

**RESEARCH PAPER****A Comparative Study of the Taj Mahal from the Mughal Period and the Forbidden City from the Ming and Qing Dynasties****Wang Chao**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to compare the Taj Mahal of the Mughal period with the Forbidden City of the Ming and Qing dynasties, conducting an in-depth analysis from the perspectives of architectural scale, construction philosophy, craftsmanship, and political symbolism. As a masterpiece of the Mughal dynasty, the Taj Mahal embodies the fusion of diverse cultures and exquisite craftsmanship, symbolizing the rulers' pursuit of love and power. In contrast, the Forbidden City serves as a symbol of feudal imperial authority in China, highlighting the monarch's power through strict spatial planning and symmetrical layout. This paper employs literature review, case study analysis, and comparative analysis to examine the architectural features and cultural implications of both structures, revealing the diversity and richness of architectural art within different historical contexts. It emphasizes the importance of cultural exchange and integration in historical development. Ultimately, the study provides new insights into understanding the relationship between Eastern and Western architecture at the social, political, and cultural levels.

**KEYWORDS** Comparative Study, Forbidden City, Taj Mahal

**Introduction**

The Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City are outstanding representatives of the Mughal and Ming-Qing civilizations, respectively. They are not only iconic structures in their countries but also epitomes of culture, politics, and art. The Taj Mahal, located in Agra, India, was built in the 17th century by Shah Jahan in memory of his wife. It is renowned for its elegant white marble and exquisite decorative arts. Its design integrates Islamic, Indian, and Persian architectural styles, embodying the harmony of multiculturalism.

In contrast, the Forbidden City, located in Beijing, China, served as the imperial palace for the Ming and Qing dynasties for nearly five centuries. As a symbol of feudal monarchy in China, the Forbidden City showcases the authority and absolute status of the monarch through its grand scale, rigorous spatial layout, and rich cultural connotations.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth comparative analysis of the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City from various aspects, including architectural scale, construction philosophy, craftsmanship, and political symbolism. By exploring the architectural art and cultural significance of both structures in different historical contexts, we hope to reveal the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western architecture and their important relationships in social, political, and cultural dimensions. This research not only provides a new perspective for understanding these two architectural styles but also emphasizes the significant role of cultural exchange and integration in historical development.

## **Literature Review**

In the fields of architectural history and cultural studies, the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City, as two significant historical structures, have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Literature mainly focuses on various aspects such as architectural style, cultural connotation, craftsmanship, and political symbolism. The design of the Taj Mahal integrates multiple cultural elements, including Indian, Persian, and Islamic art (Fletcher, 1998; Koch, 2006). Its perfect symmetry and exquisite decorative techniques, such as Pietra Dura inlay, have become key areas of study. In contrast, the Forbidden City exemplifies the standardization and symmetrical beauty of traditional Chinese architecture, emphasizing the concept of "zhonghe" (Liu, 2009; Wang, 2015). Researchers generally agree that the spatial layout of the Forbidden City is closely related to the system of rituals, reflecting the hierarchical notions and authority of the monarch in Chinese culture.

The Taj Mahal is not only a personal memorial for Shah Jahan but also a symbol of India's multiculturalism. Several scholars point out that the interior decoration of the Taj Mahal is predominantly Islamic, reflecting Shah Jahan's religious beliefs and his assertion of power (Cousins, 2014). In contrast, the Forbidden City is a concentrated embodiment of Confucian culture, reflecting the emphasis on imperial authority during the Ming and Qing dynasties and the coexistence of various religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism (Zhao, 2012; Chen, 2017). The diverse elements of belief within its architecture demonstrate the fusion and inclusiveness of ethnic cultures throughout Chinese history.

In terms of craftsmanship, the white marble and gemstone inlay techniques used in the Taj Mahal are significant sources of its unique charm (Baker, 2009). The Forbidden City is renowned for its use of Suzhou "golden bricks" and yellow glazed tiles, with these material choices reflecting technological advancements closely tied to social status at the time (Yuan, 2004). Researchers indicate that the innovations in craftsmanship in these structures reflect the economic foundations and cultural demands of their respective societies. While the Taj Mahal expresses personal emotion, it also serves as a symbol of power. Scholars have analyzed its position in Indian history, suggesting that it is not just a mausoleum but also a representation of national identity (Mitter, 2003). The design of the Forbidden City is more directly related to the exercise of ruling power, with its layout and decoration reflecting the authority of the monarch and concepts of state governance (Zhang, 2008). Numerous studies indicate that the Forbidden City's status as a power center profoundly influenced the political culture of Chinese society.

