



RESEARCH PAPER**Cultural Connotation of Forbidden City Architecture****¹Wang Chao* and ²Mahboob Hussain**

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ABSTRACT

The Forbidden City, as the royal palaces of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in China, carries rich historical and cultural connotations and is an outstanding representative of ancient Chinese architectural art. This paper focuses on the cultural connotation of the Forbidden City's architecture, and explores the cultural significance and value behind it by analysing its architectural layout, decorative arts and building materials. It adopts a combination of documentary research and fieldwork to explore the cultural connotations of the Forbidden City architecture through the combing of relevant historical documents and the fieldwork of the Forbidden City architecture. Through the study of the cultural connotation of the Forbidden City architecture, we can better understand the trajectory of the development of ancient Chinese architectural art and the change of aesthetic concepts, and provide useful reference for modern architectural design and urban planning.

KEYWORDS Forbidden City Architecture, Cultural Connotation, Modern Values

Introduction

The Forbidden City, a magnificent architectural complex located in the heart of Beijing, the capital of China, is not only the royal palace of the Ming and Qing dynasties, but also the pinnacle of ancient Chinese architectural art, carrying a profound historical and cultural heritage. As an outstanding representative of ancient Chinese palace architecture, the Forbidden City has become an important and indispensable object for the study of ancient Chinese architectural culture due to its unique layout, exquisite architectural skills, rich artistic decorations and far-reaching symbolic significance. The architecture of the Forbidden City is not only to meet the needs of the royal residence and political activities, but also a living history textbook, recording the political, economic and cultural changes of ancient Chinese society. Its unique architectural style reflects the rigour and order of ancient Chinese architecture, but also incorporates rich cultural connotations and symbolism, making it a masterpiece of ancient Chinese architectural art. Studying the cultural connotations of the Forbidden City architecture not only helps us to understand the design concepts, skill levels and aesthetic concepts of ancient Chinese architecture, but also reveals the political system, cultural concepts and social customs of ancient Chinese society. At the same time, the protection, inheritance and use of the Forbidden City, as a world cultural heritage, is also an important issue for contemporary society. This paper aims to provide useful references for the protection, inheritance and utilisation of the Forbidden City by deeply analysing the cultural connotations of the Forbidden City's architecture and revealing the historical, artistic and social values behind it. At the same time, it is also hoped that through the study of the cultural connotation of the Forbidden City's architecture, it will stimulate more people's interest in and love for ancient Chinese

architectural culture and promote the inheritance and development of ancient Chinese architectural culture.

Literature Review

The author chooses to start from the subtleties of a tile, a pillar, a door, etc., and breaks down the Forbidden City, a magnificent royal complex, into one specific and perceptible local element. This microscopic perspective allows readers to observe the subtleties of the Forbidden City's architecture in greater detail, and thus feel the deep cultural heritage behind it. In the analysis of the Forbidden City buildings, the author not only describes their material forms, but also explores the cultural connotations. For example, by analysing the roof decorative elements such as dragon's kiss, pendant beasts, immortals, beasts and so on, the author reveals the symbols of imperial power, auspicious meanings and the exquisite skills of ancient craftsmen represented by these decorations. When analysing the architectural parts of the Forbidden City, the author not only pays attention to their aesthetic value, but also places them in a broad historical context. By combining the architectural parts with historical events, social culture and other factors, the author shows the changes and development of the Forbidden City architecture in different historical periods, as well as its important position in social life (Zhang and Hai, 2004). According to Lou Qingxi, the origin of ancient Chinese architecture can be traced back to the prehistoric period, and it has experienced a course of development from simple to complex and from low to high. He analysed in detail the characteristics and changes of ancient Chinese architecture in different historical periods, such as the majesty of the Qin and Han Dynasties, the delicacy of the Tang and Song Dynasties, and the complexity of the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties. At the same time, he also pointed out that ancient Chinese architecture was influenced by various social, economic and cultural factors in the process of development, such as the constraints of feudal rites, the penetration of religious beliefs, and the changes in aesthetic concepts (Lou, 2004). Yang Zhigang, through the perspective of travelling, has deeply explored the idea of imperial power and its cultural connotation embedded in the architecture of the Forbidden City. He believes that the architectural layout of the Forbidden City highlights the idea of imperial supremacy. The Forbidden City is centred on the central axis and is arranged in a symmetrical manner, forming a unified and subordinate whole. The central axis of the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Hall of Peace, Baohe Temple, etc. constitute the 'outer court', is the emperor to deal with the place of government, and the 'inner court' to the Qianqing Palace, the Hall of Crossing, Kunming Palace, etc. as the main body, can be regarded as the emperor's home. The layout of the 'front court and back bedchamber' not only reflects the majesty and sanctity of the imperial power, but also maps out the ancient people's deep understanding of and respect for the order of heaven and earth (Yang, 2004).

