



Research on the Architectural Color Artistic Features of Da Zhao Temple in Hohhot

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Abstract: This study examines the intricate color palette and artistic characteristics of the Da Zhao Temple, a prominent architectural landmark in Inner Mongolia. Through a detailed analysis of its exterior walls, decorative elements, and rooftop features, the study elucidates the nuanced interplay of colors, influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and local ethnic traditions. Each element reflects a fusion of Han, Mongolian, and Tibetan cultural influences, from the vibrant hues adorning the temple's exterior to the elaborate rooftop decorations. Furthermore, the research delves into the artistry of the temple's exterior eaves paintings, showcasing a blend of Tibetan Buddhist motifs, Qing Dynasty-style paintings, and indigenous Mongolian art. Additionally, the study assesses the current state of the temple's surroundings, highlighting the need for improved color management and preservation efforts to maintain the historical and cultural integrity of the site. The study proposes strategies to integrate the temple's rich color palette into the broader urban landscape through comprehensive color planning and community engagement initiatives while preserving its distinct cultural identity.

Keywords: Da Zhao Temple, architectural color palette, Tibetan Buddhism, cultural fusion, urban landscape integration.

1. Introduction:

Hohhot is the birthplace of Tibetan Buddhism in the Mongolian region, known not only as the capital of grassland Buddhism but also as the "City of Temples." Since the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there has been large-scale population migration from the Central Plains to Inner Mongolia, where multiple ethnic groups have lived together for generations, fostering cultural development characterized by mutual influence and mutual assistance between grassland and Central Plains cultures, among others. Throughout its development, the influence of regional characteristics and religious concepts has led to the formation of distinctive architectural forms and color schemes at Da Zhao Temple. Located in the core protection zone of the historical and cultural block, Da Zhao Temple is an important part of the block, and its protection and development must fully consider the cultural concepts and artistic features of its color ([Ji et al., 2020](#)).

2. The main idea influencing the architectural colors of Dazhao Temple

In Tibetan Buddhism, the analysis and refinement of architectural forms, architectural construction, and architectural colors are often conducted through Feng Shui geomancy. Most of the architectural forms of Da Zhao Temple are Han-style, with the central hall following the "seven halls of Ganlan" layout. In traditional Chinese concepts, things in the void and spiritual aspects are considered "latent matter" according to human body science, and the qi of the activity area of the human body is yang. Therefore, the temple seeks balance between yin and yang through the central sacrificial offerings and the residences of monks on the left and right sides. In terms of architectural construction, the size of the architectural volume is also closely related to yin and yang. An excessively large or tall architectural volume has a yin nature, so buildings housing Buddha statues are relatively tall, while the houses where monks live are relatively small, thereby affecting the presentation of the architectural color area. Additionally, from the roof to the platform, the five elements and five colors of Feng Shui consciousness are integrated into it. The gold color of the roof tiles and the blue-green

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color of the eaves paintings of Da Zhao Temple all reflect the protection of the building through the implied meaning of fire prevention in the mutual generation and mutual restraint of the five elements and five colors.

3. Overview of the architectural colors and artistic value of Dazhao Temple

The architecture of Da Zhao Temple is a product of the integration of religion, local culture, and population migration, and it possesses a unique character. Therefore, the architectural color of Da Zhao Temple has rich cultural connotations and artistic value. Tibetan Buddhism was introduced into the Mongolian region three times, colliding with the shamanism believed by the Mongolian people. The integration and replacement of the two color traditions formed a five-color system with regional characteristics composed of white, yellow, red, blue, and green. These five colors all originate in direct worship of nature, each with its meaning: white symbolizes purity and nobility; yellow symbolizes nobility and preciousness; red symbolizes protection; blue symbolizes wisdom; and green symbolizes achievement. Subsequently, with the arrival of immigrants during the Qing Dynasty, the use of building materials was updated. The introduction of commonly used blue bricks from the Central Plains as building materials blended with the regional five colors, forming a unique color combination.

Regarding the artistic value of the architectural color of Da Zhao Temple, it mainly reflects the analysis and understanding of Tibetan Buddhist culture under long-term cultural influence and the unique historical and geographical environment of the Mongolian ethnic group, combined with the local ethnic group's understanding and exploration of beauty. After historical sedimentation, it has discovered an aesthetic taste that aligns with the characteristics of the local ethnic group, namely the understanding and expression of architectural color art.