## **Material and Methods**

This study employs multiple methods to conduct a comparative analysis of the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City, aiming to comprehensively reveal the similarities and differences between the two in terms of architectural style, cultural connotation, craftsmanship, and political symbolism. The research utilizes literature review methods, systematically organizing the background, design philosophy, and cultural significance of both structures by examining relevant academic works, journal articles, and historical documents. This includes an analysis of classic literature in architectural history, art history, and cultural studies, laying a theoretical foundation for subsequent comparisons.

Additionally, case study analysis focuses on specific architectural features and design elements, such as the symmetrical layout and decorative arts of the Taj Mahal, as

well as the spatial planning and traditional cultural symbols of the Forbidden City. Through detailed interpretation of these characteristics, the study reveals the distinctions in design philosophy and cultural expression between the two buildings.

Furthermore, comparative analysis plays a crucial role in systematically comparing the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City in aspects such as architectural scale, construction ideology, craftsmanship, and political symbolism. This approach explores how each structure reflects the values and cultural traits of its respective society within different historical contexts. By identifying similarities and differences through comparison, the study highlights the diversity of architectural art in varying cultural backgrounds.

Through the integrated application of these methods, this research aims to delve deeply into the analysis and comparison of the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City, revealing their unique values and significance within historical, cultural, and social contexts. This multi-faceted research approach not only aids in understanding the cultural connotations of individual buildings but also provides an effective framework for cross-cultural comparative studies.

### **Architectural Scale**

The Taj Mahal, a masterpiece in architectural history, sits on a vast marble platform surrounded by four identical minarets. Its marble walls support a gravity-defying dome, and both the dome and arches are designed with symmetry. Behind the 12-foot thick walls lies the octagonal crypt that encloses the tomb.

Renowned for both its beauty and architectural artistry, the Taj Mahal is also famous for its immense scale and grand design. The overall layout is square, covering approximately 17 hectares. The base of the main structure is a rectangular platform measuring about 186 meters long and 130 meters wide, emphasizing symmetry and harmony in its design. The main building reaches a height of about 73 meters, including its dome, which itself is 35 meters high and approximately 18 meters in diameter. This scale makes the Taj Mahal visually magnificent and awe-inspiring.

The main building, the core of the Taj Mahal, consists of multiple parts. The base is made of red sandstone, providing a strong visual contrast that enhances the white marble appearance of the main structure. Four small domes surround the main building, symbolizing aesthetic symmetry and enhancing the overall height. The main entrance archway, about 30 meters wide, is adorned with exquisite floral and geometric patterns, showcasing the elegance of Mughal architecture.

The dome of the Taj Mahal is its iconic feature, presenting a streamlined design that symbolizes the convergence of heaven and earth. The dome's intricate structure creates a spacious interior with excellent acoustics. An opening at the top allows sunlight to flood in, illuminating the interior and creating a mystical, sacred atmosphere. The decorative details and carvings surrounding the dome display the craftsmen's exceptional skills.

Inside the main building lies the tomb chamber, the final resting place of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. This chamber has a cross-shaped structure, enclosed by marble walls embedded with intricate gemstone patterns, showcasing the exquisite

"pietra dura" technique. In the center rests Mumtaz Mahal's tomb, surrounded by Shah Jahan's tomb, both adorned with lavish carvings and floral decorations.

The area surrounding the Taj Mahal is known as the "Charbagh," a typical Islamic garden divided into four sections by water channels, symbolizing the four rivers of paradise. The garden features fountains and pools, with water reflections enhancing the building's splendor. The symmetry and orderly layout of the garden complement the main structure, creating a harmonious whole.

The choice of materials also plays a crucial role in the scale of the Taj Mahal. The main building is constructed from white marble, which changes color under different lighting conditions, offering various aesthetic experiences at different times and angles. The use of red sandstone, gemstones, and other decorative materials contributes to the Taj Mahal's grand exterior.

