

Design Strategies for the Renovation of Arcade Buildings From the Perspective of Zen Aesthetics

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Abstract: As a unique symbol of regional culture, the arcade building carries rich historical memories and cultural connotations. In the process of urban renewal, how to reasonably renovate it so that it can meet modern living needs while preserving cultural continuity has become an important issue. Chan aesthetics, with its unique philosophical ideas and aesthetic concepts, offers new perspectives and approaches for the renovation of arcade buildings. This paper delves into the core principles of Chan aesthetics, combining the characteristics and current status of arcade buildings, to explore design strategies for the renovation of arcade buildings based on Chan aesthetics from dimensions such as spatial creation, material application, decorative design, and cultural inheritance. The aim is to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the sustainable development of arcade buildings.

Keywords: Zen aesthetics; Arcade architecture; Architectural renovation; Design strategy

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1. Introduction

Riding buildings are widely distributed in the Southern coastal areas of China and Southeast Asia, serving as a product of multicultural integration. They combine commercial, residential, and public activity spaces, witnessing the rise and fall of cities, and possess immense historical, cultural, and artistic value. However, with the development of the times, traditional riding buildings face issues such as functional obsolescence, spatial deactivation, and difficulties in integrating with modern urban environments. Zen aesthetics emphasize nature, ethereality, simplicity, and inner peace, which align closely with the goals of modern architecture, such as harmony between humans and nature and the creation of spiritual space. Introducing Zen aesthetics into the renovation of riding buildings can help uncover their deeper cultural value, creating architectural spaces that blend traditional charm with modern quality.

2. The core connotation of Zen aesthetics

2.1. View of nature: Learning from nature and uniting man and nature

Zen aesthetics revere nature, viewing it as the source and ultimate destination of all things ^[1, 2]. It advocates that

humans should follow natural laws and live in harmony with nature. In architecture, this is reflected in the respect and use of natural elements, such as introducing natural light, air, water, and plants, making buildings part of nature^[3]. This achieves an organic integration of architecture and nature, reaching the realm of “harmony between heaven and humanity.” This natural perspective opposes excessive artificial embellishment, pursuing mutual dependence and coexistence between architecture and its environment^[4].

2.2. Ethereal meaning: The interplay of reality and illusion, simplicity and ethereality

Etherealness is a crucial aesthetic characteristic of Zen aesthetics, emphasizing the conveyance of infinite spiritual essence through finite space and form^[5]. It seeks a minimalist, pure spatial atmosphere, creating an understated and profound ambiance through techniques such as negative space and borrowed scenery. In this ethereal space, people can break free from worldly constraints, achieving inner peace and freedom, experiencing a spiritual transcendence beyond the material realm^[6].

2.3. Simple spirit: Return to truth, simplify complexity

Zen aesthetics advocate a simple and unadorned spirit, opposing luxury and complexity^[7]. It emphasizes returning to the essence of things, removing unnecessary embellishments and forms, presenting their true nature in a simple and pure manner. In the selection and use of building materials, it focuses on the natural texture and original color of the materials, showcasing their raw beauty. In architectural form and decorative design, it pursues simplicity and elegance, avoiding excessive decoration, reflecting a sense of plainness and purity^[8].

3. Characteristics and current situation analysis of arcade buildings

3.1. Characteristics of arcade buildings

The unique spatial form of the arcade building generally consists of a ground-level arcade corridor, upper residential or commercial spaces, and a roof^[9]. The arcade corridor is continuously connected, forming a semi-open public space that not only provides shelter from wind and rain for pedestrians but also facilitates interaction between the street and the interior of the building^[10]. The upper space is compactly laid out with clear functional zoning, typically connected to the ground floor via stairs^[11, 12]. This distinctive spatial form adapts to the climate characteristics and commercial activity needs of southern regions, showcasing distinct regional features^[13].

Diverse architectural styles, the arcade buildings integrate elements of traditional Chinese architecture, Nanyang architectural style, and Western building techniques, forming a multifaceted architectural style. In terms of appearance, they feature both the intricate carvings and painted beams, bracket sets, and overhanging eaves characteristic of Chinese architecture, as well as the gables and louvers typical of Nanyang style^[14]. They also incorporate Western architectural components such as columns and arches^[15]. This fusion of diverse styles reflects the cultural exchanges and collisions experienced by arcade buildings throughout their historical development, endowing them with unique artistic appeal^[16].

3.2. The current problems of the arcade building

3.2.1. Functional obsolescence and spatial inactivity

As society evolves and lifestyles change, the functions of traditional arcade buildings gradually fail to meet modern needs. The ground-floor commercial spaces, due to their limited size and poor layout, struggle to attract modern business formats. Moreover, the residential spaces suffer from inadequate lighting, ventilation, and hygiene facilities, which leads to lower living standards^[17]. Meanwhile, due to a lack of effective updates and management, many arcade building spaces remain idle, losing their former vitality and becoming “lost spaces” in

urban development^[18].

