central Buddhist temple of the Jokhang Temple is the ruins of the Nalanda Temple (figure 2) located in North India, which used to be the dormitories of the monks [4]. It can be speculated that the entrance space of the Buddhist Temple in the center of the Jokhang Temple should be an imitation of the Indian Buddhist temple.
Figure 1. The first floor of the Buddhist temple in the center of the Jokhang Temple (redrawn from archaeological studies on monasteries of the tibetan buddhism).

Figure 2. The ruins of the Nalanda Temple (redrawn from archaeological studies on monasteries of the tibetan buddhism).

Located in Shannan City, Sanye Temple is the first temple in Tibet with three treasures of Buddha, Law and Monks. The central part of the Wuhuan Hall of Sanye Temple (figure 3) preserves the shape of the buildings during the budding period. The temple door is directly set in the middle of the east side wall of the scriptural hall, and there is no transition space, such as the courtyard in front of the door. The plane shape of the Sanye Monastery also emulates the Buddhist temple buildings in India.

Figure 3. The central part of the Wuhuan Hall of Sanye Temple (redrawn from archaeological studies on monasteries of the tibetan buddhism).

Developing Period

After the post-Hong period started, Tibetan Buddhism entered the exploration stage. Temple buildings were constantly developing in Tibet, and temples built during the developing period include Xia Lu Temple, Bai Ju Temple and so on. The entrance space of the temple buildings showed the following characteristics during this period: 1) the scale was getting larger and larger; 2) the diverse colonnade space appeared; 3) the orientation is relatively free.

Located in Shigatse City, Xia Lu Temple is a temple building with great characteristics of the times. The hall of Xia Lu Temple (figure 4) preserves the architectural form of the developing period. The main hall is located on the west side of the building with the gate facing east. There is a
gatehouse on the east side. The entrance of the first floor of the gate building has a porch, and the
porch is supported by double columns. This form can be seen as an evolution of the entrance gate of
the Buddhist temple in the center of the Jokhang Temple, while incorporating new forms. Therefore,
the entrance space of the Xialu Temple Hall is not only the inheritance of the budding period, but
also the transition to the maturity period.

Baiju Temple is located in Shigatse City and is the largest temple building in Gyangze County.
The Zuoqin Hall of Baiju Temple (figure 5) is the remains of the building during the developing
period. The hall is made of the shape of the mandala. The south side of the main hall has a porch,
and the porch is supported by a single row of four columns. This type of entrance is close to the
temple building at maturity.

Figure 4. The hall of Xia Lu Temple (redrawn from *archaeological studies on monasteries of the tibetan buddhism*).

Mature Period

After the growth of the Gelug Sect, Tibetan Buddhism became more and more perfect. Temple
buildings have gradually matured in Tibet, and temples built at maturity include Gandan Temple and
Sera Monastery and so on. The entrance space of the temple buildings showed the following
characteristics during this period: 1) large scale; 2) the plane shape was tending to be finalized; 3) the
orientation was mainly southward.

Gandan Temple is located in Lhasa City and is the ancestral temple of the Gelug Sect. The Zuoqin
Hall of Gandan Temple (figure 6) is the remains of the building during the mature period. The
Zuoqin Hall is a three-part building. The front section is the entrance porch. The porch is rectangular
in shape. There are 10 columns in the gallery. The porch is divided into 14 rooms by the columns.
The entrance space is relatively wide. Compared with the temple buildings in the developing period,
the number of columns on the entrance porch is significantly raised, and the entrance space is
obviously increased, too.

Figure 5. The Zuoqin Hall of Baiju Temple (redrawn from *archaeological studies on monasteries of the tibetan buddhism*).
Sera Monastery is located in Lhasa and is one of the three major temples in Lhasa. The Zuoqin Temple of Sera Monastery (figure 7) is a legacy of buildings in mature period. The main hall also adopts a three-part layout. The space form and column grid layout of the entrance porch are both similar to Gandan Temple. It can be said that the entrance to the temple buildings in this period has a relatively uniform plane shape.