Construction of the Taj Mahal began in 1632 and lasted for 22 years, employing around 20,000 craftsmen and laborers, showcasing the Mughal Empire's formidable strength and advanced technology. The craftsmen utilized cutting-edge construction techniques to ensure the building's stability and durability, employing complex measurement and positioning tools to achieve symmetry and intricate details.

Overall, the Taj Mahal's architectural scale is both grand and exquisite, perfectly blending Islamic architectural styles with Indian traditional elements. Its magnificent appearance, fine craftsmanship, and rich cultural connotations make it a dazzling jewel in the history of world architecture. More than a monument to love, the Taj Mahal represents the pinnacle of architectural art and technology, continuing to attract countless visitors who come to admire and marvel at its beauty.

The Forbidden City, a magnificent ancient architectural complex from the Ming and Qing dynasties, is the largest and best-preserved ancient palace complex in China, covering an area of 720,000 square meters and comprising over a thousand wooden structures. Its diverse architectural forms and complete building styles make the Forbidden City an encyclopedia of ancient Chinese official architecture, reflecting the remarkable characteristics of Chinese civilization.

The Forbidden City is rectangular, with uniquely designed corner towers and surrounded by a protective moat. The layout is defined by the Meridian Gate at the front and the Xuanwu Gate at the back, extending 960 meters from north to south. The West Flower Gate is located to the west, while the East Flower Gate is to the east, giving it a width of 760 meters.

The layout of the Forbidden City is based on the principles found in texts like the "Book of Rites" and the "Craftsman's Record," primarily embodying the "Five Gates, Three Halls, and Nine Layers of Heaven" concept and the "Left Ancestor, Right Altar" system. The "Five Gates" refer to the Da Ming Gate (later known as Da Qing Gate), the Chengtian Gate (Tiananmen), the Duan Gate, the Meridian Gate, and the Feng Tian Gate (later changed to Huangji Gate, now known as Taihe Gate). The "Three Halls" include the Outer Hall (the Meridian Gate), which serves as the main entrance and the location for ceremonies; the Middle Hall, which comprises the three main palaces – Fengtian (later Huangji, now Taihe), Huagai (later Zhongji, now Zhonghe), and Jingshen (later

Jianji, now Baohui); and the Inner Hall, known as the Inner Court, which consists of the Qianqing Palace, the Jiao Tai Palace, and the Kunming Palace.

These five gates and three halls are aligned along a central axis, beginning at the Da Ming Gate and extending to the Qianqing Palace, the emperor's daily residence, passing through the five gates and three great halls. Beyond the three great halls lies the main entrance to the Inner Court, the Qianqing Gate, leading into the Qianqing Palace, forming a structure known as the "Nine Layers of Heaven."

Along this main axis, there are additional groups of buildings on either side. For example, the Inner Court has the East and West Six Palaces for living quarters, while the Wenhui and Wuying Palaces are located to the left and right of the Taihe Hall. The "Left Ancestor, Right Altar" system refers to the Imperial Ancestral Temple (now the Labor People's Cultural Palace) and the Altar of the Earth and Grain (now Zhongshan Park).



Figure 1: A panoramic aerial view of the Forbidden City. Source: \*The Implied Political Meaning of the Architecture of the Forbidden City\*.

The Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City are outstanding representatives of ancient Indian and Chinese architecture, each with its unique scale, design, and cultural background.

In terms of overall size, the Taj Mahal covers approximately 17 hectares (about 0.17 square kilometers) and has a square layout. The base of the main building measures about 186 meters in length and 130 meters in width, with a total height of approximately 73 meters, including a dome that reaches 35 meters in height and has a diameter of about 18 meters.

In contrast, the Forbidden City spans around 720,000 square meters (approximately 72 hectares) and is the largest and best-preserved ancient palace complex in China. It has a rectangular shape, measuring about 960 meters in length from north to south and about 760 meters in width from east to west, containing over a thousand wooden structures.

Regarding layout and structure, the Taj Mahal features a symmetrical and harmonious design, surrounded by four identical minarets, creating a cohesive architectural ensemble. The main entrance archway is about 30 meters wide, and the base is made of red sandstone, enhancing the beauty of the white marble.