Using the NCS color system and the current architectural development status of Da Zhao Temple, attempts have been made to analyze its artistic features, including the main facade of the building, architectural details, and exterior eave paintings.

4. Color of the main interface of the building and overall color sense of Da Zhao Temple architecture

The architectural color of Da Zhao Temple completely follows the regional five-color system, from top to bottom, from the roof to the wall, reflecting the unique color sense and artistic features of Da Zhao architecture.

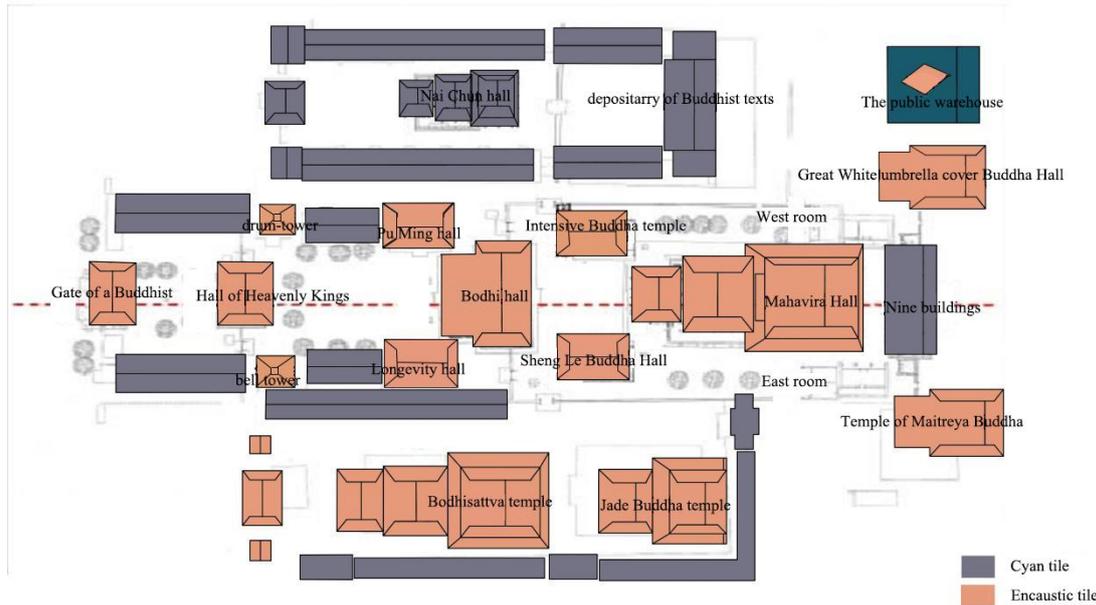
4.1 Roof color

The image of the roof is one of the important factors affecting the shape of ancient Chinese single buildings. In addition to its functional use as a wind and rain shelter, the roof shape will also convey symbolic meanings and aesthetic elements through materials and colors. Influenced by Tibet, Mongolia, and the Central Plains, Da Zhao architecture features various roof shapes. For example, the mountain gate, Tianwang Hall, Puming Buddha Hall, and Changshou Buddha Hall all have gable roofs; the front hall of the Bodhi Buddha Hall has a rolled awning roof, and the rear hall has a gable roof; the Densat Buddha Hall and the Jiujian Building Tibetan Scripture Pavilion have a hard gable roof; and the Daxiong Treasure Hall is a combination of gable roof and Tibetan-style flat roof. The traditional Tibetan architectural style gives people a rough, atmospheric feeling, while Han-style architecture, with its upwardly sloping eaves, makes the building appear light and agile. The Tibetan Buddhist temple architecture in the Mongolian region ingeniously combines the characteristics of both Tibetan-style flat roofs and Han-style roofs, forming a unique architectural art style in Inner Mongolia ([Lu, 2018](#)).

The roof's material determines its color. In terms of material selection, due to its special geographical location, the choice of building materials is also influenced by Central Plains culture, mainly including tiles and glazed bricks. Blue tiles are the most common roof material in Han-style architecture, and blue tiles are used for the roofs of almost all buildings in Da Zhao Temple except for the main halls. Glazed tiles are sturdy, bright in color, and glossy. As building decoration materials, they can add magnificence and color to buildings, making them widely used. From the plan, it can be seen that a large amount of yellow is used on the roofs of buildings on the central axis. Yellow is dominant in the color of the roofs of Da Zhao buildings, accounting for more than 70% of the overall building area, according to subjective visual analysis. Yellow, as the color with the highest saturation after white, has extremely high radiation and chroma, evoking a solemn, sacred feeling in visitors and aligning with the symbolic connotations of religious culture. The roofs on both sides of the central axis are



gray for functional reasons related to the main body of the building. The color composition of the roofs of Da Zhao Temple is interspersed with yellow and gray.



