From Bottom to Top: Research of Tang Dynasty Temple Garden

Haonan Li

School of Landscape Architecture, Wuhan Textile University, Textile Road, Hongshan District, China

Abstract: The Tang Dynasty was the peak of the development of Chinese Buddhism. Buddhist temple gardens represent the unique cultural landscape of Chang’an City. This paper discusses the phenomenon of Buddhist popularization in the Tang Dynasty, and discusses the reasons and inevitability of the bottom-up formation mode of temple gardens in the Tang Dynasty, which has certain academic value and practical significance.

Keywords: Tang Dynasty, Temple gardens, Bottom-up, Civilian literature.

1. Introduction

Tang Dynasty is the prosperous period of Chinese Buddhism, and also the prosperous period of Chinese Buddhist temple construction. In order to accumulate merits, the rulers built Buddhist temples throughout the country with large property holdings (Zhao, 945). Big temples cost millions of dollars, while small temples cost more than thirty thousand or fifty thousand. Roughly calculated construction costs exceed tens of millions. (Wei, c.a.690-705) Buddhism was obviously attached to imperial power. To strengthen control, rulers also used Buddhism to achieve their ideological domination. At the same time, through the preaching of Buddhists, people widely accepted the concept of Buddhism.

Therefore, the various activities related to the temple garden in the Tang Dynasty reflect that the temple garden in the Tang Dynasty is a bottom-up development model, and various activities related to the temple are derived. At the same time, temples have become an important place for people’s entertainment activities. In addition, the temples of the Tang Dynasty are also places for scholars to enjoy. The temple garden of Tang Dynasty witnessed Chang’an civilization and became an indispensable part of Buddhist culture in Tang Dynasty.

2. The Development and Support

2.1 The Layout Development

As the center of Buddhist culture at that time, temples in Chang’an City were everywhere.

There were more than 100 streets and markets in Chang’an City in the Tang Dynasty, many of which had Buddhist temples. The scale of Buddhist temples in Chang’an City is becoming larger and larger, forming a pluralistic Buddhist temple. From the “Guan Zhong established altar pictures” (Dao Xuan, 667), it can be found that the Buddhist temples are generally divided into the main courtyard and another courtyard. The main courtyard is dominated by Buddhist temples, and other courtyards have auditoriums (pavilions) or corridors. The main courtyard is connected with many other courtyards, forming a large Buddhist temple. The emergence of multi-architectural system of Buddhist temples in Chang’an caters to the important needs of Buddhist social functions. For example, with the support of the government, the large Buddhist temples in the Tang Dynasty not only played an important role in the spread of Buddhist culture, but also had a large area of land to operate shops, garages and other social undertakings (Pei, c.a. 627-649). Therefore, the multi-yard development of temples in the Tang Dynasty is an important epitome of the development of Buddhism popularization.

In the development of Buddhist temples, another phenomenon needs to be mentioned, that is, Buddhists use their own homes as temples. That is, Buddhists donate their houses to Buddhist monks for life and religious activities. Due to the small scale and simple structure of unicameral Buddhist temples, the most basic building is at least one Buddhist temple. Based on the limitations of housing layout, the houses in the Tang Dynasty were temples, mostly unicameral Buddhist temples. From the sui and tang dynasties chang’ an city temple master status, we can find that under the constraints of economic conditions, rich temples than temples for the poor more. Some rich people even help the poor to donate their houses as temples. Therefore, some temples in streets and markets are large-scale and magnificently decorated. For example, Zhangjing Temple in Chang’an of the Tang Dynasty was magnificent, but the wealth of the city was not enough to build it. Therefore, the demolition of Qujiang and Huating palaces to build temples, cost more than trillion yuan (Sima, 1084).

It can be concluded that the development of temple gardens often depends on the results of population and economic structure. So according to its content is divided into two groups for analysis.

2.2 Number of Temples and Population Density

According to the overall summary statistics of the distribution of temples, Department(county) with more temples are undoubtedly places with a large population. The department with little or no temple statistics are usually less populated.