The Forbidden City is primarily designed based on the concepts of "Five Gates, Three Halls, and Nine Layers" and "Left Ancestor, Right Altar," emphasizing axial symmetry. It includes five main gates (such as the Meridian Gate and the Heavenly Gate) and three ceremonial halls (the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Hall of Central Harmony, and the Hall of Preserving Harmony), showcasing complex spatial hierarchies.

In terms of architectural features, the Taj Mahal is constructed of marble, with walls approximately 12 feet thick, enclosing an octagonal burial chamber that houses the tombs of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. Its streamlined dome design allows sunlight to filter through a central opening, creating a mystical atmosphere, with interiors adorned with gemstones and exquisite carvings.

The Forbidden City boasts a rich variety of architectural types and wooden structures, reflecting the architectural characteristics of Chinese civilization. Each building serves a unique function and carries symbolic significance, such as the Hall of Supreme Harmony, where significant ceremonies were held.

Culturally and historically, the Taj Mahal was built between 1632 and 1653, embodying the Mughal Empire's pursuit of art and culture and serving as a tribute to love. As a model of Islamic architecture, it combines Persian, Indian, and Islamic styles.

The Forbidden City, constructed during the Ming Dynasty (1406-1420), served as the imperial palace for both the Ming and Qing dynasties, symbolizing imperial power and feudal rituals. Its design and layout are heavily influenced by Confucian ideals, emphasizing hierarchy and axial symmetry.

Overall, the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City each showcase distinct characteristics in architectural scale, layout, structure, and cultural background. The Taj Mahal is renowned for its exquisite craftsmanship and symmetrical beauty, suitable for expressing personal emotions, while the Forbidden City demonstrates national authority and the symbolism of governance through its grand scale and complex layout. Both have become exemplary models of architectural art within their respective cultural and historical contexts, continuing to attract visitors and researchers from around the world.

### **Construction Philosophy**

The Taj Mahal, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, is a mausoleum built by Shah Jahan, the fifth emperor of the Mughal dynasty, in memory of his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Construction began in 1631 after Mumtaz Mahal's death and took 22 years, involving over 20,000 workers, culminating in its completion in 1653. It embodies the essence of Mughal architecture and represents the spirit and soul of the Mughal Empire.

The creation of the Taj Mahal is also linked to the enlightened religious and cultural policies pursued by the Mughals as foreign rulers. The Mughal emperors advocated tolerance among different religious sects and the harmonious coexistence of diverse cultures, which facilitated the development of all forms of art, including architecture. Experts studying the art of the Taj Mahal suggest that it is a synthesis of



multiple artistic influences and an innovative work of its time. It resembles Indian architecture yet differs from it, appears similar to Persian architecture but is not entirely Persian, and embodies Islamic styles while not being exclusively Islamic. Some European scholars even posit that the designer was Italian. Additionally, Mongolian artists claim that the Taj Mahal's rounded dome must have been inspired by the Mongolian yurt, known for its expansive sky.

This "similar yet different" quality reflects the idea expressed by the Chinese artist Qi Baishi about art being "like yet unlike." Overly resembling can lead to kitsch, while being too different may deceive; true brilliance lies in a balance of both. In artistic terms, the Taj Mahal combines the grandeur of Indian art with the delicate features of Islamic Arabic art and the ethereal simplicity of Persian art. It is a product of the fusion and innovation of various artistic styles, resulting from the collision of diverse cultures. The Taj Mahal stands as a monumental testament to the achievements of Indian architecture, leaving an indelible mark on the history of world architecture.

Just as biodiversity encourages distant hybridization and genetic rejuvenation, art also thrives on diversity. Only through the combination of different influences can truly novel and vibrant works be created; inbreeding results in stagnation and regression. The greatness of the Taj Mahal lies in its amalgamation of multiple traditions. It belongs to the Mughals, to India, and to the world and humanity as a whole.



Figure 2: The Forbidden City Source:QSTHEORY.CN

Despite the differences in historical background, cultural values, and construction philosophies, both the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City profoundly reflect the religious, philosophical, and aesthetic pursuits of their respective societies.

In terms of cultural background and religious influence, the Taj Mahal was built in the 17th century by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. It symbolizes love and remembrance, with its design incorporating various cultural elements that showcase characteristics of Islamic, Persian, and Indian traditional arts. This multicultural fusion is closely related to the Mughal Empire's policy of religious tolerance, which promoted harmonious coexistence among different religions and cultures, providing fertile ground for artistic innovation.