Dazhao Temple top surface color schematic diagram

Figure 3-1: Schematic Diagram of Roof Colors of the Dazhao Temple, drawn by the author

The roofs of the buildings in Da Zhao Temple are staggered in height, with yellow and gray colors complementing each other to form a clear hierarchy and a strictly ordered color sequence, thereby influencing and enriching the architecture's overall image.

4.2 Wall Color

Wall color accounts for a large proportion of the overall architectural image and plays an important role in creating atmosphere. Wall color is not influenced by wall formality, but the wall material is an important factor affecting it. Da Zhao Temple uses different forms and materials for the outer walls of the buildings and individual buildings, thus creating different artistic effects.

The outer walls of Da Zhao Temple use the most common wall construction method, resulting in uniform, smooth walls that are easy to paint. The walls are mostly red, with the roof parts and parapets in gray, presenting a gray-red-gray color form from top to bottom.

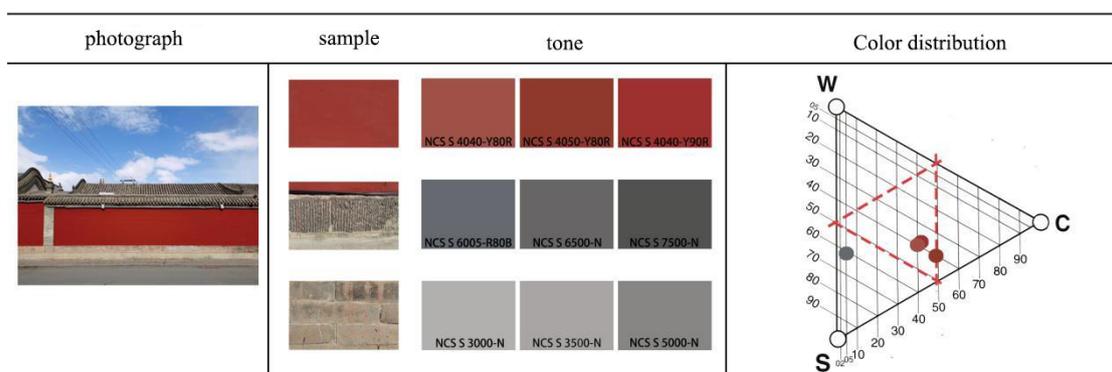


Figure 3-2: NCS Analysis of Wall Colors, Self-drawn by the author

From the distribution of colors on the outer walls of Da Zhao Temple, it can be seen that red is the main color, located in the region of medium brightness and medium chroma (4040, 4050), while most of the roofs and parapets are in the achromatic gray series (N).

Taking the Daxiong Treasure Hall as an example of the color of individual building walls, the Daxiong Treasure Hall, as the most representative building of the Han-Tibetan mixed style, uses blue bricks to mimic the Tibetan architectural style of segmented walls. Above the walls, barley grass is planted, which is the same as the construction form of temple buildings in the Tibetan region. The three openings in the middle of the building are all painted red, while the openings on the left and right sides retain the original blue brick material.

