

Temple Architecture of Liao&Jin dynasty(916-1234A.D) in Datong

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Abstract: Datong was the auxiliary capital of Liao and Jin Dynasties, it was also the Buddhist center of northern China at that time. A lot of Buddhist buildings were carefully preserved there. Most people don't know that the architecture of the same time, such as Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties are followed Tang Dynasty but the same time they are different from each other. After doing the research about the Buddhist buildings in Datong, it was known that the architecture style of the dynasties of the same time such as Song, Liao and Jin was followed Tang Dynasty. But what is the difference from them? Through research these Buddhist buildings, we can conclude that people in Liao and Jin periods followed the architectural style of Tang Dynasty -- roof gentle gradient, eaves overhangs deeply, large Dougong, thick columns, the appearance of the building is simple, forceful and effective, unlike the building of Song, soft and beautiful. However, the building of Liao Dynasty developed their own characteristics, the appearance and use of oblique Dougong.

Key Words: Datong, Liao and Jin Dynasties, Buddhism, architectural styles, Dougong, roof, decline of the columns

1 The Buddhist buildings during Liao and Jin periods in Datong area

Datong, the city outside of Yanmenguan, has been contested by many people in the past two thousand years. During the long history of China, there are many magnificent chapters happened here. In Datong, simple streets, ancient buildings and all the beautiful things are accumulated by history which makes Datong a unique city from other cities in northern China.

Since Northern Wei Dynasty(386-534A.D), Datong has been the Buddhist center of northern China. Located at the south of Wuzhoushan mountain Yungang Grottoes started to build by the craftsmen who had skillful hands and worked very hard. These grottoes recorded the spectacular history during that time. Buddhism in northern China began to decline

during the end of Tang Dynasty and Wudai Dynasty until the beginning of Khitan Dynasty. Datong was in the Yanyun sixteen states, which later occupied by Khitan in the times of Houjin Dynasty. Datong became the auxiliary capital and was named Xijing Datong during the two dynasties. Datong, in western China, was not only a political, economic and cultural center, but also an important military strategic location, the rulers of two dynasties attached great importance to this city.

Khitan, Jurchen maintained their original faith, which was a primitive fetishism and shamanism, and they also learn to absorb the Central Plains region of the Buddhist culture. Based on these, they set up a national religious ritual and use it as a theocratic regime. Thus, during the Liao and Jin periods, a large-scale and large areas of wooden construction Buddhist temples were built which represented the highest artistic level at that time. Until today, though

this place had gone through many wars, it still remained the majestic minority civilization and became even greater. To understand the architecture during the Liao and Jin dynasty, Datong is an important part to research. And also, this is a unique way and a very important significance to understand how the northern minority learned the wooden architecture from Tang Dynasty and which reached the highest level of Architectural Art.

2 To understand the difference between Liao Dynasty and Jin Dynasty, we should research the Buddhist buildings of Datong area

2.1 Northern Huayan Temple

In Datong today, three main Buddhist temples were better preserved: Northern Huayan Temple, Southern Huayan Temple and Shanhua Temple.

First, we talk about Huayan Temple. This famous Buddhist temple was built from Liao Dynasty. At that time, Buddhist culture and Buddhist philosophers was in a low level. In stead of the complex Buddhism and abstruse Zen, some simple Buddhism such as Huayan Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Pureland Buddhism were more popular. Huayan Temple was built at that time. The name of the temple came from a famous Buddhist classic: "Huayan scripture." Because Huayan Temple was the royal temple of Liao Dynasty there were no other temples could compared with its huge construction. In Ming Dynasty, the temple divided into north part and south part until today. In the Khitan tribe's unenlightened primitive belief, the direction of the east was more noble. So the main building, like the Main Hall and Bojiajiaozang Hall faced east, which was different from the Han culture as in Han the Buddhist temple faced south. The Liao people retain their own characteristics in imitation of the building

design of the Central Plains region. They showed their strong sense of self-awareness.

There are two yards in Northern Huayan. King Hall, Guanyin pavilion, Jizo pavilion and other major buildings are located on the axis and both sides of the axis lined with galleries and orderly buildings. On the square gate of the courtyard there were two studded Buddhist stories --"Nianhuaxiao" and "qingzhujian" (Fig. 1)



Fig.1 The square gate of North Huayan Temple. Copyright 2011 JI Jianle, all rights reserved used by permission.