The Forbidden City, as the imperial palace of the Ming and Qing dynasties, was deeply influenced by Confucian thought. Its design and layout emphasize hierarchical structure, ritual norms, and cosmic principles, highlighting the majesty of imperial power. The construction of the Forbidden City inherited the traditions of ancient city planning, particularly the "Zhonghe" (harmony) concept closely linked to agricultural civilization, reflecting respect for harmony, order, and natural laws.

In terms of social function and symbolic significance, the Taj Mahal serves as a tomb, symbolizing not only personal emotion but also representing Mughal culture and its pursuit of beauty and love. It attracts countless visitors and art enthusiasts, becoming a symbol of global cultural heritage that reflects humanity's eternal longing for love.

Conversely, the Forbidden City functions as a political, ceremonial, and residential center, embodying the power hub of feudal Chinese society. It is not only a symbol of imperial authority but also carries profound cultural and historical significance, showcasing the essence of traditional Chinese culture.

Although the construction philosophies of the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City differ in many ways, both embody their cultures' pursuit of beauty, harmony, and authority. The Taj Mahal showcases the universality of human emotions through its multicultural fusion, while the Forbidden City emphasizes the importance of social order and rituals through its meticulous layout and symbolic design. Their existence represents not only the markers of their respective civilizations but also a shared cultural heritage of humanity, worthy of in-depth study and appreciation.

### **Craftsmanship and Technology**

The Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City are two historically significant architectural landmarks that not only represent the architectural achievements of their respective countries but also reflect the craftsmanship and artistic styles influenced by different cultural backgrounds.

In terms of material selection, the Taj Mahal primarily uses white marble sourced from Rajasthan, India. This material is favored for its delicate texture and luster, as well as its durability, allowing the building to display varying shades under different lighting. Red sandstone is also used, creating a striking contrast with the white marble and enhancing the visual effect.

For decoration, artisans employed Pietra Dura techniques, embedding precious stones like turquoise, jade, and agate into the marble surface to create vivid floral and geometric patterns. The walls of the Forbidden City are entirely clad in bricks, ensuring the durability and weather resistance of the structure, overcoming the weaknesses of the previous earthen walls. The interior features "golden bricks" produced using complex techniques, showcasing the advanced brick-making skills of the Ming Dynasty.

The roofs of the Forbidden City prominently feature yellow glazed tiles, which not only add visual grandeur but also differentiate it from earlier architectural styles, resulting in a unique design. Technically, the Taj Mahal utilizes advanced dome and column structures that allow the building to bear significant weight while maintaining stability. The central dome rises to 35 meters with a diameter of 18 meters, presenting a streamlined beauty. During construction, artisans employed complex measuring tools to ensure symmetry and meticulous detail, resulting in perfect harmony across the entire structure.



The Forbidden City inherits the traditional Chinese palace construction philosophy, emphasizing the "front hall and rear chambers" and the "three entrances and five gates" structure, creating a layout that is both rigorous and layered. Architecturally, it uses a wooden structural system, employing traditional techniques such as bracket sets and purlins, enhancing the building's elasticity and stability.

In terms of decorative art, every surface of the Taj Mahal is intricately carved, displaying complex patterns and designs, particularly in the lacework of doors and windows, allowing light to filter through and create unique vistas. The gem inlays and carved patterns on the walls complement each other, fostering a luxurious and sacred atmosphere that showcases the artisans' exceptional skills. The Forbidden City, on the other hand, incorporates extensive painting and carving, with dragon motifs on rooftops and floral patterns on doors and windows, embodying cultural symbols and showcasing the essence of traditional art.

Regarding garden design, the gardens surrounding the Taj Mahal are divided into four parts, symbolizing the four gardens of paradise in Islamic horticultural philosophy, emphasizing the symbolic significance of water and natural harmony. The pools and fountains in the gardens not only add a sense of dynamism but also enhance the grandeur of the architecture through reflective effects, creating a tranquil ambiance.

In contrast, the Forbidden City's garden design integrates the style of southern Jiangnan gardens, exemplified by the Jianfu Palace Garden and Qianlong Garden, showcasing a perfect blend of natural and artificial landscapes. The buildings within these gardens complement the natural scenery, demonstrating the ancient Chinese pursuit of garden art, highlighting the richness and depth of culture.

