

## On the Architectural and Cultural Value of Jinan Old Railway Station

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### Abstract

Jinan Old Railway Station, as the only Germanic-style station architectural group in the world, was a landmark of Jinan with high architectural and cultural value. Both its demolition and reconstruction have affected the nerves of Jinan people. This article starts with from a review of the historical evolution of Jinan Old Railway Station, focuses on the history, architectural and cultural value of this station, and further explores the significance of the reconstruction of Jinan Old Railway Station.

**Key words:** Railway station; Architectural and cultural value; Historical and cultural value

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### INTRODUCTION

Jinan Old Railway Station, as then the largest railway station in Asia as well the only Germanic style traffic architectural group, was listed as the first stop in the Far East by the magazine, *Trip to the Far East*, published by the West Germany after the war. It was also presented in text books on architecture used by Tsinghua University and Tongji University, as a case for study. From this we can see that, Jinan Old Railway Station plays an important role in China's modern architectural history and it was a landmark building in Jinan. Unfortunately, such a station architectural group with a typical European style did not draw enough attention and even did not escape the fate to

be demolished and constructed in China's vigorous tide of urban construction. In 1992, after an intense discussion among some high-ranking officials and experts, the railway station was eventually demolished. Since then, the station architecture which had been in existence for 81 years exited out of the stage of history, which made many experts and residents sadly sigh with regret.

In recent years, with urban construction returning to rationality, the relative governmental authorities have focused on the creation of urban characteristic tourist economy. Jinan Old Railway Station draws the attention again and the reconstruction of the station is put on the agenda. For the reconstruction of the old railway station, both the voice of support and the voice of opposition are heard and many experts and scholars have put forward their own opinions. First, some cultural relics experts are not optimistic about the reconstruction and they believe that once a heritage or an ancient architecture is destroyed, it can no longer be undone. Jiang Bo has pointed out the key to the question: "Then we put it demolished confusedly in order to develop the economy; now we want to reconstruct it confusedly in order to develop cultural tourism." Wang Chen from Shandong University also points out that

It is unnecessary to reconstruct the railway station; although it is regrettable. It is the fact. In the present high-speed rail era, reconstruction at the original site no longer suits the development of social economy; reconstruct it at a new site and that would be completely a fake. We should respect history and reality.

Second, there are many voices to support the reconstruction as well. Many residents of Jinan say that they really hope to see the old railway station again. The Director of the Archaeological Institute of Jinan, Li Ming, emphasizes that "the reconstruction is not without significance; the greatest significance of the rehabilitation is to warn the future generations that we had a wrong attitude towards our history and that is our shame monument." Professor Zhang Runwu believes that,

architectures, as the witness to history and the carrier of the information era, faithfully record the scientific and technological education, culture and arts, politics and ethics, customs, economy and finance, etc of its building time. To reconstruct the railway station is in favor of the construction of the historical and cultural city of Jinan. The key is to choose the site. Reconstructing the station at the original site is more valuable. (Zhang, 1999)

Therefore, as a continuation of the historical context, this article starts from the building of Jinan Old Railway Station, focuses on the analysis of the historical, architectural and cultural value of the station, and further explores the significance of the reconstruction of the station.

## 1. THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF JINAN OLD RAILWAY STATION

Jinan Railway Station, as a witness of the modern city development history of Jinan, was a symbol of Jinan's transformation from a feudal city to a modernized city. It is an important part of the urban cultural context of Jinan and it is of high historical and cultural value.

### 1.1 The Historical Evolution

The original name of Jinan Old Railway Station was "Jinpu Railway Jinan Station" and it was located on the Station Street in the Tianqiao District of Jinan. Originally, it was composed by the confluence of two railways; one was the Jiaoji Railway from east to west to Jinan built by Germans and the other was the Jinpu Railway built to Jinan by using the money lent from Britain and Germany. Until 1923, China took back the sovereignty of Jiaoji Railway. Jinan Old Railway Station became a large station used by the two major railway lines. The prototype of the Jinan Old Railway Station was built in 1904 and it was a Germany station building with a typical Germanic style, designed by the German architect, Hermann Fischer. The station was completed in 1909. After that, the station was expanded and reconstructed three times: the first one was during the Japanese occupation. In 1937, Japan renovated and expanded the original station in order to deal with its own partition management. The second one was during the nation founding period. In 1958, the Railway Department partially reconstructed the old railway station in order to increase the capacity and a two-floor waiting room and three platform sky bridges were built in the west of the station. The third one was during the urban construction period. In 1972, in order to welcome the Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia to Jinan, an exit from the platform straight to the square of the station was built and then it was known as the Welcome Gate. Until then, the overall construction of Jinan Old Railway Station was basically completed. At that time, as the junction of two major traffic arteries, Jinpu Railway and

Jiaoji Railway, the old station had become a major traffic artery in East China.

