

Analytical Comparative of early Mosques of Iran and China: Investigation of Architectural, Cultural and Spatial Structure Characteristics

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ABSTRACT: Mosques represent Islamic art and identity and have displayed themselves in each geographical region in a way compatible with the culture and identity of that society. The significance of this research lies in its meticulous examination of early mosques within two distinct cultural and societal contexts, Iran and China. By investigating these mosques' architectural, cultural, and spatial attributes, this study sheds light on the divergent approaches of two communities facing the same religious, social, environmental, and cultural challenges during a comparable historical period. Despite sharing the same religious foundation and featuring similar spatial arrangements within the mosques, the contrasting cultural affinities reveal the crucial need to comprehend and appreciate the distinctive qualities inherent to early mosques in these two distinct cultural spheres. This research endeavor is a pioneering exploration toward unraveling the complexities surrounding early mosques, thereby deepening our understanding of their historical and cultural significance in disparate cultural contexts. The research methodology involves a comprehensive review of library sources, articles, and software analysis using Depthmap X. As a result, and mosques have been compared based on the four main dimensions of architecture: spatial, conceptual, and philosophical structural features. Iranian mosques demonstrate a fusion of Saudi Arabian Islamic architecture and Iranian design, emphasizing entrance connectivity. Chinese mosques, on the other hand, blend Islamic elements with ancient Chinese architectural art, prioritizing courtyard connectivity and integrating environmental elements, resulting in a distinctly Asian flavor.

Keywords: *Mosque, Iran, China, Architectural, Spatial Structure.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of Islam, the institution of the mosque has played an influential role in the creation, development, and prosperity of Islamic societies. Muslims worldwide have long agreed that the mosque has a tremendous impact on life (Utaberta et al., 2015; Rahmawati et al., 2018; Adriani, 2019). In the past, mosques were places for Muslims to conduct religious activities and were often the centers of Muslims' politics, economy, and culture. Usually, Muslims go to the mosque to worship and hold religious ceremonies. At the same time, the mosque undertakes the mission of organizing religious education and spreading spiritual knowledge and knowledge. During the time of the Prophet, the mosque was the Prophet's pulpit for preaching Islam, preaching and holding prayers. A mosque is not only a place for "congregation for worship" but also a place for Muslims to resolve disputes and

judge injustice. Historically, in the Muslim struggle against reactionary rule, it was once a strong fortress of Muslim unity and fighting (Gladney, 2003; Armijo, 2008; Erie & Carlson, 2014; Utaberta et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2021; Feng, 2017b, Su, 2017, Jeong, 2022).

Mosques are closely related to the life of Muslims throughout their lives. Their functions are reflected in the following aspects (Utaberta et al., 2015; Rahmawati et al., 2018; Adriani, 2019; Omar et al., 2019; Riwayatanti, 2019; Al and Al-Juhani, 2022; Fairuz et al., 2022, Murod et al., 2022): Religious Activity Center, The Center for Education, Religious Education Center, Cultural Center, The center of Muslim contact and communication. Furthermore, There are many types of mosques built in history, including (Utaberta et al. 2015; Rahmawati et al., 2018; Adriani, 2019; Omar et al., 2019; Riwayatanti, 2019; Al & Al-Juhani, 2022, Fairuz et al., 2022,

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Murod et al., 2022): (1) Holy Mosques, that is, mosques related to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, such as the "Three Holy Mosques." (2) Royal mosques: mainly built in the name of caliphs, sultans, and emirs of successive dynasties, such as the Umayyad Mosque. (3) Jameh Mosque: It is the central temple in the region, also known as the Great Temple; there are many in Iran. (4) Mausoleum Temple, a mosque attached to the main building of the mausoleum, such as the Hussein Mosque. (5) General mosques. Mosques hold immense historical, cultural, and religious significance, serving as sacred spaces for worship, community gatherings, and architectural masterpieces.