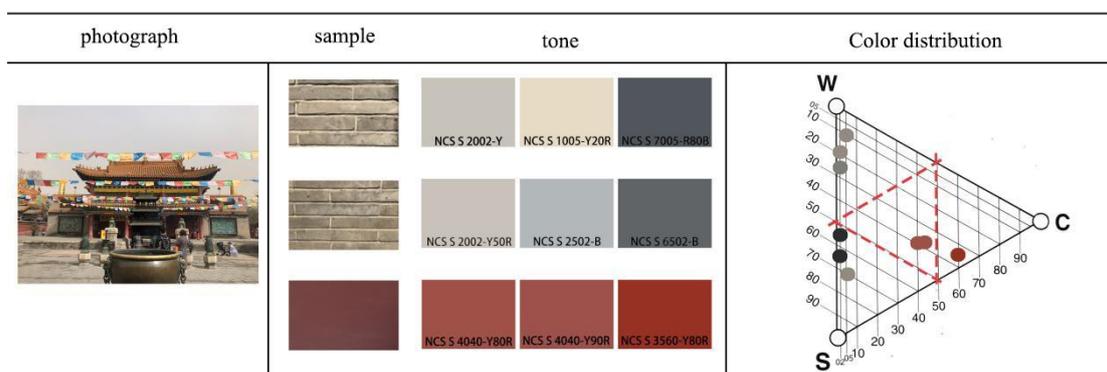


Figure 3-3: NCS Color Analysis of the Walls of the Main Hall, drawn by the author

From the color distribution of the walls of the Daxiong Treasure Hall, it can be seen that the building presents a bright color feeling. The red part is located in the region of medium chroma, high chroma, and medium brightness (4040, 3560), while the gray brick wall is in the region of high brightness, low chroma, and low brightness, low chroma (2002, 1005). Due to the long construction period of the main hall, the gray color cannot present a purely achromatic gray color compared to red. The walls present a gray-red-gray color form. As the most important building in Da Zhao Temple, the color combination of the Daxiong Treasure Hall establishes the color tone and color tendency of the entire architectural complex.

Through the analysis of the color composition of the outer walls of public buildings and the outer walls of the Daxiong Treasure Hall, three artistic features can be summarized: First, the color form of the outer walls of Da Zhao Temple is the same as that of the Daxiong Treasure Hall, and red belongs to the same color category. Second, red, as the main color of the outer walls, belongs to the red color of the regional five colors. The entire architectural complex echoes each other from the outside to the inside, highlighting the majestic momentum of Da Zhao architecture. Third, this color construction form uses a large area of achromatic gray to highlight the red of the key parts. Under the unified overall image and color tendency, different architectural units use the same construction method to present a regional architectural color system with a clear hierarchy and emphasis.

5. Color Artistic Features of Architectural Details in Da Zhao Temple

The color of architectural details mainly reflects in various components such as roof decorations, doors, windows, and columns. The color application of architectural details in Da Zhao Temple is also influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and the local tradition of color preference, forming unique regional architectural detail artistic features.

5.1 Decorative Components

The roof decorations of Da Zhao Temple mainly include dharma wheels, victory banners, golden deer, and treasure bottles, which are decorative components covering religious attributes. Most of the main ridges of the roofs are adorned with treasure bottles or dharma wheels placed on both sides, mostly gilded bronze poles; Han-style roofs often have ridge beast decorations. The meaning displayed by ridge beasts varies according to their positions and shapes. Since Da Zhao was an imperial temple at that time, sculptures of dragons, which represent imperial power and status in Han-style architecture, can be seen in Da Zhao Temple. In addition, the Mongolian symbol "Sulu Ding" also appears on the roof. Therefore, elements such as dragons, common decorative elements in Han-style architecture, and decorative elements of Tibetan Buddhism such as dharma



wheels and treasure bottles, as well as Mongolian symbols, all exist in Da Zhao Temple. These elements provide strong evidence of the integration of Central Plains culture with Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhist cultures.



Figure 4-1: Roof Decorative Components, captured by the author

The roofs have a warm color tone, with the addition of golden decorative components that further enhance it. Gold is an extremely noble color that can highlight the function of the Da Zhao architecture and create a grand atmosphere for the entire building.

5.2 Protective Components

The protective components of Da Zhao Temple buildings, such as doors, windows, and columns, have particularly unique color forms. The selection of colors is influenced by Tibetan Buddhism but also incorporates local elements, making the color characteristics of protective components more distinctive.

The color form of the doors is similar to that of the Tibetan area, with luxurious decoration and clear layers. Red is selected as the main color, green as the auxiliary color, and yellow (gold) as the accent color. The color of the windows is more abundant, especially the blind windows. The regional five-color characteristics are very obvious, and Buddhist patterns and Sanskrit are painted on the blind windows in the Daxiong Treasure Hall in bright colors. Red remains the main color, with green and blue appearing in the patterns from dark to light; yellow serves as the auxiliary color, highlighting the sacredness of the patterns; and white serves as the accent color, providing a finishing touch. Unlike in the Tibetan area, many door and window frames are black because black is believed to have the function of driving away evil and intimidating. Therefore, in the temple architecture of the Tibetan area, colors such as red, white, yellow, green, blue, and black may appear. However, in the Mongolian tradition of color preference, black is not considered auspicious, so it does not appear in the color scheme of Da Zhao architecture. All the columns in Da Zhao are mainly red, with the mountain gate columns as an example: the decorative beasts are blue as the main color, and the other five colors as auxiliary.