In the early Tang Dynasty, temples distributed more in the north than in the south. There are 470 temples in the north and 364 in the south.

Chang’an has 112 temples, accounting for about 14% of the total number of Chinese temples (Xu, 1810). Central South
Mountain has 21 temples, is the most famous peak of the early. There are 162 temples in Jingzhao County, accounting for 89.5% of Guanneidao and 19.4% of the total number of the country. Other intensive centers include Henan (56, including 29 in Luoyang and 6 in Songshan), Chengdu (30), Runzhou (28), Xiangzhou (25), Daizhou (23, including 17 in Wutaishan), Yuezhou (23), Taiyuan (21), Suzhou (19), Yangzhou (18), Jingzhou (17), Xiangzhou (16), Hengzhou Nanyue (16) (Li, 1998).

In the Tang Dynasty, the number of urban population increased significantly, and the trend of rural population transferring to cities accelerated. While the population is concentrated in large cities, the emerging cities along the industrial and commercial transportation have become the centers of population concentration and population mobility. The increase of social population is one of the important factors for the development of temple gardens. The increase in population has provided a certain degree of support for the development of temple gardens, brought or created diversified cultures and customs, and promoted the prosperity of urban temples.

![Figure 1: A map of the number of temples in various provinces in the Tang Dynasty](image)

**2.3 Temple Distribution and Economic Development**

In the early Tang Dynasty, three temples were densely distributed, two in the south and one in the north. The largest one is located in Jiangsu and Zhejiang, which is the distribution zone along the Hanou-Jiangnan Canal. It starts from Yangzhou in the north to Taizhou in the south, including 10 states, including Yang, Run, Chang, Su, Hu, Hang, Yue, Ming, Wu and Tai. There are 140 temples, accounting for 17 % of the total. The second dense area is Jingzhou and Xiangzhou in the lower reaches of the Han River, with 42 temples. (Li, 1998)

The early dense center lost its central position later, with two in the north and two in the south. Jingzhou from dense center to sub-dense center; hezhong, Yanzhou, Fenzhou and Fenzhou are no longer secondary intensive centers. Status has also increased, Hangzhou from a secondary intensive center to a dense center; hong, Tan, Ming, Shanghai, and Zhen became secondary dense centers. (Li, 1998)

Due to the development of commodity economy, rural population flows to cities at all levels. The urban population structure of Tang Dynasty continued to flow and restructure at all levels of society. As the focus of urban distribution shifts from north to south, the internal spatial structure of the city breaks the boundary of the city, and the external spatial structure extends beyond the boundary of streets and markets to the surrounding areas. Due to the economic decline in the north caused by wars and ethnic conflicts, the number of temples in the north and the south is increasingly different.

### 3. The Concept and Metrics of “Bottom-up”

#### 3.1 Open Policy in Tang Dynasty

The Tang government’s open policy towards Buddhism was the decisive factor for the bottom-up development of temple gardens. As if the sun palace is ten thousand miles high. Butterflies fly around the flowers, rainbows like flags flutter in the curved gully. The sunset is like a silk tent, a string of raindrops intertwined into a dense network, as in the vast clouds, outside the earth. (Li, visiting the Great Charity Temple) Poetry reflects the emperor’s respect for Buddhism, that is, Buddhist temples transcend things and cultivate body and mind. From the early Tang Dynasty to the heyday, and then to the end of the Tang Dynasty, the Tang government management of Buddhism has been institutionalized. The open policy towards Buddhism promoted the development of Buddhist culture in the Tang Dynasty; at the same time, it guides the masses to accept Buddhist culture. At this time, there was a bottom-up mechanism for the institutional management of Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty: from Li Zhi and Wu Zetian, the Tang Dynasty was committed to the progress of scholars, and the examination content gradually abandoned the original policies and Confucian classics, and turned to poetry and fu. The new national employment policy in the late Tang Dynasty led to the great change of the mainstream culture of the Tang Dynasty. The changes in social politics, economy and life culture caused by the changes in the imperial examination policy naturally extend to religious beliefs. (Zhang, 2013) Buddhism mainly reflects the thoughts and interests of the aristocratic class, with an increasing number of civilian factors. However, the suppressed folk beliefs have developed rapidly and even entered the ranks of mainstream religions. Folk beliefs constitute a low foundation for the development of temple gardens. In the late Tang Dynasty, temple gardens began to develop from bottom to top.