In this respect, studying early mosques in Iran and China is of great importance and necessity in understanding the diverse architectural, cultural, and spatial dimensions of these significant religious structures. Specifically, the different distances of the two countries from the cradle of Islam (Arabia), their cultural differences, and the limited studies of Chinese mosques and the investigation of their architectural features are some of the notable things in this choice. By exploring and comparing mosques from these two distinct geographical regions, we gain valuable insights into the cultural and historical contexts that influenced their design and construction. Understanding the architectural features, cultural influences, and spatial arrangements of these mosques helps us appreciate the rich diversity within Islamic architecture and how it assimilated with local cultures. Additionally, this research contributes to the conservation and documentation of the architectural heritage of these mosques, ensuring that their unique characteristics and historical significance are recognized and celebrated. By delving into this topic, we not only enhance our knowledge of mosque architecture but also foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation of the diverse artistic and cultural expressions within the Islamic world (Pirmia & Memarian, 2005a; Biglari et al., 2022; Jeong, 2022). With this explanation, the commonalities and differences in spatial arrangement for mosques in two different cultures and paying attention to traditional architecture in the region can be key issues.

This research aims to undertake a comparative analysis of the early mosques in Iran and China. We will focus on their architectural characteristics, spatial structure, and cultural dimensions. By examining specific examples from Iran, such as the Jameh Mosque of Fahraj, Tarikhaneh Mosque, Jameh Mosque of Nain, and Jameh Mosque of Kabir Neyriz, and from China, such as the Huaisheng Mosque, Great Mosque of Xi'an, Niujie Mosque, and Qingjing Mosque, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse dimensions and influences that shaped these mosques. We also hope to explore the mutual effects of culture, religion, and architecture in the two countries of China and Iran during a specific period. The current research seeks to understand the early mosques built in Iran and China and to compare the spatial structure of mosques of the same period in these two countries. The goal is to learn

about the early mosques built in different geographical areas with different design thinking and cultural backgrounds. This will help to raise awareness of the early mosques constructed in these areas for those interested in the field of mosques. The study's central question is whether the mosques of the same period in Iran and China have any differences, even though the Arabs built the mosques in Iran after conquering them, while the mosques in China were constructed without war and welcomed by the Chinese people.

The research explores the architectural dimension by analyzing the distinctive architectural styles, design elements, and decorative motifs employed in constructing these mosques. The spatial structure dimension will delve into these mosques' spatial organization, layout, and functionality, examining the arrangement of courtyards, prayer halls, and ancillary spaces. The cultural dimension will investigate the historical and cultural contexts in which these mosques were built, considering their roles as cultural symbols, centers of community activities, and religious and cultural heritage repositories.

By conducting a comparative analysis, we seek to identify similarities and differences between the early mosques in Iran and China, shedding light on the architectural, spatial, and cultural influences that shaped these sacred structures. This study will contribute to a wider understanding of Islamic architecture and its interaction with cultural traditions and local architecture in different regions. Through this comparative exploration, we hope to deepen our knowledge of the early traditional mosques in Iran and China, enhance our understanding of the cultural exchange and syncretism that occurred between Islamic and local architectural styles, and gain insights into the symbolic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions embodied within these significant religious structures. Ultimately, this research aims to provide a valuable resource for architectural historians, cultural scholars, and anyone interested in these regions' rich architectural and cultural heritage.

Research Background

Much research has been conducted to recognize mosques in Iran, China, and even the world, some of which have been analyzed in Table 1. This research has examined mosques based on their architectural characteristics or single buildings. Also, some researchers aim to know the spiritual attributes of mosques. However, unlike other research, this research has dealt with the comparative study of the structure of the spatial relations of the early mosques built in Iran and China with a detailed look at the knowledge of the mosques of these two countries.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is developmental, seeking to develop cognition in early Islamic mosques in Iran and China. The methodology is based on specialized analyses and descriptions. The data required has been collected by the library method,

Table 1. Research background

1	Quran verses are influential in the design of religious places, especially mosques. This research, by examining the verse of light in the altars of Iranian mosques, has investigated the characters related to the Quran in the design of altars and the direct connection of Islamic thinking in the design of mosques and its manifestation in the creation of mosques(Arezoofar & Marasy, 2023).
2	Xi'an Mosque is one of the mosques built in 1523 in China. This mosque has been a show of Islamic architecture. By examining the Xian mosque with illustrated sources, this research has helped recognize and contribute to the mosque's position in China (HAGRAS, 2019b).
3	The historical investigation of Chinese mosques, especially the Xian mosque, is one of the main goals of this research. This research seeks to show the cultural and historical characteristics of the Xi'an Mosque and expand these values to Muslim mosques in China(Hagras, 2019a).
4	This research aims to investigate the architecture of mosques and understand the impact of mosques in non-Islamic contexts. This research has studied the role of mosques for people and has finally studied the effect of these buildings on the surrounding buildings and local people(Farrag, 2017).
5	The architecture of mosques was formed based on specific instructions. This research introduced the characteristics of mosques by documenting eighty mosques and scrutinizing them(Khan, 1990).

