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# Western Style Eastward: The Derivation of Architectural Art and Design in Harbin (1898-1945)

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**Abstract:** Harbin's architectural design is known for its fusion, with Western design providing its outer skeleton and Chinese culture giving it its inner blood. Harbin has attracted the world's attention with its unique architectural design style since the 19th century. From the early Russian and Japanese colonial period, European and Japanese styles were introduced. Harbin's architectural design history has not only witnessed the changes of an era, but also demonstrated the fusion and symbiosis of multiple cultures. In the context of globalisation, how can Chinese art participate in the process of globalisation with a unique Chinese consciousness and visual image, how to face up to the existence of exotic 'transplanted' cultures, and how to incorporate foreign design language symbols into Chinese design methodology? These are the questions that need to be solved urgently. Harbin's architectural design is not only a display of architectural art, but also a microscopic mirror of the progress of human civilisation and cultural exchange. Through in-depth study of the philosophical thinking, cultural interactions and aesthetic concepts behind its design, we can not only have a better glimpse of the cultural concepts of urban landscape, but also have a deeper understanding of the development of human civilisation and the future direction of Chinese architectural design.

**Keywords:** Design history; Harbin; Architecture; Japanese style

## Introduction

The construction of the colonial city of Harbin constitutes a unique pattern of spatial and temporal evolution in the history of architectural design.<sup>[1]</sup> At the end of the 19th century, Russia invaded the northeastern region of China. Influenced by the construction of the Middle East Railway, Harbin was forced to transform from a Chinese frontier village into an international city, attracting immigrants from Russia, Japan, Denmark, Germany, France, Britain, Czechoslovakia, and other countries, and spreading the intertwining of the many cultures they brought with them, allowing a variety of design styles from the Art Nouveau movement, Renaissance architecture, Classical architecture, Eclecticism, Japanese Decoration, and Chinese Baroque architecture to emerge in Harbin. styles of architecture in Harbin.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 1. Pluralistic coupling under the evolution of eclecticism (1920-1930)

Eclecticism is Harbin pluralistic design under the overall innovation of architecture and local inheritance. Eclecticism in the local inheritance of the classical architectural style, but the whole is a renaissance style, baroque art, the formation of a patchwork of diverse architectural forms.<sup>[3]</sup> 1920 Harbin eclectic architecture according to the different modes of integration, can be divided into 'western - western' integration mode and 'Chinese - western' integration mode two types. 'Chinese-Western' fusion mode.

### 1.1 Origin of Architectural Style

Harbin architectural design change as the research object, traces the ancient and modern history of Chinese design, takes the change and dissemination of architectural design culture as the guide, analyses the style characteristics and cultural attributes of Harbin buildings in different periods, explores the cultural reasons behind the modern Harbin architectural design from westernization to gradual nationalization, and analyzes the possible paths for Harbin architectural design to go to the high light again relying on the traditional culture, and I start from the colonial perspective, and climb through the evolution of Harbin design language and diversified architectural cultural genes in the period of 'Russian occupation' and 'Japanese occupation'. The author starts from the colonial perspective, and climbs the evolution of Harbin's design language in the period of Russian Occupation and Japanese Occupation, as well as the diversified architectural cultural genes.<sup>[4]</sup>

### 1.2 Mixture of Western architectural styles

The 'West-West' model refers to the appearance of two or more Western architectural styles on the same building. The Matsuura Bank, located at 120 Central Avenue in Daoli District, is not only a Baroque-style building, but also a masterpiece of art showing the charm of eclecticism. The Matsuura building combines a variety of artistic styles and elements, including the solemnity and order of the classical style,

as well as the freedom and creativity of the romantic style. Male and female portrait columns, varied balconies, flower-carved balustrades, unique window design. These seemingly contradictory and conflicting elements, but in the architect's hands to achieve a harmonious unity, the spirit of eclecticism to the extreme.

The 'Chinese-Western' fusion model uses new Western building materials, but completely refers to the Chinese classical architectural shape of the antique-style buildings blended together. The Daowai district of Harbin is a unique blend of Chinese Baroque architecture derived from the architectural styles of two different cultural regions, the East and the West. <sup>[5]</sup> This area combines the building habits of the northern cold land dwellings, and adopts the four-court plan structure to form a courtyard-style 'circle building'.