Through the charming little courtyard, there is an open space. Main Hall stands in the middle of the buildings (Fig.2). The Hall was destroyed in the war and rebuilt in Jin Dynasty (1140A.D). The Hall was

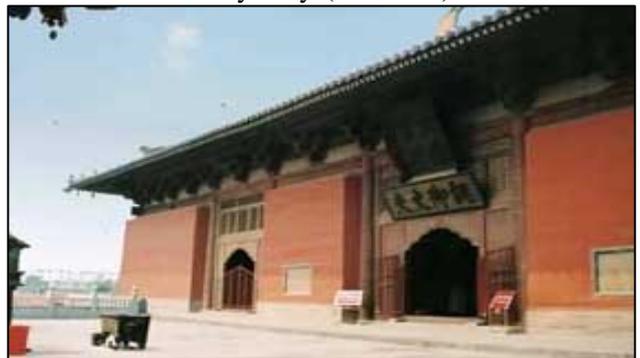


Fig.2 Main Hall of Huayan Temple. Copyright 2011 JI Jianle, all rights reserved used by permission.

built on a tall pedestal, which is an important feature of Liao and Jin periods.

The width of the main hall is 9 Kaijian (space between two columns) and the depth is 5 Kaijian, single-layer eave and five ridge roof. It is the largest existing ancient wooden architecture with single-layer eave in China. Three doors are in the Kaijian, and the shape of the door is old and simple. The middle door decorated with a plaque, which was built in the Ming Dynasty and means "Great man great mind." The Chiwen (which is made of colorful glass and looks like a bird head, located at the end of each ridge of the roof) is a relic of the Jin Dynasty. It has huge Dougong (interlocking wooden brackets, often used in clusters to support roofs and add ornamentation.) All the Dougong are full of variety, a 60° oblique Dougong on the beam between middle two columns, and there are two 45° oblique Dougong on the other side beams.

The style of oblique Dougong is also the main features of Liao & Jin architectures. The oblique Dougong bearing the weight of the roof, and it is decorative. There are 12 columns less than normal which makes the space expand and easy to hold Buddhist ceremony. There are 32 sculptures in the large hall what were made in Ming Dynasty which are about Five District Buddha and the King of law.

2.2 Southern Huayan Temple

About ten meters from the south of Northern temple, there is the southern temple. In the front of this temple there are several buildings which display some of the historical artifacts now. In the backyard, the building Bojiajiaozang (Buddhist scriptures) is the main hall of the temple. (Fig.3) It is built in 1038 A.D of Liao Dynasty, and it used to store Buddhist scriptures and books. The width of it is 5 Kaijian, and the depth is 4 Kaijian, single-layer eave and nine ridge roof. The slope of the roof is gentle and the eave is far-reaching. The style of the building is strict and solemn.

Interior of the hall with a reduction in column number, so the space seems clearer and lighter. There



Fig.3 the main hall of Southern Huayan Temple. Copyright 2011 JI Jianle, all rights reserved used by permission.

are 38 loft-style closets on the four walls, and 31 sculptures of Liao Dynasty in the middle of the hall, all of them have personality and vitality. There are several standing statues of different Buddha which are solemn and graceful. They are wearing dynamic skirt and ribbon which expresses the secular aesthetics.

2.3 Shanhua Temple

Shanhua temple is another important temple in Datong. It is the largest and most complete temple in China now which was built in Liao & Jin Dynasty. This temple was founded in the year of Kaiyuan of Tang dynasty (713-741 A.D), Its original name is Kaiyuan Temple. It was severely damaged by war in

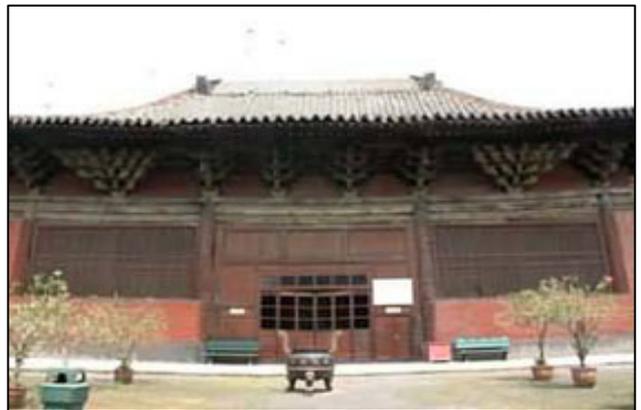


Fig.4 Sanshengdian in Shanhua Temple. Copyright 2011 JI Jianle, all rights reserved used by permission.