**The Decorative Art of the Entrance Space**

**Top Decoration and Ground Decoration**

The decoration at the top of the entrance space is mainly reflected in the treatment of the beam structure. There are two common methods: one is to expose the beam structure with rich rhythm directly, showing the beauty of the structure of the entrance space (figure 8); the other is to cover the top of the beam structure with a wooden ceiling or printed fabric for decorative purposes. The ground decoration of the entrance space is mainly composed of engraving patterns and gemstones.
Colonnade Decoration

The pillars (figure 9) are also the key parts of the entrance space decoration. There are two kinds of cross sections of the column, one is a square, and the other is a polygon similar to a mandala plane. The color of the pillars is mostly red and brown. At the bottom of the column, it is typically wrapped with a metallic material or a white paint. In the middle of the column, vertical gold lines are usually drawn and metal waistbands are provided. At the top of the column, it is usually decorated with engraving and painting. The decorative pattern includes two kinds of graphics: plants and geometric figures. These patterns are beautifully carved, gorgeous in color and have a good decorative effect.

Wall Decoration

The wall decoration of the entrance space is mainly composed of murals. The murals are generally drawn on the wall facing the porch. If the sides of the porch are surrounded by the wall, the wall is also painted with murals. The theme of the murals is mainly Buddha statues and Buddhist stories, as well as some symbolic Buddhist symbols (figure 10). Drawing murals can not only promote the Dharma, but also have a religious significance; it can also add the beauty of the entrance space and have a decorative meaning. Some temples do not use murals on the walls of the entrance space. They are simply painted, and generally use yellow. At the bottom of the wall, a wall skirt is generally drawn, and at the top of the wall, a scented cloth is generally drawn.
Cornice Decoration

In the mouth of the entrance space (figure 11), cloth and scented cloth are hung for decoration. The fabric is large in size and is usually woven from yak wool. The texture is thick. The cloth can keep from the strong sunlight in the plateau and reduce the erosion of the internal structure of the entrance space caused by the harsh climate. On the cloth, there is usually a symbol of Tibetan Buddhism, and the color contrast is very clear. The scented cloth hangs on the outside of the cornice, giving a feeling of lightness and elegance. The scented cloth flutters in the wind, like a wave, which can add a touch of movement to the building.

Conclusion

The temple architecture has experienced a process from nothing to something in the Tibet area. As part of the temple architecture, the entrance space has also experienced three periods of germination, development and maturity. The entrance spaces of different periods have different characteristics. With the development of Tibetan temple architecture, the plane form of the entrance space has also evolved from a small scale, a simple form, and a free orientation to a larger scale, tending to be finalized, and a southward orientation.

As the “facade” of the temple buildings, the entrance space is the key part of the entire building decoration. The decoration of the entrance space is mainly concentrated on the ceiling, the ground, the colonnade, the wall and the cornice. The decorative means are mainly carved, painted, rendered and inlaid. The decorative techniques include contrast, rhythm, repetition, symmetry and so on. Through the decoration, it creates a bright and colorful and dynamic entrance space in the temple buildings with simple colors and volume. As the “facade” of the temple building, the entrance space is the key part of the entire building decoration. The decoration of the entrance space is mainly
concentrated on the ceiling, the ground, the colonnade, the wall and the cornice. The decorative means are mainly carved, painted, painted and inlaid. The decorative techniques include contrast, rhythm, repetition, symmetry and so on. Through the decoration, it creates a bright, colorful and dynamic entrance space in the multitudinous temple buildings with simple colors.

The decorative arts of the entrance space of Tibetan temple buildings are unique. The decoration content has a strong religious meaning, and the decorative themes are all related to Buddhism. It can play the role of conveying the teachings of the Dharma and setting the religious atmosphere, and meet the requirements of the temple buildings as religious places. The decorative materials are selected with distinctive regional characteristics. The Tibetan people have skillfully dealt with the problem of local material poverty through local materials. These materials not only decorate the buildings well, but also integrate with the surrounding natural environment.

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References