In addition, as the relief carvings on the shadow walls and the grey carvings on the eaves and other parts of traditional Chinese architecture are extremely similar to the decorative techniques of relief carvings in Baroque architecture, the similarity of the two design ideas between the East and the West has made it possible to incorporate the decorative techniques of traditional Chinese themes into the detailed decoration of the buildings, which is reflected in the decorative form of Chinese aesthetics or traditional Chinese themes, and the motifs are often made of folklore symbols, blessings, and plant and animal themes to make the details of the buildings more attractive. The motifs often use folk symbolism, blessing meaning of plants and animals to make the architectural details of the building components with the unique flavour of traditional Chinese artefacts. <sup>[6]</sup>

## 2. Flamboyant and refined shapes under the tendency of Art Deco (1931-1945)

Art Deco is the core of Harbin's spatial layout and flow design. 1931, the Japanese imperialists launched the 'September 18th' Incident, and occupied Harbin in 1932, a large number of Japanese immigrants came in, <sup>[7]</sup> living on both sides of the stone road street, lot street, buy and sell street, Touguan street, Xincheng street, and Central street in Daoli district. The Japanese invaders proceeded to plan and implement the Greater Harbin Urban Construction Programme, forcibly buying up privately owned land, and carrying out a second round of transplantation of Harbin's architectural design.

### 2.1 The rise of Japanese style

The period of Japan's Harbin Common Dental Hospital and the Japanese Consul General's residence in Harbin, geometric forms, facade simple, light vein, wall stickers small pieces of yellow and other Japanese decorative style, this decorative techniques and detailing breakthrough in Harbin architectural style of the original tone of the Western-style atmosphere mixed with Eastern flavour, the classical style of the pattern of the incorporation of the modern mood, to the modern architectural style of Harbin Dyeing a diversity of colours, significantly enhance the visual appeal and artistic value of the building. Specifically, this 'Art Deco' tendency of architectural performance is mainly reflected in the combination of simple lines and fine architectural relief, creating a strong sense of verticality and streamlined volume. <sup>[8]</sup>

### 2.2 Unique Japanese Culture

Architects often use convex brick pilasters extending from the bottom to the top of the building, which are full of streamlined lines, but also look simple and rounded. In terms of the decorative treatment of the building's eaves, the Decorated style enriches the visual effect of the eaves through decorative elements such as relief-like floral decorations, abstract geometric shapes, or unique iron elements. It is worth mentioning that the decorative treatment of the wall between the windows of the building is particularly unique, usually decorated with elaborately carved shallow reliefs, and these decorative elements are based on common themes of Art Nouveau.

Such as plants and animals, which not only embodies the refinement of art but also highlights the cultural connotation of the building. In terms of visual effect, it not only maintains the rigour and solemnity of the building, but also emphasises the contrast and coordination between the horizontal and vertical directions in the composition setting, thus shaping a sense of visual stability. At the same time, the richness and fullness of the details are presented through the use of round sculpture modelling, which further enhances the reality of the visual perception, and makes the building present the typical aesthetic characteristics of the 1930s Japanese style. (i.e., Figure 1 or Figure 2)



Figure 1. Former Harbin Kyoritsu Dental Hospital, Japan

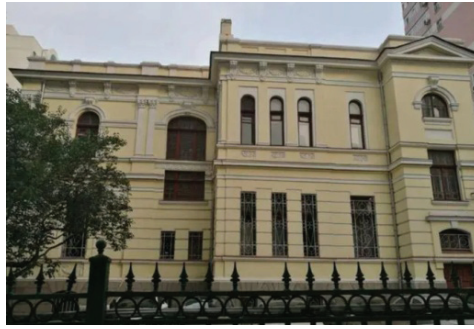


Figure 2. Former Residence of the Consul General of Japan in Harbin

### 3. Conclusions

The core essence of modern architectural art lies in the coherence of its time dimension, and this coherence reflects the unity of ephemeral and co-temporal architectural styles at the academic level. Harbin, a land with 126 years of city concept in Northeast China, has a significant historical stage and cultural integration in the evolution of its architectural design style. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the cultural, political and economic factors behind Harbin's architectural design style through systematic analysis, and to reveal the possible paths for it to move towards a combination of academic research and practical innovation based on its original foundation.

At present, cultural confidence has become an important trend of global cultural development, and national culture and Chinese design are ushering in a golden period of dissemination and development. In this context, Harbin's architectural design should clarify its own academic positioning and practical direction, and strengthen the public's identification with Chinese culture and confidence in Harbin's architectural features. By digging deep into the historical heritage and integrating international advanced design concepts and technical means, Harbin's architectural design is expected to shine even brighter in the new era, making an important contribution to the city's internationalisation and the enhancement of the global influence of Chinese design. At the same time, this will also promote the dissemination and development of national culture on a global scale, contributing Chinese wisdom and strength to the building of a community of human destiny.

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