Figure 4-2: Enclosure Components, captured by the author

The detailed color of the Dazhao Temple buildings mostly exhibit high chroma and high lightness. Decorative components, positioned on the roof, serve as more prominent embellishments, while protective components, located at eye level for the public, feature richer colors, with all four of the region's primary hues except white being utilized. The abundant use of red reflects a harmony between the detailed and primary architectural colors, creating a unified color impression.

6. Artistic Characteristics of Exterior Eaves Mural Paintings at Dazhao Temple

The exterior eaves murals at Dazhao Temple are influenced by Tibetan Buddhism, Qing Dynasty-style mural paintings, and Mongolian folk art. They blend these influences with the aesthetic characteristics of the local ethnic groups, highlighting unique regional culture and ethnic features.

6.1 Types and Composition of Exterior Eaves Murals at Dazhao Temple

The types and composition of the exterior eaves paintings of Dazhao Temple integrate features of various ethnic groups, such as the Han, Mongolian, and Tibetan. Apart from some paintings from the Ming and Qing dynasties, seals, spirals, and Suzhou-style paintings, many unique painting types specific to the local area are also incorporated into Tibetan Buddhist texts and patterns.

The paintings are generally symmetrical, with the main frame measuring one-third of the overall composition, following the three-pavilion layout of official-style paintings. However, some paintings have a main frame that accounts for half or even more than half of the composition, without strict adherence to the three-pavilion composition. The composition style is more flexible, forming structures such as the five-pavilion and continuous styles based on the length of the components. Variations in the length of the end parts and the main frame patterns are utilized to adjust the composition adaptively and choose suitable compositions based on local conditions (Wang & He, 2016).

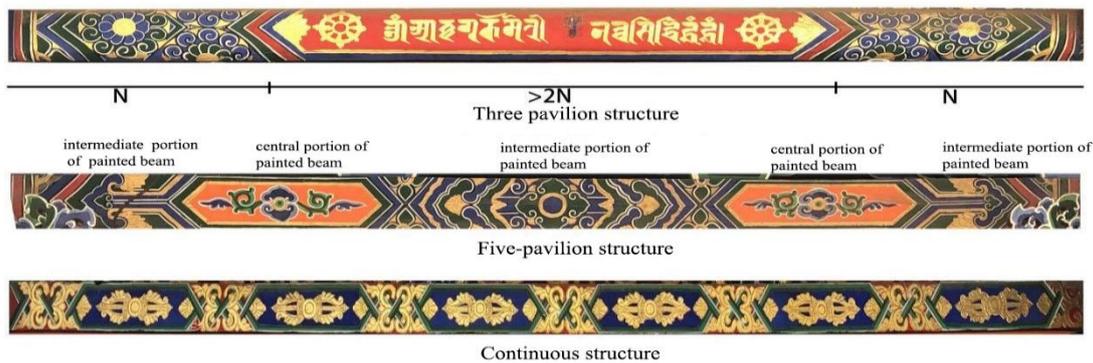


Figure 5-1: Types of Paintings, captured by the author

6.2 Overview of Exterior Eaves Murals at Dazhao Temple

The architectural style of the exterior eaves paintings of Dazhao Temple is characterized by axial symmetry. Therefore, the exterior eaves paintings of the Mahavira Hall were selected as samples, including its south, east, and north facades. Through on-site research and color measurements, it was observed that the colors in the paintings generally adhere to the traditional color preferences of the Mongolian ethnic group and the reverence for the five colors in Tibetan Buddhism. The colors are distributed mostly in areas of low saturation and low brightness (S: 02-40, C: 50-90) and areas of medium brightness and high saturation (S: 05-50, C: 60-90).

