

## THE SPATIAL LAYOUT FEATURES OF RITUAL ARCHITECTURE IN CHINA DURING THE REPUBLICAN ERA (Gong He Shi Dai)

Yi Li

*Belarusian State University, Niezaliežnasci Avenue, 4, 220030, Minsk,  
Republic of Belarus, strator40@gmail.com*

Author categorizes the spatial patterns of ritual architecture according to the principle of Zuo Miao You Gong (“On the left is the temple and on the right is the god of the land and grain altar”). Then he explores how this pattern continues from the Ming and Qing period to the Republican Era (“Gong He Shi Dai”), reflecting the enduring influence of traditional ritual spatial concepts even in modern times.

**Keywords:** Chinese architecture; ritual architecture; urban planning.

## ПРОСТРАНСТВЕННЫЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ РИТУАЛЬНОЙ АРХИТЕКТУРЫ КИТАЯ В РЕСПУБЛИКАНСКУЮ ЭПОХУ (Гун Хэ Ши Дай)

И Ли

*Белорусский государственный университет, пр. Независимости, 4, 220030,  
г. Минск, Республика Беларусь, strator40@gmail.com*

Автор классифицирует пространственные структуры китайской ритуальной архитектуры в соответствии с принципом Цзо Мяо Ю Гун («слева находится храм, а справа — алтарь бога земли и зерна»). Затем он исследует, как эта модель сохраняется от периода Мин и Цин до республиканской эпохи («Гун Хэ Ши Дай»), отражая устойчивое влияние традиционных ритуальных пространственных концепций даже в наше время.

**Ключевые слова:** Китайская архитектура; ритуальная архитектура; городское планирование.

Following the establishment of New China architecture has taken on a profoundly ideological and symbolic role, functioning not merely as shelter or aesthetic expression but as an active agent in the construction of a new, powerful cultural system: socialist culture. This system is neither a rupture from the past nor a passive imitation of foreign models; rather, it is a dynamic synthesis. It consciously inherits the most outstanding elements of traditional Chinese culture – refined over five millennia – while simultaneously adapting them to meet the ideological, functional, and symbolic demands of contemporary socialist society. In this context, ritual architecture has undergone a profound metamorphosis. It no longer serves solely the emperor or celestial deities but has been reoriented to serve the people, the collective, and the forward march of socialist modernization [3, p. 45–48].

Ritual architecture, in particular, has always functioned as the most comprehensive spatial and symbolic manifestation of the Chinese nation's core beliefs, moral values, and behavioral norms. It is the built environment of ideology – a physical embodiment of cosmic order, political legitimacy, and social harmony. The modern capital, Beijing, stands as the most potent example of this continuity and transformation. Built upon the foundations of the Ming and Qing dynasty imperial capitals, Beijing's urban fabric preserves the essential ritual-spatial logic of its imperial predecessors. The classical arrangement known as *Zuo Miao You Gong* (“On the left is the temple, on the right is the altar of land and grain”) continues to structure the symbolic heart of the city. To the east of the Forbidden City lies the Taimiao (Imperial Ancestral Temple), while to the west rests the Sheji Tan (Altar of Land and Grain). Extending this cosmological alignment, the Southern gate of the imperial city traditionally faced the Altar of Heaven, the Northern gate aligned with the Altar of Earth, and the Eastern and Western gates corresponded to the Altars of the Sun and Moon, respectively. This quadripartite celestial-terrestrial schema reflects the ancient Chinese worldview in which architecture mediates between Heaven, Earth, and Humanity [2, p. 256–273].

The spatial hierarchy of the Ming-Qing capital – with its concentric rings of walls, axial thoroughfares, and ritual nodes – was not demolished in the modern era but selectively renovated and symbolically reinterpreted. The most significant transformation occurred with the southward extension of the central axis and the repositioning of key ritual structures. The Taimiao and Sheji Tan, which since the Qin and Han dynasties had resided just outside the palace city, were symbolically relocated to flank the newly constructed Tiananmen Square. This was not a physical relocation but a conceptual and functional one – a re-signification of space for a new political era. In this reconfiguration, the Taimiao was transformed into the National Museum of Chinese History – an institution no longer dedicated to venerating imperial ancestors but to organizing and narrating historical time for the education and ideological formation of the people. Similarly, the Sheji Tan became the site of the Great Hall of the People – no longer an altar for agrarian deities but a monumental platform for the organization of political space, where the will of the people is theoretically enacted through representative governance. These two institutions now stand as the twin pillars of New China's ritual architecture: one anchoring collective memory in time, the other anchoring collective will in space. The former Taimiao now operates as the Beijing Working People's Cultural Palace – a space for leisure, education, and cultural enrichment for the masses – while the former Sheji Tan has been converted into Zhongshan Park, a public green space named in honor of Sun Yat-sen, symbolizing the transition from imperial to republican to socialist values [1, p. 125–143].