Material and Methods

Adopting a combination of documentary research and fieldwork, the cultural connotation of the Forbidden City is deeply explored through the combing of relevant historical documents and the fieldwork of its architecture.

Architectural Themes and Decorative Elements of the Forbidden City

The Shiji Suoyin' note said: "Purple this also Palace of the word in also, said the movement of the gods, yin and yang open and close, all in this also". And 'Song Jun also thought twelve army, in and out of the position of each set, always called the purple palace also' (Yang, 2004). The Ziguan star, also known as Ziwei star and Ziguan, is the location of the Heavenly Palace and the residence of the Heavenly Emperor. The ruler was the 'son of

heaven', the representative of the emperor on earth, and the ruler's 'looking up to the heavens' was in fact to 'look down to the earth' (Yi, 'The Book of Changes'). The 'change of the stars' interpreted as 'the appearance of the should' claimed to be 'to show the heavenly precepts', in fact, 'the king of the matter.' Heavenly Palace or, the Palace or, are heavily guarded forbidden places, so the formation of the Forbidden' or "Forbidden City" said' (Yang, 2004). According to the Records of the Grand Historian, when Laozi left the Hangu Pass in the west, Yin Xi, the orderer of the Pass, saw a purple qi coming from the east, foreshadowing the arrival of a saint. Later, the name 'Purple Breath Coming from the East' became a symbol of good luck. The name of the Forbidden City also draws on this allusion, signifying the sanctity and auspiciousness of imperial power. The Forbidden City was built during the Yongle period of the Ming Dynasty (1406-1420) by order of Zhu Di, the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty. When naming the new palace, Zhu Di wanted it to symbolise the supremacy of imperial power and to correspond with the Ziwei Wall in the sky, hence the name 'Forbidden City'. The Qing Dynasty continued to use the name 'Forbidden City' after it came to dominate the Central Plains, and carried out many renovations and expansions. The Qing emperors inherited the royal traditions of the Ming Dynasty and further consolidated the Forbidden City as a symbol of imperial power. The origin of the name of the Forbidden City not only reflects ancient Chinese astronomy and philosophical thinking, but also highlights the sanctity and majesty of imperial power. The Forbidden City, as the palace of the royal family in the Ming and Qing dynasties, has an architectural theme that firstly reflects the supremacy and honour of the imperial power. From the scale of the building, the layout to the decoration, all show the royal grandeur and majesty. For example, the Hall of Supreme Harmony, as the largest palace in the Forbidden City, has the highest architectural standards, a hipped roof with heavy eaves, gable corners adorned with ridge beasts, and brilliant interior decorations, which is a place for the emperor to hold major ceremonies, fully embodying the dignity and sanctity of the imperial power. The design of the Forbidden City is based on highlighting the power of the monarch, so its overall design is to focus on reflecting the authority of the monarch, rather than in the convenience of use. The theme of the building is to highlight the supreme monarch with a majestic and solemn atmosphere. The monarch was the core of the authoritarian regime, and this core was the central court, so the whole layout of the building was centred on the three halls within the palace, especially the Hall of Supreme Harmony, where the great ceremonies of the imperial court were held. The Hall of Supreme Harmony was located in the centre of the palace and was the highest point of the palace. [Bai Hua and Huang Weite. *The Implied Political Meaning of the Architecture of the Forbidden City*. *gu gong xue kan*, 2011.] The idea of the unity of heaven and man in ancient Chinese philosophy is also deeply reflected in the architecture of the Forbidden City. The architectural layout of the Forbidden City strictly follows the idea of the unity of heaven and man. The architectural layout of the Forbidden City strictly follows the principle of symmetry of the central axis, and at the same time pays attention to the harmonious symbiosis with the natural environment. For example, the imperial garden in the Forbidden City, as a royal garden, the design of the landscape, plants, architecture and other elements into one, creating a wonderful realm of harmony between nature and humanity. In addition, the roof forms, door and window decorations in the Forbidden City buildings also incorporate natural elements, such as dragons and phoenixes, flowers, birds, fish and insects and other motifs, signifying the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. The Middle Way is one of the core ideas of Confucianism in ancient China, which is also reflected in the architectural themes of the Forbidden City. The architectural layout of the Forbidden City is rigorous and orderly, reflecting both the dignity of imperial power and the focus on the norms of propriety. For example, the palace buildings in the Forbidden City in accordance with the layout of the principles of the layout of the former dynasty after the bed, the former dynasty for the emperor to deal with political affairs,