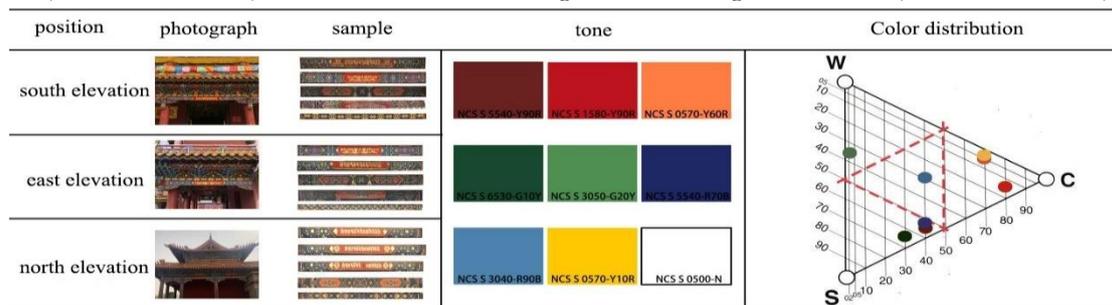


Figure 5-2: NCS Color Analysis of Paintings, drawn by the author



Additionally, the exterior eaves paintings of the Mahavira Hall exhibit a rich variety of colors. Furthermore, by employing a computer Java program, the exterior eaves painting of the fourth opening of the Mahavira Hall was used as an experimental subject. All pixels in the painting image were extracted for color analysis, and the hue range and proportions were summarized. The main process diagram is as follows.

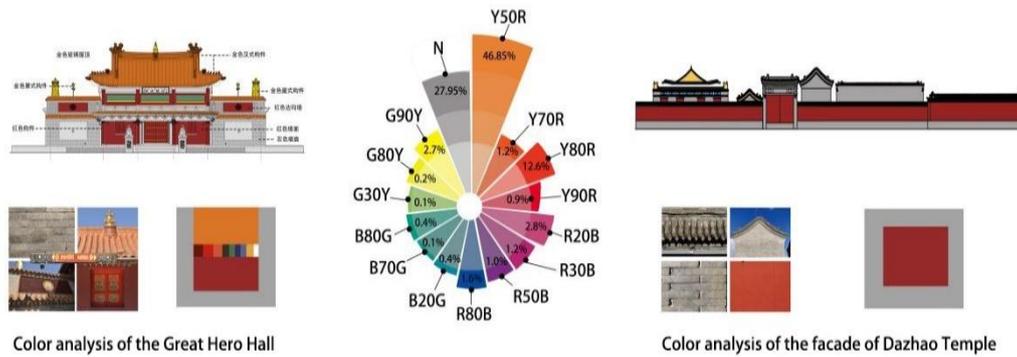


Figure 5-4: NCS Proportion Analysis of Paintings, drawn by the author

From the extraction of hue-range proportions from the exterior eaves painting of the fourth opening of the Mahavira Hall and on-site color measurements of the saturation distribution, it can be seen that the paintings mainly exhibit a warm color trend.

The hue range is concentrated between Y50R and R20 B, and the saturation distribution is higher than that of the main building color. As part of the architectural decoration, colorful paintings add brilliance to the building's overall atmosphere.

6.3 Artistic Characteristics of Exterior Eaves Murals at Dazhao Temple

The artistic characteristics of the exterior eave paintings of the Dazhao Temple are primarily manifested in two aspects: pattern themes and color application, reflecting a unique regional cultural connotation.

In terms of color application, influenced by the directional implications of the religious symbolism in Tibetan Buddhism, "the five colors symbolize the five great elements of Vajrayana: white represents water, yellow represents earth, red represents fire, green represents wind, and blue represents space (Wang, 2021). These colors, endowed with specific meanings, not only have their unique charm in the religious domain but also resonate with the colors revered by the Mongolian people.

The Dazhao Temple is a model of integration of Tibetan, Mongolian, and Han cultures, influenced by various factors. The color combinations of the paintings generally remain within the color tone of the regional five colors. The color of the frame center differs from the official painting style, which uses cyan, incorporating red, yellow, and orange. Such highly saturated and bright colors enrich the color hierarchy.

The Mongolian people have maintained an open attitude towards foreign cultures from ancient times to the present, allowing the integration and absorption of the esoteric implications of Tibetan Buddhism into the color and form of the exterior eave paintings of the Dazhao Temple. Han-style patterns and the Mongolian people's original color tradition are also incorporated, combining various hues in an orderly manner to present a steady, magnificent color characteristic and form a unique regional style.