This Zuo Miao You Gong spatial model is far more than an aesthetic or nostalgic gesture. It represents a fundamental transformation in the object of service, the carrier of meaning, and the scope of cultural function. Where ritual architecture once served the emperor as the Son of Heaven, it now serves the people as the sovereign collective. The emergence and proliferation of new forms of ritual architecture – including monuments, memorial halls, and public museums – reflect the ongoing reintegration and evolution of politics and culture within an expanded spatiotemporal framework. These are not static relics but dynamic institutions that evolve with the ideological needs of the era. A particularly sophisticated evolution of this model can be observed in the Yin-Yang spatial pattern that has emerged around Tiananmen Square. The National Museum of Chinese History (representing historical lineage, memory, and the Yin principle of receptivity and continuity) and the Great Hall of the People (representing political action, futurity, and the Yang principle of activity and projection) form a dialectical pair – a ritual-architectural embodiment of balance appropriate to the Gong He Shi Dai (“Era of Republican Harmony”). This Yin-Yang duality is further enriched by the addition of monuments and memorial halls along the central north-south axis – most notably the Monument to the People’s Heroes – which establishes a Zhong He (“Central Harmony”) pattern. This axial monument serves as the unifying, symbolizing the unity of the people across historical epochs and geographical expanses. It is a spatial philosophy: diversity in the horizontal plane, unity in the vertical axis; multiplicity of experience, singularity of purpose [3, p. 95–108].

Perhaps the most ambitious and philosophically rich manifestation of this new ritual architecture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the National Archives of Publications and Culture – a nationwide cultural infrastructure project comprising the central Wenhan Pavilion in Beijing and its regional branches: the Wenji Pavilion in Xi’an, the Wenrun Pavilion in Hangzhou, and the Wenqin Pavilion in Guangzhou. While their primary institutional function is the preservation, cataloging, and display of national cultural resources – manuscripts, publications, digital archives, and artistic versions – their architectural conception and spatial logic are deeply imbued with the spiritual core and ritual sensibilities of Chinese civilization. The placement, orientation, materiality, and symbolic ornamentation of these pavilions consciously echo ancient library-temples and cosmic diagrams, positioning them not merely as storage facilities but as sacred spaces of cultural transmission and civilizational continuity. In this sense, the Wenhan system is perhaps the most sophisticated ritual architecture of the new era: it ritualizes knowledge, sanctifies cultural diversity, and monumentalizes the idea of civilizational dialogue. It is architecture as diplomacy, as philosophy, as futurism [4, p. 314–328].

The influence of these architectural ideas extends far beyond Beijing or monumental projects. They permeate the fabric of everyday public life across China. Government buildings at the provincial, municipal, and county levels increasingly incorporate axial symmetry, hierarchical spatial sequences, and symbolic ornamentation drawn from traditional ritual architecture – not as decorative afterthoughts but as deliberate ideological statements. People’s parks, cultural centers, and even grassroots community offices are designed with an awareness of spatial harmony, public accessibility, and symbolic resonance. The altar has become the plaza; the temple has become the museum; the imperial gate has become the people’s entrance. This is not architectural mimicry, it is ideological translation.

In sum, the evolution of Chinese ritual architecture thus offers a powerful case study in how civilizations can navigate modernity without self-erasure. It demonstrates that tradition is not a cage but a vocabulary; that ideology need not be sterile but can be spatially poetic; that serving the people can be as ritually profound as serving the gods. In preserving the core spatial patterns of Zuo Miao You Gong, in expanding them into Yin-Yang and Zhong He configurations, and in projecting them into future-oriented institutions like the Wenhan Pavilions, Chinese architecture has not merely survived the transition to modernity – it has redefined what modernity can mean. It has shown that architecture can be a medium of ideological continuity, cultural confidence, and civilizational ambition.

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