### 1.2 The Historical Value of Jinan Old Railway Station

Jinan Old Railway Station, as once the largest railway station in Asia, was a landmark of the old Jinan and it has irreplaceable historical and artistic value. First, Jinan Old Railway Station is a powerful testimony of modern Jinan's suffering of colonial aggression and it witnessed the history of aggression and plunder from invaders to Jinan people. It has become the historical heritage to document the modern history of humiliation and it is also a valuable asset of Jinan people facing history. Second, Jinan Old Railway Station is the combined product of China and the West. Although it was designed by a Western architect, it was built in Jinan. The realization of the architecture mainly depended on Chinese building materials, artisans and technologies and it condensed the wisdom and technology of Jinan people, virtually combining with local features and technological elements. As a typical German architectural group, Jinan Old Railway Station was also an example of the cultural exchange collision and integration between China and the West. After three times reconstruction, the old railway station was no longer only of a German style. Instead, it constantly integrated with Jinan local culture with constantly updating its functions. Especially in the subsequent reconstructions, the station integrated local cultural connotations of Jinan so as to become a landmark in Jinan and a city image for the propaganda of Jinan. Third, from both a historical perspective and a background of the times, Jinan Old Railway Station, as a German building with European features, plays an exemplary role in Jinan city construction. The modernization of Chinese architecture is a process of rejecting, imitating, learning and integrating foreign architectural features. In summary, Jinan Old Railway Station, as one of the outcomes of Art Nouveau, is undoubtedly a part of the architectural heritage of Jinan and an important cultural heritage of Chinese architecture with high historical and cultural value.

## 2. THE ARCHITECTURAL AND CULTURAL VALUE OF JINAN OLD RAILWAY STATION

Architectural culture refers to the reflection of a nation's culture, cultural background and the regional geographical features, etc. in a group or an individual architecture (Wang & Zhu, 2009). The architecture of Jinan Old Railway Station is a reflection of the German Style in the region of Jinan and it is a witness of how an alien note rooted and germinated in Jinan. It expresses the functional feature of traffic architectures and reflects the social art forms of European style. Architecture,

as a material carrier, is also a carrier of culture (Wang & Zhu, 2009). Therefore, as the only railway station with a Germanic style architectural group in the world, Jinan Old Railway Station is one of the architectural achievements of Germany de Stijl left in China and it has high architectural and cultural value.

### **2.1 The Architectural and Cultural Value of the Station From the Perspective of Its Architectural Style**

The German Art Nouveau was developed around 1897. In architecture, Art Nouveau emphasizes the integrity of the architectural structure and the shape and that architectural decorations only play a decorative role. Around 1898, the German Jugendstil began to emerge and the Jinan Old Railway Station is a direct reflection of contemporary German architectures. The Jinan Station Building is the German Jugendstil's best example in China. The architectural form of the old station also vaguely reveals the popular symbols of German architectures. For example, its simplified walls and the patterns of curves, the long spiral windows on the Clock Tower, the arch windows at the top of the ticket office, and the semi-circular shaped skylights staggered up and down on the roof add curve and swift beauty to the building and they also increase the brightness of the room, which is a new style feature different from traditional German style. However, its fascinating dome roof and the semicircular arch combining with the tall tower building present the religious ideas of medieval Europe. In addition, the most unique part is the four large round clocks decorating the station walls, especially the melodious sound of the bells at the end of each hour. They are practical to provide time for travelers and at the same time they add decorative features, known as a major feature of the railway station.

### **2.2 The Architectural and Cultural Value of the Station From the Perspective of Localization of Foreign Cultures**

In 1898, Germany forced the Qing government to sign the "Jiao'ao Lease Treaty". Since then, the German constructed the railway to Jinan and built the German station with a Germanic style designed by the German architect Hermann Fischer. After that, the German architectural style accompanied by aggressive forces from Europe and the United States launching aggressive activities in mainland China gradually infiltrated into the local culture of Jinan. The construction of Jinan Old Railway Station undoubtedly had an enormous impact on the local culture of Jinan. First, it is a "foreign construction" with a typical European style funded by foreign capital, led by foreigners and built in Jinan. It has a distinct colonial color, indicates that foreign forces have infiltrated into the transportation field in Mainland China, becomes a powerful radiation source of German locating in Jinan, and represents strong privileged position. It