after the bed for the emperor and the consort's living area, this layout is in line with the requirements of the ancient system of etiquette, but also reflects the idea of the middle way. At the same time, the Forbidden City buildings in the decorative patterns, colours and so on also follow certain norms of etiquette, such as yellow on behalf of the imperial power, red on behalf of the festive and so on. The architectural theme of the Forbidden City also reflects the integration of cultural heritage and innovation. The Forbidden City as an outstanding representative of China's ancient palace architecture, its architectural style, decorative arts, etc. are carrying a rich historical and cultural connotations. At the same time, the Forbidden City buildings have incorporated innovative elements on the basis of the inheritance of ancient architectural art. For example, the Bathing Virtue Hall in the courtyard of Wuying Hall adopts the Central Asian Arabian dome architectural form, and there is a large-scale landscape painting combining the Western focal point perspective technique and the traditional Chinese painting technique in the Qianlong Garden's Burning Lodge, which not only enriches the architectural connotations of the Forbidden City, but also demonstrates the inclusiveness and innovativeness of the ancient Chinese architectural culture.

The Forbidden City is rich in decorative elements, which not only reflect the dignity and authority of the royal family, but also incorporate the cultural connotations and aesthetic concepts of ancient China.

The Forbidden City's palace buildings have a variety of roof forms, including heavy-eaved hipped roof, heavy-eaved hipped roof, single-eaved hipped roof, etc. Each roof form has its own unique decorative elements. For example, the Hall of Supreme Harmony adopts the most honourable heavy-eaved hipped roof, which is covered with yellow glazed tiles, glittering in the sunlight and imposing. The eaves of the roof are also decorated with ridge beasts, which have different forms and profound meanings, which not only play a decorative role, but also undoubtedly reflect the dignity and sanctity of the imperial power. The arch is one of the important load-bearing structures in the Forbidden City architecture, which is set between the beams and the pillars and plays the role of transmitting force. The delicate structure and beautiful form of the arch not only enhance the stability of the building, but also become a major decorative highlights of the Forbidden City buildings. At the same time, the Forbidden City's buildings are connected by interlocking mortise-and-tenon joints, a structural form that makes the buildings stronger as a whole, and also reflects the superior skills of ancient Chinese craftsmen. The Forbidden City's palaces are beautifully painted and carved inside and out. Painting patterns are varied, including dragons and phoenixes, flowers, landscapes, etc., with bright colours and brilliant gold, which not only play a role in beautifying the buildings, but also imply good luck, wealth and longevity and other good wishes. Carving is mainly reflected in the building's doors and windows, railings, columns and other parts of the base, carving pattern image vivid, smooth lines, exquisite craftsmanship, demonstrating the ancient Chinese craftsmen's superior skills and aesthetic pursuit. Forbidden City palace building roofs generally use yellow glazed tiles, this tile is not only brightly coloured, hard texture, but also has good waterproof performance. The eaves of the roof is also decorated with various forms of kissing animals, these kissing animals have both decorative effect, but also to avoid evil, pray for blessings. Kissing beasts of different shapes, some like dragons and non-dragons, some like beasts and non-beasts, but are full of mystery and majesty. Forbidden City palace buildings below and around the usual use of carved with exquisite dragons and phoenixes presenting auspicious clouds of white jade for the base and railings, this decoration not only enhances the overall momentum of the building, but also reflects the royal dignity and authority. The carvings on the bases and balustrades are delicate and exquisite, with far-reaching meanings, which not only show the superior skills of ancient Chinese craftsmen, but also reflect the deep heritage of ancient Chinese culture.