The comparison between the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City reveals two distinct cultural traditions in craftsmanship and technique. The Taj Mahal, with its exquisite decorations, clever use of materials, and advanced architectural technology, exemplifies the fusion and innovation of Indian and Islamic cultures. The Forbidden City, through its strict spatial layout, traditional building techniques, and symbolic decorations, reflects the profound heritage and harmonious aesthetics of Chinese civilization. Both landmarks hold significant positions in their respective cultures and contribute invaluable legacies to global architectural art.

### **The Political and Cultural Connotations Reflected in Architectural Complexes**

The Taj Mahal is a magnificent contribution of the Mughal Empire to world architecture. In the 1630s, historian Muhammad Amin Kazvini remarked:

"A towering dome and a grand structure have been erected—under this vast blue sky, the eyes of the ages have never seen a wonder quite like it, and the ears of time have never heard of such marvels in any past era... It will become a masterpiece for the future, evoking awe in all of humanity."

Indian civilization is characterized by its rich religious diversity, comprising different ethnic groups and languages with varied religious beliefs, which together have created the remarkable Indian culture. The identity of the Indian people is undoubtedly built upon a multicultural framework. Therefore, the Taj Mahal has long been regarded as the most representative cultural sanctuary of India (Mei, 2018).

The Taj Mahal is far more than a symbol of lost love; it is also a manifestation of the king's personal power. Unlike the red sandstone commonly used for tombs in the

Mughal Empire, the Taj Mahal is made of rare and expensive pure white marble, adorned with numerous gemstones. This choice reflects the fact that in Hinduism, white stone structures are often associated with the homes of high-ranking priests. The entirely white Taj Mahal serves, to some extent, as Shah Jahan's direct declaration to the local populace—asserting his divinely ordained status as ruler.

Inside the Taj Mahal, you won't find any motifs related to Hinduism. Instead, the architecture is rich with Islamic patterns and symbols that reflect Shah Jahan's distinct religious beliefs:

The surrounding minarets are commonly found in Middle Eastern mosques; the pointed arches on the windows and doors are reminiscent of ancient Iraqi design; and the intricate wall patterns are, in fact, verses from the Quran inscribed in their entirety.

Only at the pinnacle of the Taj Mahal can one catch a glimpse of a Hindu temple's urn-shaped symbol, signifying auspiciousness.

The octagonal star inlaid in the tomb's floor expands into an infinitely repeating geometric pattern, representing the infinite essence of God. The most magnificent dome, which reaches nearly half the total height of the structure, perfectly conveys to visitors the idea of eternal paradise.

The Forbidden City is a quintessential example of a unified multi-ethnic nation. In addition to Han architecture, it features buildings with distinct characteristics from other ethnic groups. For instance, the renovations of the Palace of Earthly Tranquility (Kunning Palace) exemplify the early Qing dynasty's blend of Manchu and Han cultures. This is evident in the relocation of the main gate from the center to the east, the "pocket room" layout inside, and the "swastika kang" design in the western wing, which reflects typical Manchu architectural customs.

Another notable structure is the Yuhua Pavilion, which represents a harmonious fusion of Han and Tibetan architectural styles, making it one of the most iconic Tibetan Buddhist buildings within the palace. Many of the plaques on the doors and gates throughout the palace are inscribed in both Manchu and Han languages, and some inscriptions are even in Manchu, Mongolian, and Chinese.

The Forbidden City embodies a rich integration of diverse cultures centered around Confucianism, showcasing a harmonious coexistence of various religious beliefs in China. Besides the main palatial buildings, it also contains over 40 Buddhist structures, including the Yuhua Pavilion, Baohua Hall, Baoxiang Pavilion, Jiyun Pavilion, Fari Hall, and Fanhua Pavilion; Taoist structures such as the Qinan Hall and Xuankong Hall; and temples reflecting folk beliefs and the original religious practices of the Manchu people, such as the City God Temple and Kunning Palace.

The Forbidden City stands as a representative of traditional Chinese palace architecture while also serving as a stage for the exchange and fusion of architectural techniques from both China and abroad. For example, the Bathing Virtue Hall in the northwest of the Wuying Hall features a typical Central Asian Arab-style dome; the Qianlong Garden's Juanqin Studio includes a large panoramic painting that combines Western perspective techniques with traditional Chinese painting, immersing viewers in a dreamlike reality; and in the courtyard of the Yanxi Palace, remnants of a Western "Crystal Palace"-style building with modern steel structures, known as Lingzhao Xuan, are preserved.