Building damage and cultural loss, eroded by time and unreasonable renovations, have led to structural damage, wall peeling, and missing decorative elements in some arcade buildings^[19]. Moreover, during the process of urban modernization, historical and cultural elements of some arcade buildings have been overlooked or destroyed, blurring traditional architectural styles and regional cultural characteristics. This has put the cultural memory and humanistic connotations embodied in arcade buildings at risk of being lost^[20].

4. Design strategies for the renovation of arcade buildings from the perspective of Zen aesthetics

4.1. Space creation strategy

The introduction and integration of natural elements follow the Zen aesthetic view of nature, actively incorporating natural elements in the renovation of arcade buildings to achieve harmony between architecture and nature. Small landscape ponds and green plants are set up in the ground-floor arcades and corridors, creating a tranquil and natural atmosphere. The gentle flow of water in the ponds not only regulates the microclimate but also adds a sense of vitality to the space. The introduction of green plants softens the hard surfaces of the building, purifies the air, and allows people to feel the vitality and energy of nature as they walk through. At the same time, by reasonably designing internal spaces such as courtyards and atriums, natural lighting and ventilation are increased, allowing sunlight and air to freely circulate within the building, forming a spatial layout that resonates with nature.

The creation of ethereal spaces employs the Zen aesthetic technique of creating an ethereal atmosphere to shape a simple and airy arcade building space. In terms of spatial layout, unnecessary partitions and divisions are minimized, adopting open or semi-open design concepts to enhance spatial fluidity and transparency. By setting up large glass curtain walls or transparent grilles, the interpenetration between indoor and outdoor spaces is achieved, allowing people to experience changes in the natural landscape from indoors. At the same time, the technique of leaving blank areas is used reasonably, creating appropriate empty zones in the space that invite imagination, fostering a tranquil and profound ambiance. For example, in the public rest areas of arcade buildings, simple seating and minimal decoration are provided, conveying an ethereal atmosphere through a minimalist spatial layout, enabling people to relax their minds and bodies and find inner peace here.

4.2. Material application strategy

The selection and expression of natural materials, based on the simple spirit of Zen aesthetics, prioritize the use of natural materials such as wood, stone, and blue bricks in the renovation of arcade buildings. Wood has a warm texture and natural grain, providing a sense of warmth and comfort, suitable for doors, windows, stairs, and railings. Stone is durable and robust, with its natural texture and color, ideal for flooring and wall decoration, conveying a sense of stability and weightiness. Meanwhile, the blue bricks, commonly used in traditional arcade architecture, have an ancient hue and unique quality that evokes memories of history. In renovations, original blue brick walls can be preserved or restored, or used for partial decoration to continue the historical charm of the arcade. Throughout the process of material application, emphasis is placed on showcasing the raw texture and natural appearance of the materials, avoiding excessive processing and embellishment, allowing the natural beauty of the materials to be fully expressed.

The harmonious coexistence of old and new materials is inevitable in the renovation of arcade buildings, where modern building materials such as steel and glass are used. To achieve the harmony and unity pursued by Zen aesthetics, attention should be paid to the combination and integration of old and new materials, achieving a harmonious coexistence through contrast. For example, based on retaining the original blue brick walls, steel

structures are used as the supporting system. The simplicity of the steel structure contrasts sharply with the ancient simplicity of the blue bricks, yet they complement each other, showcasing a dialogue between tradition and modernity. Glass curtain walls are set at the entrance or public spaces of the building, where the transparency of the glass complements the heavy texture of the surrounding natural materials. This not only enhances the modern feel of the space but also preserves the overall ancient atmosphere.

4.3. Decoration design strategy

The creation of a minimalist decorative style adheres to the Zen aesthetic principle of simplification. In the design and decoration of arcade buildings, it discards intricate and complex decorative elements in favor of a simple and elegant style. It reduces unnecessary carvings and moldings, focusing instead on clean geometric lines and shapes to highlight the structural and formal beauty of the building. For example, in window and door designs, it uses simple window frames and glass partitions, avoiding excessive decorative patterns. As for wall decorations, it can use simple colors or textures as accents, creating a simple yet refined atmosphere. Through this minimalist decorative style, arcade buildings return to their essential functions and forms, showcasing a plain and pure beauty.