To sum up, the Forbidden City is rich in decorative elements, which not only reflect the royal dignity and authority, but also incorporate the cultural connotations and aesthetic concepts of ancient China. These decorative elements make the Forbidden City an outstanding representative of ancient Chinese palace architecture, and also leave a valuable cultural heritage for future generations.

Symbolism and Cultural Significance of the Forbidden City

From the point of view of architecture as a material entity, architectural culture belongs to the material culture system undoubtedly; but on the other hand, architecture also contains rich spiritual content. Therefore, the essence of architectural culture is that it is environmental culture, survival culture, social culture and historical culture, and it has the characteristics of precession, synthesis, wholeness, practice and randomness. The Forbidden City, as a place for the emperor to rule the country, manage the government and live, its main building, the Hall of Supreme Harmony, is located in the middle of the city, covers the widest area, uses the most exquisite materials, costs the most, has the most gigantic scale, has the highest taste, has the most distinctive rank, and highlights the political theme (Bai and Huang, 2011).

The architectural layout and names of the Forbidden City contain a profound cosmology. For example, the name 'Forbidden City' is derived from the Feng Shui concept of 'Purple Energy Coming from the East', which symbolises good fortune and royal authority. At the same time, the architectural layout of the Forbidden City strictly follows the north-south axis, a design that not only reflects the centrality of imperial power, but also matches the ancient Chinese perception of heaven and earth, yin and yang. The Forbidden City's architecture places a strong emphasis on harmony and coexistence. The name "He" also refers to the union of yin and yang, as well as the unification of heaven and earth, in other structural titles such as the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Hall of Central Harmony, and the Hall of Preservation of Harmony (Yang, 2004).

The Forbidden City's architecture clearly demonstrates Confucian architectural theory's emphasis on harmony and uniformity. The underlying stability and cohesion of the city are emphasized by the strict north-south axis design of each building. The architectural embellishments of the Forbidden City, including its murals and statues, also deftly blend Confucian cultural themes. The dragon and phoenix themes not only symbolize imperial might and good fortune, but they also reflect Confucianism's focus on social hierarchy and manners. As the location of 24 Ming and Qing dynasties, the Forbidden City holds enduring significance in Chinese history (Zhang, Shan, Zhang, Chen, & Zheng, 2023). Not only was the Forbidden City's architecture stunning, but it also represented strong philosophical and cultural influences, particularly Confucian concepts. Beyond its historical significance, this city is a symbol of cultural continuity, where resilient architectural design coexists with long-standing ideas and values. The palace, pavilions, pavilions and other buildings in the Forbidden City were not only for the emperor to live and deal with political affairs, but also a place to hold various grand ceremonies. These buildings and ceremonies strengthened the sanctity and inviolability of imperial power. The Forbidden City is not only a palace complex, but also a living history textbook. It has witnessed the historical changes and cultural inheritance of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Forbidden City holds a large number of cultural relics and artefacts, such as paintings and calligraphy, porcelain, jade, gold and silverware, etc. These treasures not only demonstrate the brilliant achievements of ancient Chinese culture, but also provide valuable historical information and research clues for future generations. The architectural and decorative arts of the Forbidden City are regarded as the treasures of ancient Chinese art. Its architectural style is unique, the decoration is exquisite, whether it is painted, carved

or ceramic art has reached a very high level. The architecture and decoration of the Forbidden City not only reflect the superior skills and aesthetic concepts of ancient Chinese craftsmen, but also leave a rich artistic heritage and aesthetic resources for future generations.