The design of the Forbidden City centers on emphasizing the power of the emperor, prioritizing the representation of his authority over practical usage. The architecture conveys a solemn grandeur that underscores the supremacy of the ruler, making this theme central to the structure. The emperor is the core of the autocratic regime, and this core is located within the Inner Court. Consequently, the architectural layout focuses on the three main halls within the palace, particularly the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihe Hall), which is both the center of the palace and its highest point.

Taihe Hall is the largest surviving palace structure in China, measuring 11 bays wide, 66 meters long, and 44 meters deep, serving as the venue for grand ceremonies and the highest-ranking building within the imperial city. It features a triple-tiered platform and a heavily layered roof, with an interior area of 2,370 square meters, making it unparalleled in both architectural form and scale among ancient buildings (Ru, et al., 2005).

The coffered ceiling, also known as dragon well, exquisite well, square well, or round well, is commonly found at the tops of palaces, altars, and Buddhist halls. It represents one of the most important aspects of interior decoration in ancient Chinese architecture and can be considered the essence of this architectural style. The introduction of coffered ceilings transformed the spatial layout of interiors, raising the central part of the ceiling into a dome-like shape, which created a distinctive decorative form. Researchers believe that it plays a crucial role in the artistic effects of interior decoration (Zhu, 2013). The coffered ceiling of the Hall of Supreme Harmony highlights the central position of imperial power and the supremacy of the monarchy in traditional society. This hall, where the emperor held grand ceremonies, is the central structure of the Forbidden City, commonly known as the Golden Throne Hall, and is considered the "first hall" of ancient Chinese architecture. As the central figure in governing the nation, the emperor naturally occupies the central position in this grand hall, and every element—from the coffered ceiling to the columns and furnishings—is arranged to emphasize this "center" (Zhang&Hai, 2004). In other words, the prominence of the coffered ceiling in underscoring the centrality of imperial power and the supremacy of the monarchy carries political and cultural significance that clearly outweighs its decorative role in architecture.

The Hall of Supreme Harmony features golden dragons and seal motifs to symbolize the supreme status of the "True Dragon Son of Heaven." (Zhang&Hai, 2004) The Hall of Supreme Harmony is the largest structure in the entire Forbidden City, featuring the highest-grade double-eaved roof, top-tier golden dragon and seal motifs, and exquisitely crafted lattice doors and windows. This palace, which symbolizes feudal imperial power, stands unparalleled in terms of its position, scale, and decoration, fully embodying the idea of centralizing and prioritizing imperial authority (Lou, 1997). It can be said that every architectural detail expresses the concept of the supremacy of imperial power, clearly conveying its political significance.

The modular planning of palace architecture symbolizes the relationship between the family and the state, highlighting the central position of imperial power within this relationship. This is particularly evident in the architectural design of the Forbidden City, especially through the use of the numbers three, five, and nine. The "Shuowen Jiezi" states: "Three is a number name. It represents the way of heaven, earth, and humanity." The "I Ching" mentions, "Nine Five: The flying dragon is in the sky; it benefits a great man." The "Image" states: "The flying dragon in the sky indicates that a noble person achieves great things." This essentially means that the hexagram representing nine and

five indicates that the esteemed gentleman will have a successful and prosperous life, attaining a position of governance that ensures political stability and peace.

In later interpretations, "nine five" became a symbol of the emperor's esteemed position, referred to as "the noble position of nine five." Thus, these two numbers became exclusive symbols of imperial power. Throughout the Forbidden City, the careful use of the numbers five and nine reflects not only the emperor's pride in his "noble position" but also the rulers' hopes for a harmonious and prosperous state. This carries significant political and cultural implications, expressing certain political values and meanings.

The Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City are not only architectural marvels but also significant embodiments of their respective political cultures and symbols of power. Each exhibits unique design elements, material choices, decorative styles, and cultural meanings, reflecting different historical contexts and cultural identities.