The refinement and application of cultural symbols, the arcade buildings carry rich regional cultural connotations. In decorative design, emphasis should be placed on the refinement and application of regional cultural symbols to inherit and promote local culture. Delve into the historical and cultural elements embedded in arcade buildings, such as auspicious patterns in Chinese style and mountain flower designs in Nanyang style. After simplifying and abstracting these cultural symbols, they can be applied to architectural decorative components like lighting fixtures, railings, and signboards. By skillfully using cultural symbols, not only can the cultural recognizability of arcade buildings be enhanced, but they can also add unique cultural charm to the architecture, allowing people to appreciate the beauty of regional culture while admiring the buildings.

4.4. Cultural inheritance strategy

The preservation and recreation of historical memory, Zen aesthetics emphasize respect and the inheritance of tradition. In the renovation of arcade buildings, it is important to focus on preserving and recreating their historical memory. Protecting and restoring architectural components, decorative elements, and spatial layouts with historical value ensures that they truly reflect the historical appearance of arcade buildings. For example, repairing damaged carved doors and windows, pediments, and other decorative elements while retaining the original architectural structure and spatial scale allows people to intuitively experience the historical changes of arcade buildings. At the same time, by setting up cultural history exhibition areas and museums, the development process, cultural connotations, and related historical artifacts and documents of arcade buildings can be showcased, enabling future generations to better understand and inherit the historical memory carried by arcade buildings.

The integration of modern life with traditional culture, while preserving historical and cultural heritage, combines the needs of modern life with traditional culture to endow arcade buildings with new vitality and functions. In terms of functional layout, modern commercial, cultural, and leisure activities such as specialty bookstores, cafes, and art studios are introduced, making arcade buildings an urban public space that integrates cultural experiences and recreational entertainment. At the same time, traditional cultural elements are incorporated into architectural space design, such as hosting traditional folk activities and cultural exhibitions, allowing traditional culture to continue and develop in modern life, achieving an organic fusion of history and the present.

5. Case analysis: Haikou Qilou street renovation project

The renovation project of the arcade district fully draws on the aesthetic concepts of Zen Buddhism, achieving

excellent results. In terms of spatial creation, designers have set up small landscape flower beds on both sides of the arcade corridors, planting local specialty plants such as *Bougainvillea* and banyan trees, infusing the corridors with natural vitality. At the same time, the internal courtyards of some arcade buildings have been renovated, adding water features and rest facilities, creating tranquil and comfortable public spaces inside. By removing unnecessary partition walls, the spaces between adjacent buildings have been connected, enhancing the continuity and transparency of the space, thus creating a serene atmosphere.

In the use of materials, a large number of original blue brick walls and wooden doors and windows have been retained, with damaged parts repaired and replaced to restore their ancient simplicity. At the same time, modern materials such as steel and glass have been used in new public facilities and decorative elements. For example, a landscape pavilion combining steel structure and glass has been set up at the entrance of the block. The simple lines of the steel structure contrast sharply with the transparent quality of the glass, forming a striking contrast with the surrounding blue brick arcade buildings while also blending harmoniously, showcasing the harmonious coexistence of tradition and modernity.

In terms of interior design, a minimalist style is adopted, removing the original intricate decorations and outlining the building with simple geometric lines. For lighting design, traditional Chinese lantern shapes are used, which, after simplification, retain cultural elements while meeting modern aesthetic requirements. Additionally, murals reflecting local history and culture are painted on the building's walls, using simple lines and understated colors to showcase the development of arcade architecture and regional cultural characteristics.

In terms of cultural heritage, a Qilou culture museum has been established within the district, showcasing the historical evolution, architectural features, and related folk culture of Qilou buildings. Traditional folk activities such as dragon and lion dances, opera performances, and others are regularly held, attracting many residents and tourists to participate, making the Qilou area an important venue for inheriting and promoting local culture. Through these renovation measures, the Qilou area has not only regained its former vitality but also become a cultural landmark of the city, achieving an organic combination of historical and cultural value with modern functionality.

6. Conclusion

Zen aesthetics provide unique design ideas and methods for the renovation of arcade buildings. By introducing natural spaces, creating ethereal spaces, using natural materials, fostering a minimalist decorative style, and integrating historical and cultural heritage, these design strategies can effectively address issues such as functional aging, spatial deactivation, and cultural loss in arcade buildings, achieving their sustainable development. In actual renovation processes, it is essential to fully understand the core essence of Zen aesthetics and combine them with the characteristics of arcade buildings and regional cultural features. These design strategies should be applied flexibly to create spaces that are rich in traditional cultural heritage while meeting modern living needs. Additionally, the renovation of arcade buildings is a systematic project that requires joint efforts from the government, designers, residents, and other stakeholders. Enhancing conservation awareness, increasing financial investment, and paying attention to detail are crucial for rejuvenating arcade buildings in urban renewal, making them important carriers for inheriting regional culture and showcasing urban charm.

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