7. Current Status and Issues of Color Landscape in Front Plaza of Dazhao Temple

The purpose of the square in front of the Dazhao Temple is to preserve the temple's spiritual and cultural essence. The square features symbols of Mongolian culture, including a white pagoda, a statue of the prominent figure Alatan Khan, and a Chinese-style archway.



Figure 6-1: Landscape of the Front Square of the Dazhao Temple, captured by the author

However, the current state of color preservation in the square is poor. Due to its location in Hohhot, a high-altitude, inland area with long hours of sunlight, minimal precipitation, and a dry climate, many building materials and coatings are unsuitable for the local environment. This can lead to color fading and peeling. The lack of maintenance is particularly evident in the colors of the archway, resulting in overall low color saturation and a lack of atmosphere enhancement and guidance ([Wang, 2019](#)).

7.1 The Chaotic Color Landscape of the Front Plaza

The artificial environment color mainly includes the color appearance of urban buildings, street facilities, and other material entities, which are relatively stable color elements in the overall urban color scheme. Among them, the color of buildings is its main component. Compared to buildings, billboards, landscape ornaments, and other smaller elements also have some degree of influence on the overall color tone of the block.

On the east side of the Dazhao Temple complex, newly constructed antique-style commercial stalls have been erected. These stalls have simple construction techniques, lightweight materials, and meticulous architectural design. The roof and facade use a gray color palette, and the painting style is casual. The placement of these stalls obstructs views of the eastern side of the Dazhao Temple complex and also affects the flow of public traffic entering the temple complex.



Figure 6-2: Landscape of the Front Square of the Dazhao Temple, captured by the author

Within the square in front of the Dazhao Temple complex, the facilities are disorderly arranged and lack a unified form, resulting in a lack of distinctiveness. There is also a lack of close integration between the square and the Dazhao Temple complex. The unique cultural essence of the Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhism experienced within the temple complex is not extended to the square and the historical district. The buildings in the area merely reflect the historical characteristics of the block through a single cultural symbol and the use of blue brick, lacking detail and direct visual impact. The overall landscape of the block feels rigid, with architectural forms that mimic the style of elevated-beam wooden structures, creating a strong commercial atmosphere. The signage's color scheme lacks cultural consideration, and the block's overall color palette is very monotonous, failing to reflect regional characteristics and traditional color preferences. This, to some extent, diminishes people's experience of the "historical" and "cultural" sensations in the historical cultural district.



Figure 6-3: Landscape of the Front Square of the Dazhao Temple, captured by the author

7.2 Lack of Unity and Integration in the Front Plaza

The facilities within the front plaza lack cohesion and fail to establish a unified identity. There is a noticeable disconnect between these elements and the architectural complex of Dazhao Temple, resulting in a fragmented and disjointed environment. Visitors to the temple, seeking to immerse themselves in the site's unique cultural and religious heritage, find this experience diminished by the lack of continuity between the front plaza and the historical district.

The architecture within the neighborhood relies heavily on conventional symbols and materials, such as blue bricks, to evoke a sense of historical authenticity. However, this approach lacks depth and fails to capture the intricacies of the area's cultural heritage. As a result, the neighborhood's overall aesthetic feels contrived and lacks the vibrancy that characterizes authentic cultural experiences.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Dazhao Temple stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Inner Mongolia, with its vibrant colors serving as a cornerstone of its architectural and artistic identity. The temple's color palette not only influences the aesthetic of its own structures but also sets a tone for the surrounding neighborhood. As such, a comprehensive approach to managing the color landscape of the Dazhao architectural complex is essential to preserving its thematic significance and historical integrity while guiding future development.

8.1 Layered Control of Dazhao Architectural Complex Color Landscape

Implementing a layered control strategy for the color landscape of the Dazhao architectural complex involves systematic classification and management of colors. This approach considers both macro and micro levels of color control, ensuring a cohesive and harmonious aesthetic throughout the temple complex. By establishing clear guidelines for color selection and application, stakeholders can maintain the temple's thematic integrity while allowing individualized expression within defined parameters.

8.2 Benchmarking the Essence of Dazhao Temple's Color Landscape

Analyzing the color composition of Dazhao Temple's architectural complex provides valuable insights. The Dazhao Temple complex is the most significant example for studying historical districts. By analyzing the color combinations and proportions of the Daxiong Hall and the exterior walls of the temple complex, it can be observed that besides the gray tones of the original blue bricks, yellow and red are the predominant colors, while white is the least used.