### **Reflection of Multiculturalism**

The architectural style of the Taj Mahal merges various cultural elements, showcasing both Islamic architectural characteristics and symbols of traditional Indian culture. While its exterior reflects Islamic religious beliefs, the intricate decorations within and outside cleverly highlight India's diversity and complexity. Shah Jahan's choice of precious white marble symbolizes his power and status, while the geometric patterns and quotations from the Quran emphasize its close ties to Islamic culture. The Taj Mahal stands not only as a symbol of personal grief but also as a celebration of multicultural identity, representing Indian culture.

The Forbidden City exemplifies the fusion of Han and other ethnic cultures, particularly during the Qing Dynasty. Its architectural design integrates elements from Manchu and Tibetan cultures, as seen in the renovations of the Kun Ning Palace, which reflect a blend of Han and Manchu traditions. In addition to Han architecture, the Forbidden City houses numerous Buddhist and Daoist structures, showcasing the harmonious coexistence of various religious beliefs in China. The use of bilingual Manchu and Han inscriptions on palace plaques further demonstrates the ruling class's emphasis on and inclusivity of multiculturalism.

### **Symbols of Power**

The scale and material choices of the Taj Mahal directly manifest Shah Jahan's power status. The use of white marble and precious gemstones highlights its luxury and sanctity, symbolizing the divine and legitimate nature of royal authority. The absence of Hindu-related decorations emphasizes its Islamic faith, reflecting the ruler's religious identity and political stance. In this sense, the Taj Mahal serves not only as a personal memorial but also as a declaration of Shah Jahan's consolidated power.

The design philosophy of the Forbidden City centers on imperial authority, with the layout focusing on the Hall of Supreme Harmony and other main structures, illustrating the supreme power of the emperor. The Hall of Supreme Harmony serves not only as a venue for significant ceremonies but also as the core symbol of imperial power. The architectural planning using the symbolism of "nine five" reinforces the emperor's status, highlighting the feudal society's reverence for royal authority.

### **Architectural Details and Cultural Significance**

The dome and geometric patterns of the Taj Mahal convey a pursuit of perfection and eternity, symbolizing the infinite nature of the divine. Its decorative arts, with complex carvings and gemstone inlays, enhance the building's aesthetic appeal and reflect the era's understanding of beauty and respect for religious faith. The design's symmetry and harmony embody the essence of Islamic garden culture, creating a tranquil and sacred atmosphere that has become a marker of Indian identity.

The coffered ceiling design and decorative details of the Forbidden City illustrate the unique artistic value of ancient Chinese architecture. The golden dragons and decorative paintings in the Hall of Supreme Harmony emphasize the central position of imperial authority and reflect the traditional society's veneration and deification of the emperor. Every detail in the design embodies profound cultural significance, with the interior arrangements and layouts reinforcing the concept of supreme authority and the sanctity of the monarch.

By comparing the architectural complexes and their political cultural connotations of the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City, we see that, despite their different historical and cultural backgrounds, both uniquely embody the fusion of multiculturalism and the symbolism of power. The Taj Mahal commemorates diversity and personal emotion, while the Forbidden City serves as a culmination of power and traditional culture. These structures not only symbolize their respective nations' cultures but also provide significant historical lessons and cultural reflections for future generations.

## **Conclusion**

The Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City stand as remarkable architectural representations from the Mughal and Ming-Qing periods, showcasing the unique charm and rich historical significance of their respective cultures. The Taj Mahal is not only a heartfelt tribute by Shah Jahan to his late wife but also a symbol of the fusion of India's multiculturalism, reflecting the exquisite craftsmanship of Islamic architecture and a profound pursuit of beauty. Its clever integration of design and decoration reveals a vibrant cultural identity.

In contrast, the Forbidden City epitomizes the power dynamics and traditional culture of feudal China. Through its meticulous layout and opulent decorations, it emphasizes the supremacy of imperial authority, highlighting the dominance of Confucian culture and the harmonious coexistence of various ethnic groups. As a crucial historical political center, every detail within the Forbidden City conveys respect and reverence for the monarch's authority.

Overall, both the Taj Mahal and the Forbidden City are not only masterpieces of architectural art but also vital carriers of their respective cultures and histories. They profoundly influence subsequent understandings of architecture, art, and political culture. Throughout history, they have become cultural symbols for their nations, attracting countless visitors and scholars, and bearing witness to the diversity and brilliance of human civilization.

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