Liao Dynasty and rebuilt in Jin Dynasty. In Ming Dynasty, it has been repaired again and changed his name to Shanhua temple.

The layout of the temple buildings are facing south, and the main halls lined in the axis, from south to north, the Tianwangdian (the hall of four kings), the Sanshengdian (the hall of three sages), and the Daxiongbaodian (the Main Hall). In front of Main Hall there are Manjusri tower site, Samantabhadra tower, east and west side halls. There are seven main buildings that in order to meet the ancient Buddhist system of "Garan seven".



Fig.5 Oblique Dougong of Sanshengdian in Shanhua temple. Copyright 2011 JI Jianle, all rights reserved used by permission.

Sanshengdian is a relic of the Jin Dynasty, 5 Kaijian width and 4 Kaijian depth, single-layer eave and five ridges roof. (Fig.4). There are two 60° oblique Dougong under the eaves of the hall, the shapes seems like flowers, and it shows the most significant features of Jin architecture (Fig.5). The method of the column decline is also used in interior of the hall. There are only four main columns and four supporting columns to support the roof beams. And there is no ceiling on the top which makes the space very light and spacious.

On the broad platform is the Main Hall which was built in Liao Dynasty and repaired in Jin Dynasty. (Fig.6). The width of this building is seven Kaijian, the depth is four Kaijian, single-layer eave and five ridge roof. The Dougong have five layers and single



Fig.6 the Main Hall of Shanhua Temple. Copyright 2011 JI Jianle, all rights reserved used by permission.

between two columns. There is a 45 ° oblique Dougong in the middle Kaijian, 60 ° oblique Dougong in the left and right Kaijian. It also used the method of the column decline which makes the space interior light and spacious.

In the middle of the main hall, there are Five District Buddha and 24 Kings of law standing on both sides. There are a few statues which had painted complex pattern. It is said to be painted in Qing Dynasty. Because the result is not good, so they did not paint all the statues. Fortunately, among these best statues, such as Helidinan, have not been damaged (Fig.7)



Fig.7 Helidinan in the Main Hall of Shanhua temple. Copyright 2011 JI Jianle, all rights reserved used by permission.

3 Features of the Architecture of Liao

&Jin Dynasties

Through the analysis of these buildings, we can find out that although the Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties are at the same period, the different locations and the affects of wars made them learn the different ideas of Tang Dynasty's architecture. The architectural of Song is flexible, the slope of the roof and the height of the column is higher than Tang Dynasty .And also they reduced the width of each room and the proportion of Dougong. The appearance of the buildings was very different from the forceful buildings in Tang Dynasty.

Khitan tribe risen in the Wudai Dynasty. Their cultural integrated the northern frontier of the Tang Dynasty so their buildings inherited the Tang Dynasty's architectural style which is the gentle gradient of roof, eaves overhangs deeply, large Dougong, thick columns. The buildings are simple, forceful and effective, unlike the buildings of Song which are soft and beautiful. Moreover, the absorption of the Han's culture made them willing to change their traditional ideas. At the same period , the buildings of Jin Dynasty integrated the structure of Song and Liao's features that the decline of columns were widely used in the buildings. The Dougong was more complicated, They even have some bracket of 60 ° and 45 ° in one Dougong .This is a more and more complex style which showed the bright characters of the minority.

Datong's temple architecture during Liao and Jin Dynasties reached a high level of art. The minorities of Khitan and Jurchen absorbed the essence of the Han's culture and arts during their integration into Han's society and life. Because of the different culture, the meticulous of the Song, the generous of the Liao and Jin lead to the their different buildings. The different cultures among the Song Dynasty Liao Dynasty and Jin Dynasty lead to their different buildings.

4 Conclusion

Datong's temple architecture of Liao and Jin Dynasties reached a highest level of art. The minorities of Khitan and Jurchen absorbed the essence of the Han's culture and arts during their integration into Han's society and life. The meticulous of the Song and the free of the Liao and Jin, which is the difference of their culture and also is the difference of their buildings.

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