

Study on the Application of Zen Culture in Architectural Space Design

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Abstract: Many people think that Zen is mysterious and far away from our lives. But fact, Zen is a kind of thought, language and belief. Zen differs from other languages because it has its own vision and unique views. It pursues the noble thought of “quiet, balanced and simple”. The study of Zen should be carried out from its components and surrounding environment. This article mainly elaborates Zen culture from the cognition of Zen culture, the three-dimensional aesthetic directions of Zen culture and the contents of Zen culture in space.

1. Introduction

1.1 The meaning of Zen culture

Zen is the abbreviation for Zen Buddhism artistic conception. In Chinese society, Zen attains the realm it advocates by pursuing the sense of beauty. This realm shows the beauty of vacant outside and solid inside, and presents a vibrant scene full of infinite vigor and vitality. Zen culture has its own unique characteristics; it refuses to express itself through beautiful words or gorgeous images. It is a sort of simple and ordinary culture, just like the plain beauty of a girl without makeup. However, besides simple surface, Zen culture also has far-reaching significance. It mainly expresses a kind of emotion or some spirit. In China, different historic periods witnessed the emergence of diversified Zen cultures. For instance, in Tang Dynasty with strong economic power, famous poets like Wei Wang and Hao-ran Meng often described the feeling of tranquility through images like “bare mountains” or “empty forests”; the noble aesthetic consciousness such as “witty words” is the most basic Zen culture. It can be seen that Zen is different from cultures we know well, but it is not as mysterious as we thought. It is the feeling of life experience, a profound artistic conception and a simple living custom.

1.2 The idea of Zen in space design

Zen is an important part of Zen Buddhism. The thought of Zen is the thought of Zen Buddhism. But it also differs from the thought of Zen Buddhism; actually, it is the soul of Zen Buddhism thought. In short, Zen philosophy advocates the design ideas of natural, simple, honest and innocent. It holds that less is more, and insists that only spaces close to “blank” can stimulate the potential of audiences to the greatest extent, since these spaces can provide people with enough room and energy to feel and get inspiration. Complex design will restrict thinking and imagination. A fresh, natural and simple environment can encourage its users to think deeply, since it has strong attraction. In that case, the good space environment has been achieved. The word of “space” is familiar to everyone, but now few people know the accurate meaning. The simple and clear explanation of space is to consider it from its own point of view. With the development of socialist economy, human thinking and understanding are no longer limited in superficial understanding. Now we have deeper understandings. Meanwhile, the space surrounded human beings changes from its past form and evolves into rational space with complex elements. Human beings are constantly changing and pursuing things that cannot be obtained. They begin to pursue physiological enjoyment after material satisfaction such as food, clothing, shelter and transportation. At this stage, the physiology demand has been satisfied; we start to pursue psychological enjoyment. Zen space is the psychological enjoyment of human pursuit. It is a kind of expression of thoughts and feelings. Through their own understanding of the surrounding environment, as well as their continuous

thinking and insights, space users can ultimately achieve a state of transcendence from the world and psychological satisfaction. From the perspective of space, Zen is the thought of using simple and obvious objects or ordinary shapes to meet the demands of space users' eyes, spirit and attitudes, and helping users to express their own views and mindset of transcending nature. If we design space with Zen thought, we can create natural and harmonious space through bare mountains and other intangible objects. Through integrating these elements with human feelings, spirit and wills, designers can create a very mysterious and noble artistic world that people yearn for.

2. The Three-dimensional Aesthetic Directions of Zen Culture

2.1 Simple, quiet and natural

From the perspective of space, Zen pursues natural and unrestrained beauty. It emphasizes to return to nature and create a simple space environment through language design and emotional expression. Seemingly simple is the false appearance. Simple but not easy is a design method advocating indifferent beauty. Zen space aims to achieve the beauty of simplicity of Zen culture in the process of designing and obtaining cultural elements. In the process of design, designers should first understand all natural things until they know everything in nature well. Then they can use the strange forms of natural things in design and make up for the shortcomings of traditional design, since the traditional landscape design is always limited. Designers can combine the scarce natural landscape and traditional design with their own imagination so as to create rich aesthetic experience. The highest state of a swordsman is the unity of man and sword; the highest realm of space design is the superb artistic conception of "the identity of things with persons", which can be achieved through the closely connection between the beauty of nature and the environment of space. Only in this way can designers create space form with profound thought. The beauty of Zen space is characterized by nature and tranquility, which is created by the idea of simplifying trivial things. It always advocates the idea of "thoroughly discerning of temperament", which means people need to use their minds to apprehend the essence of things, rather than simply observe the appearances. Thus, Zen space design should refuse the complex pruning of materials such as processing, repairing and sculpture, and do everything possible to retain the original form of materials, in order to show the natural beauty of materials to the largest extent. The primitive materials show their simplicity and beauty; the tranquil beauty can be appreciated in a very simple environment, thus creating the tranquil and natural beauty of space.