The Daxiong Hall, as a representative of the integration of Tibetan, Mongolian, and Han cultures, follows the regional five-color system in its color selection. The main theme colors include neutral gray (N) and the red-yellow series (Y-R), primarily manifested in the blue brick exterior walls, small areas of red walls, and paintings. Other colors such as green (G), blue (B), yellow (Y), and white (NCS S 0500-N) are present in the paintings. The overall color sequence presents a combination of gray-red-yellow-green-blue-white, with most colors being of low brightness and medium to high saturation. This stark contrast in combination will provide the public with a certain visual impact, creating a solemn, serious, and peaceful psychological experience. The color combination of the Daxiong Hall directly reflects the color combination of the exterior walls of the Dazhao

Temple. Based on this, it can be inferred that the overall architectural components of the Dazhao Temple tend towards warm colors, with red being the most prominent. As the color with the longest wavelength, red will be perceived by the public in the first instant, evoking feelings of solemnity, classical elegance, and warmth. Combined with the cultural uniqueness of the Dazhao Temple, the entire temple complex, and even the entire district, exudes a unique atmosphere.

Tibetan architectural art and traditional Han-style architectural art have been jointly passed down in Inner Mongolia, and during their development, they have combined with the local population's aesthetics, forming the unique Tibetan Buddhist architectural art of Inner Mongolia. The decorative color style in the Dazhao Temple in Hohhot reflects the cultural exchange and integration among Tibetan, Han, Mongolian, and other ethnic groups in the region.

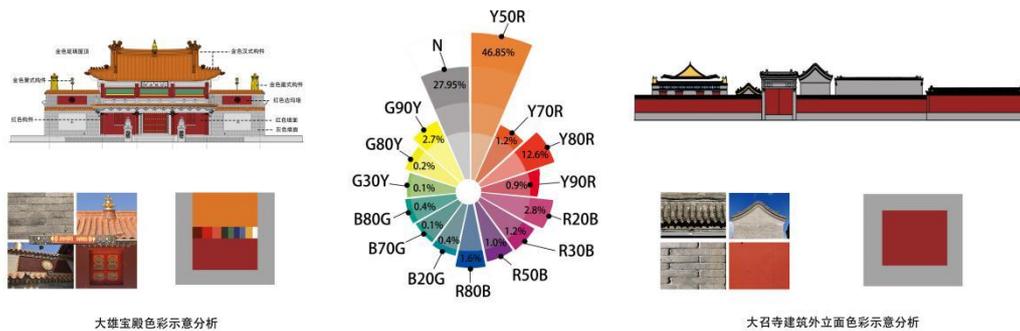


Figure 7-1: Recommended Color Palette for the Dazhao Temple Complex, drawn by the author

8.3 Eliminating Disturbances in the Color Landscape

To preserve the historical integrity of Dazhao Temple's architectural complex, it is imperative to eliminate disturbances in the color landscape. This requires strict control over the use of paints and timely maintenance of architectural colors to prevent degradation and color deviation. By adhering to established color palettes and avoiding the introduction of "new" colors that disrupt the cohesive aesthetic, stakeholders can safeguard the temple's cultural heritage for future generations.

8.4 Establishing a Comprehensive Color Management Mechanism for the Area

A comprehensive color management mechanism is essential for effectively managing the color landscape of the Dazhao architectural complex and its surrounding neighborhood. This mechanism should encompass guidelines for color design, implementation, and management, with specific responsibilities assigned to relevant departments and administrative units. By establishing clear protocols for color selection, application, and maintenance, stakeholders can ensure consistency and continuity in the area's color landscape, preserving its cultural identity and aesthetic appeal.

8.5 Integrating the Essence of Dazhao Temple's Color Landscape into Neighborhood Development

Integrating the essence of Dazhao Temple's color landscape into the surrounding neighborhood is crucial for creating a cohesive and harmonious urban environment. Public facilities in the front plaza should reflect regional elements and maintain consistency with the temple's architectural style, avoiding overly bright colors that detract from the overall aesthetic. Furthermore, neighborhood design should allow for individualized expression while remaining in harmony with the temple's color theme, fostering a sense of unity and cultural pride within the community. By incorporating the temple's color landscape into broader urban development initiatives, stakeholders can create a vibrant and culturally rich environment that honors the legacy of Dazhao Temple for generations to come.

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