#### 3.2 The Behavior of Citizens

From a bottom-up point of view, the broad masses of the people as the largest development subject, in the understanding and application of policy, cultural identity and participation, has become an important force to promote the development of temple gardens.

Beijing customs (Li, 1937, cited from Miao Xiangshi) mentioned: “Jingshi Longfu Temple, 9th each month, department stores gathered, this is the temple fair.” Thus, the temple fair is to serve the people’s lives, in the temple fair often acrobatics and acrobatics performances, affecting the Tang Dynasty and later entertainment. Drama is also a way of entertainment. Chang’an City more famous temples, such as Cien Temple, Qinglong Temple, Jianfu Temple, Yongshou Temple, have formed the theatre. Southern New Book (Qian...
Yi, 1056) records: “Chang’an Theatre is mainly in Cien Temple, followed by Qinglong Temple, and then Jianfu Temple and Yongshou Temple”. For example, in the spring of the 19th year of Zhengguan, Hongfu Temple ushered in Buddhist shrines and people were happy to participate. Within dozens of miles from Zhueque Street to Hongfu Temple Gate, citizens and bureaucrats met on both sides of the road. Temples in Chang’an are concentrated on the streets and markets to facilitate people’s participation in various Buddhist activities.

3.3 The Promotion of Scholar-Bureaucrat Culture

Under the decisive factors of the upper-level policy and the people’s bottom-up main force, the scholar-bureaucrat culture has played a role in promoting.

The pagodas of the Temple of Great Mercy include Wu Daoxuan, Yinlin, Wei Zhiyi, Yang Tingguang, Zheng Qian, Bi Hong, Wang Wei, Li Guom, Zhang Xiaoshi and Wei Luan (Yuan, 2012). It can be seen that the temple combined with the natural environment, very popular with the literati. Since the Tang Dynasty, literati moved from the local to the central, literati gathered in the city. On the south side of Longhua Temple, there is a winding water, named Qujiang. There are Ziyun Tower and Furong Garden in the south, Xing Garden and Cien Temple in the west. There are many flowers around. (Chen, 1238) For Hanlin scholars, they also prefer to build temples according to the landscape. These temples often provide creative inspiration for them. They prefer to come here to sing and write poems, and have an elegant assembly and association gathering. The wide participation of literati and monks led to the emergence of new cultural forms. The beauty of the temple was influenced by the literati culture, resulting in many secular landscapes: “Many residents visited and celebrated Shangsi Festival, people played in the mountains, pavilion workshops, and there were boats in the lake”.

There are prime ministers and many Hanlin scholars on board. People in the whole city know this conversation. (Kang, 895) It can be said that the leisure and entertainment of literati doctors promoted the development and prosperity of temple gardens.

4. Conclusion

The bottom-up formation mode of temple gardens in Tang Dynasty has a process of continuous improvement and manufacture. The bottom-up formation mechanism is to strengthen the spatial concentration of population and economy, improve the cultural level, gradually get rid of the decentralization and small-scale of temples, and form a centralized, large-scale and multicultural landscape model.

Buddhist temple gardens have become an important place for people’s entertainment activities and also a place for literati to entertain and meet. The bottom-up development mechanism of temple gardens in the Tang Dynasty reflected the urban life of Chang’an in the Tang Dynasty, witnessed the civilization of Chang’an, and became an indispensable part of Buddhist culture in the Tang Dynasty.

References