2.2 The beauty of balance

The goal of Zen space design is noble and beautiful. The space needs to liberate people's mind from the interference of secular world, to purify their minds and sublimate their sentiments. Zen strongly advocates the balance between man and nature, just like the balance beauty of equal power in martial arts. In aesthetics, this kind of pursuit is known as balance beauty. Balanced beauty emphasizes two objects unified and against each other. In the actual process of space design, the designer needs to balance various decorative forms by adjusting the forces of elements such as colors and shapes. Everything in nature can become an element of Zen space design. Through the Zen space design, limited natural elements can produce unlimited aesthetic experiences. The proper relationship between the formal beauty of Zen space and the simple beauty of nature can perfectly integrate Zen space beauty with natural beauty, and create a balanced aesthetic feeling.

2.3 The beauty of tranquility

Nowadays, with the rapid development of socialist economy, more and more people are running around for their livelihood. Their tired footsteps never stop; anxiety and impatience always haunt them. The secular competition imposes heavy burdens on common people and makes them exhausted. So people want to find a suitable paradise to express their grievances. Zen space is the paradise which human beings have always dreamed of. When wandering in the Zen space, everyone can experience unprecedented feelings, no matter how depressed or frustrated when they come in.

Like bathing with sweet dew, the beauty of space can slowly penetrate into their minds, and wash away mental dirt as well as irritability and anxiety of the secular world. The beauty of its tranquility lies in the simplicity of its spatial design. With soft and graceful forms and the aesthetic feeling of nature perfectly integrated with each other, Zen space can make people feel transcendent, natural and peaceful.

In Zen quotes, there is a saying goes as follows. “May I come to this world with supreme wisdom; may my body be as pure as colored glaze, clear and flawless.” Enlightened eminent monks in the world often compare themselves to colored glaze, since the glittering and translucent glaze represents their peaceful and comfortable realm. The image also expresses the peaceful beauty of Zen space.

3. The Contents of Zen Culture in Space

Many people do not know that Zen culture is actually around them. In fact, Zen culture has influenced many aspects of Chinese society and culture, as well as people’s outlooks on life, values and love. Besides traditional demands of food and clothing, modern people now have higher requirements for living places. Thus, interior design should be improved since it deals with people’s most basic living places. Their main purpose is to satisfy human beings’ demands for social and cultural life. Zen space pursues tranquility and nature, from which we can easily find that Zen culture pursues the love and yearning for nature. Zen space provides people a paradise far away from the secular world; people in the space can give full play to their advantages and use their imagination. These characteristics uplift the ideological level and enrich the artistic conception of design.

3.1 Constituents of Zen

One special feature of Zen space is that it likes to use natural elements around us. Elements such as light and wind can make the Zen space more obvious and attractive. Using these elements has many advantages; they can make the space design closely connected with the nature. However, how to integrate these natural elements into the space design of Zen culture is an essential issue. People’s understanding of the world comes mainly from their own eyes; that is, what they see is what they understand. In physics, human beings can see things because light shines on objects and refracts into their eyes. In other words, people can see objects because of light. The principle of people see objects determines that Zen space design also needs light. In the designing process, the designer can change time and climate, as well as positions of elements to realize the different projections of the same object under the illumination of light. The influence of light on the shapes of objects can make people feel the beauty of changing nature.

As we all know, human beings feel the existence of the wind through tactile sensation; the flow of air forms the wind. Human beings cannot see the wind directly with their naked eyes, but they can indirectly judge the strength and direction of wind through the influence of winds on objects, and they can hear the sound produced by the vibration of wind. By the help of this principle, designers can apply sounds like wind blowing through woods or copper bells in Zen space. Different styles of architecture can be designed according to different wind directions caused by diversified terrains. Through the existence of wind, the “moving scenery” can make the surrounding environment “quieter” and create the spatial atmosphere of Zen space. Flowing water seems to possess all kinds of human expressions, and it can be applied in space design to achieve different effects. The calm surface of the lake cannot conceal its tranquility; flowing water also shows its tranquility. That is the so-called “quiet in dynamic, and motion in quiescence”. Flowing water can become quiet instantly, then space users can go into a peaceful a quiet environment immediately.

3.2 Creating the artistic conception of Zen space

Zen is great; its understanding of beauty far surpasses the literary understanding of beauty. It allows people to stand at a higher stage to pursue what they need and enjoy their lives. Zen thought is composed of the pursuit of life efforts, as well as the spiritual needs of life and aesthetic ideas; it

guides the creation of Zen space. Realm, as its name implies, is a kind of spiritual food, an invisible and intangible form of ambiguity. But it is the core of Zen and the soul of design. Zen space is a space with great attraction and appeal. It should be guided by traditional aesthetics. Designers can find themes from ancient poems, lyrics and paintings, and use modern methods to deeply impress modern people.

Zen has a very strong affinity. It is approachable; people can go in there without any sense of resistance or defense. Peoples' hearts can truly go into Zen space and feel the spiritual rhythm. Therefore, Zen space cannot be too large or wide. People may fear large spaces because long distance can deprive the affinity of space. The size of Zen should be very small and low, in order to create a better atmosphere. These characteristics can make people feel less pressed and less constrained.

4. Conclusions

Zen space reflects the characteristics of Oriental environment in the process of design. It has external emptiness and internal entity. The ancients believed that the highest state of mind was the complete integration of man and nature. That mental realm is also the highest level of Zen culture.

References

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