was under the protection of the government then and in turn interfered with China's internal affairs, which laid the foundation for further aggression. Second, the construction of the railway station, for the outdated and closed Jinan, brought new production and living ways, especially the advantages on industrial and technological civilization. They represented a new productivity and a new lifestyle, which virtually enhanced the influence of the Jinan Old Railway Station on Jinan. Eventually, foreign cultures and the invasion of the German station landed in Jinan. This must have experienced a running-in process which is also the process of the cultural exchange and integration between China and the West. The most outstanding feature of Chinese culture is its integration of all foreign cultures and ultimately forms the cultural pattern with Chinese characteristics. Jinan's local culture, residents' real life and folk customs are bound to influence and transform foreign cultures and architectural arts in some degree, which can be seen in the follow-up renovation and reconstruction of Jinan Old Railway Station in decades. It became a Jinan local architectural group combined with Chinese and Western specialties, though it had a German style. Therefore, if we focus on the influential and transforming elements from the perspective of traditional Chinese architectures and folk culture, we can find the traces of the localization of foreign architectural cultures.

### **2.3 The Architectural and Cultural Value of the Station From the Perspective of Architectural Details**

In construction technology, the old station used thick and strong brick and stone walls to support the main building which gave people a deep sense of security. In architectural details, it used artificial carving, combining with wired glass and caisson and some other decorative techniques, which are truly exquisite. Its design quality is fully comparable with the European train stations. In the design process, the architect, Hermann Fischer, referred to the design of the Finnish architect, Eliel Saarinen for the Helsinki Railway Station. The old railway station itself has the features of being warm in winter and cool in summer and it was a classic design then.

The buildings of the Jinan Old Railway Station were mostly supported by using brick and stone structure. In the plane layout of the station, the station waiting room, the ticket office, the clock tower and ancillary buildings formed a prioritized function zoning. The spatial organization has a strong sense of order. In the design of the façade, the station took the south as the positive façade. The positive façade consisted of four levels: Ancillary buildings, the clock tower, the waiting room and the ticket office, from west to east, horizontal arrangement, forming undulating, patchwork and curvaceous beauty, and also more down-to-earth. The entrance to the waiting room has large stone steps as

guidance, plus vertical colonnade design, which enhances the space's sense of order. Entering the hall there is a square layout to maximize the capacity of the waiting room; the northern and southern walls of the hall opened large arch windows imbedded stained glass. In addition, the dome of the waiting hall was about 13 meters high, covered with gable tile roof, which outstandingly showed the tallness and spaciousness of the waiting hall. The east of the waiting hall was the ticket office which had a green ball low dome. The focus of the vertical design was the cylindrical clock tower up to 32 meters tall between the waiting hall and the ancillary buildings. It had green tile dome, intricately oblique inserting between the middle of the eastern and western buildings. The four parapet walls were decorated with European style round wall clocks, which formed the compositional center of Jinan Old Railway Station. The design highlights European medieval religious philosophy and it is a typical religious architecture. In a word, Jinan Old Railway Station, from the perspective of its architectural style and details, as well as the architectural individual design and the group construction composition, was an excellent modern traffic architecture in the world with high architectural and cultural value. It is a Chinese architectural work which is comparable to famous European railway stations and it occupies an important position in the history of modern architecture in China.

## CONCLUSION

After a study of the historical, architectural and cultural value of Jinan Old Railway Station, the author believes that we should understand the reconstruction of the old railway station from two aspects. First, from the perspective of architectural semiotics, the reconstruction of the old railway station is no longer simply a material performance; it is a symbol to convey visual information to people. The Jinan Railway Station suffering from demolition has an unusual cultural significance. It is a valuable cultural resource, a symbol of modern history in Jinan and a symbol of the integration of eastern and western cultures. Therefore, as a carrier of the cultural spirit of Jinan, the reconstruction is indispensable for the physical description of the history of Jinan and it is a continuation of the cultural memory of Jinan. Second, from the aspect of cultural ecology, the reconstructed

old railway station is not only a continuation of culture; itself it is also with a new vitality and is a powerful expression of cultural heritage and development. It is understood that the reconstructed old railway station will form a bigger station with the existing station, and it has a practical function as well; a CPPCC member, Cui Anyuan points out that: "The reconstructed old railway station will connected with the Daming Lake, the moat, the four spring group and the entire old city. It will become a best route for tourism and recreation of the residents." Therefore, the reconstruction of the old railway station is of practical significance.

Architecture is the carrier of culture and culture is the soul of architecture. The old railway station, as a foreign note of the continuation of Jinan architectural context, has become a landmark of Jinan modern development; today, under the context of economic globalization and cultural diversity, Jinan as a well-known historical and cultural city in China, the reconstruction of its old railway station plays an irreplaceable role in continuing its historical architectural context and promoting Jinan tourist cultural connotation and perception.

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