Modern Values and Implications of the Forbidden City

The Forbidden City, a palace complex that carries the deep historical and cultural heritage of China, is not only a treasure of ancient Chinese civilisation, but also a common cultural heritage of all mankind.

The Modern Value of the Forbidden City

Witness to history and culture

The Forbidden City, as the palace of the royal family during the Ming and Qing dynasties, has witnessed the rise and fall of Chinese feudal society and carries a wealth of historical information. From the eloquence of the Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty to the prosperity of the Kangxi and Qianlong Dynasties of the Qing Dynasty, the Forbidden City witnessed countless historical events and has become an indispensable and important source of information for the study of ancient Chinese history. At the same time, the architecture, decorations and cultural relics in the Forbidden City embody the essence of ancient Chinese culture and are important physical materials for the study of ancient Chinese culture, art, science and technology.

Exemplary art and architecture

The Forbidden City, with its unique architectural style and exquisite skills, is the pinnacle of ancient Chinese architectural art. Its architectural layout is rigorous and symmetrical, with the central axis running through the north and south, dividing the Forbidden City into the east and west, reflecting the superb skills of ancient Chinese urban planning. At the same time, the Forbidden City's architectural decoration is exquisite, whether it is painted, sculpted or ceramic art, all of which have reached a very high level of art. These art treasures not only demonstrate the superior skills of ancient Chinese craftsmen, but also leave a rich artistic heritage for future generations.

Tourism and cultural exchange

With the development of the times, the Forbidden City has gradually changed from a royal forbidden place to a tourist attraction open to the public, attracting countless domestic and foreign tourists to visit. The Forbidden City is not only one of the iconic attractions of Chinese tourism, but also an important platform for cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Visiting the Forbidden City, one can gain an insightful comprehension of the core principles of ancient Chinese culture and truly experience the vastness and profound depths of Chinese civilization. The City itself has become an unparalleled showcase for China to present its cultural influence worldwide, serving as a significant showcase of cultural soft power in the global arena.

Education Research Foundation

A living history textbook, the Forbidden City is a magnificent historical site with many cultural and historical significance. Its extensive collection of historical information and cultural artifacts provides priceless resources for study and teaching. The Forbidden City is a popular destination for academic institutions and research teams, and it

significantly expands students' understanding of ancient Chinese history and culture. Because field visits to this amazing location offer an immersive experience that cannot be duplicated in a classroom, they are frequently used as a springboard for inquiry and investigation. The extensive collection of antiques and cultural items from the Forbidden City also offers valuable physical resources for scientific study (Liu, 2015). These artifacts are not only aesthetically pleasing but also practical resources that support research and advancement across a range of disciplines. Researchers can gain a deeper understanding of ancient Chinese history and culture by considering the many possibilities and complexities found in these relics. The Forbidden City provides a deeper insight of ancient Chinese history and culture than just a historical landmark. It also provides a wealth of information and educational possibilities (Yanyao & Xiaodong, 2023).

The Forbidden City Exposures

Traditional Culture

The fact that the Forbidden City is regarded as a splendid example of traditional Chinese culture illustrates the importance of maintaining traditional culture. Modern civilization's traditional culture is dealing with hitherto unseen difficulties and repercussions due to globalization and the swift advancement of science and technology (Yao, 2024). The Forbidden City serves as a reminder, meanwhile, that traditional culture is an essential part of a nation's spiritual underpinnings and cultural identity, and that we should cherish and protect this invaluable heritage. We may feel more patriotic and confident in our cultural skills if we learn about and value traditional culture (Yanyao & Xiaodong, 2023).

Development Concept of Innovation and Integration

An excellent illustration of a creative and all-encompassing development strategy is the Forbidden City's initiatives to conserve and disseminate its ancient culture. The site's experts have demonstrated an incredible commitment to fusing state-of-the-art technology with conventional preservation methods (Yanyao & Xiaodong, 2023). By strengthening the buildings' resistance to fire and earthquakes, this fusing technique enhances safety standards while preserving the Forbidden City's historical authenticity. In an effort to give tourists a smoother and better experience, the Forbidden City is also establishing the benchmark for the use of cutting-edge technologies like virtual reality and digital tools. In addition to bolstering its own growing significance and impact, the site's use of these cutting-edge technological innovations opens up new avenues for cultural preservation and development (Meifan & Wenjing, 2020).

Embodiment of Social Responsibility and Public Spirit

In accumulation to presenting and promoting traditional culture, the Forbidden City, a public tourist site, actively carries out its social obligation by boosting social welfare. For example, The Forbidden City provides a range of cultural events, discussions, and exhibits to enhance the public's understanding of history and culture while also fostering a greater love for art and culture. In order to demonstrate its feeling of civic duty and public spirit, The Forbidden City, a public cultural institution, also actively participates in social welfare initiatives, such as lending books to children in impoverished areas and providing educational funding (Johnston, 2011).

The harmony between nature and humanity is expertly portrayed by the Forbidden City's architecture and scenery. Let's examine some of the Forbidden City's most

fascinating elements, like the Imperial Garden and Jingshan's skillful utilization of the surrounding landscape. These natural features not only improve the area's overall aesthetic appeal but also offer perfect places for enjoyment and relaxation. The preservation and improvement of the natural environment is a primary objective of the Forbidden City's ongoing conservation and restoration projects. Numerous initiatives, like the city's efforts to improve the water quality, increase green space, and make the area a more welcoming vacation spot, serve as examples of this strategy (Liu, 2015).

Implications for Modern Urban Planning and Construction

Modern urban planning and development are significantly influenced by the architectural style and conceptions of the Forbidden City. The central axis layout and symmetry of the Forbidden City, which emphasize the dominance of ancient Chinese urban planning ideas, can be advantageous to modern urban construction. The Forbidden City's policies and practices for promoting and conserving old culture can also be highly advantageous to modern communities seeking to maintain and spread their distinct cultural identities. The central axis layout, which reflects the harmonizing principles of traditional Chinese aesthetics, not only gives the city its structural symmetry but also reflects a fundamental balance between form and function (Johnston, 2011). Modern urban planners who wish to create living cities that are both aesthetically beautiful and functional in terms of traffic flow and public space use must take note of its lesson (Yao, 2024).

The dedication of the Forbidden City to preserving its cultural legacy serves as a model for modern communities. It successfully preserves and passes on its rich cultural heritage to future generations by putting in place a number of procedures and policies. Contemporary societies are reminded to cherish their cultural legacy to safeguard their historical underpinnings and guarantee their recognition and continuation (Yanyao, & Xiaodong, 2023).

Conclusion

The authority of Forbidden City as a representation of imperial power and holiness was the first indication of its architectural and cultural meanings. Through its magnificent architectural complexes, exquisite decorative arts and strict ceremonial system, the Forbidden City has successfully shaped a majestic and mysterious royal image, reinforcing the sanctity and inviolability of imperial power. At the same time, the cosmology contained in its architectural layout and name, such as the correspondence between 'Zi Wei Yuan' and 'Forbidden City', not only embodies the ancient people's profound knowledge of astronomical phenomena, but also implies that the emperor, as the representative of the emperor of the sky on earth, the legitimacy of the ruling power originates from The Forbidden City is a symbol of the emperor as the representative of the emperor on earth. Secondly, the architectural and cultural connotation of the Forbidden City is also reflected in its embodiment of ancient Chinese philosophical thinking. The 'middle way' of Confucianism, the doctrine of yin and yang and the five elements, and the concept of the unity of heaven and mankind are fully embodied in the architectural layout of the Forbidden City, the decorative arts, and the choice of building materials. The integration of this philosophical thinking not only gives the Forbidden City architecture a profound cultural connotation, but also makes it an outstanding representative of ancient Chinese philosophical thinking in the art of architecture.

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