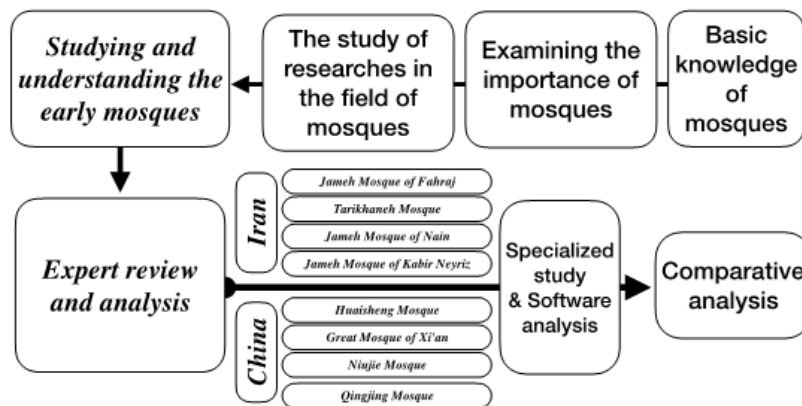


Fig. 1: Research process

reviewing various documents, and using DepthmapX software. The mosques of the same period in Iran and China were investigated using logical reasoning and natural analysis and then analyzed with Jamvi statistical software. Finally, they were compared based on the different structural dimensions of the mosques. The analysis unit in the present study is the mosque and its components, elements, and values. The process of the research is summarized in Figure 1. In the research process, the research is first presented to express the topic and its need and importance in formatting and examining it in a general study structure. To explore the theoretical and empirical background of the subject, the literature on Iranian and Jain mosques and the course of the emergence of mosques in these two countries have been examined. Based on this

characteristic, the characteristics of mosques and the formation process of each mosque in Iran and China have been obtained. Finally, it has been compared with the composition of the space relations structure of the mosques of the same period with the software to obtain it from the analytical system. Finally, the explanatory values of the mosques of Iran and China, which can be used in other related studies, are presented.

The Emergence of Islam in Iran

Mosques in Iran began to be constructed after the Arab conquest in the 7th century, reflecting the evolution of Iranian architecture. Initially following Khorasani and Razi styles, Iranian mosques underwent a transformative phase during the Al-Buyeh period. With the attention of elders, sages,

kings, artists, and architects, these mosques incorporated beautiful design motifs like Shabestani and the forty columns, showcasing impressive artistic views. The construction of a mosque in Iran adheres to three principles: a well-designed structure, the implementation of divine instruments and facades, and the use of tasteful materials for overall beautification (Ramzy, 2022; Pirnia & Memarian, 1995; Pirnia & Memarian, 2004, Pirnia & Memarian, 2005b, Biglari et al., 2022). Iranian art and architecture find a unique manifestation in mosques, representing the pinnacle of Iranian craftsmanship and culture within Islam. The symbolic, decorative, and repetitive motifs in mosques exemplify the deep connection between Iranian architecture and its religious significance. Mosques have been historically significant in Iran, serving as centers for education and community life. Quranic inscriptions adorn the interior and exterior, establishing a strong link between the holy book and the place of prayer. Decorations in Iranian mosques avoid human and animal forms and instead feature geometric designs, flowers, plants, and calligraphy, symbolizing the promise of heaven (Biglari et al., 2022; Ramzy, 2022; Pirnia & Memarian, 1995; Pirnia & Memarian, 2004, Pirnia & Memarian, 2005a, Pirnia & Memarian, 2005b, Pirnia & Memarian, 2007, Pirnia & Memarian, 2008).

Iranian artists and architects in the Islamic era incorporated abstract elements of Islam while drawing inspiration from the art and culture of ancient Iran. They created unique geometric and abstract forms, combining symbolic and structural elements in a highly artistic manner. Iranian mosques stand as wonders and attractions, built in various styles throughout history and revered as masterpieces of Iranian Islamic architecture. The emergence of mosques in Iran can be traced back to the early centuries of Islam, following the Islamic conquest of the country (Pirnia & Memarian, 2005a; Sarhaddi-Dadian et al., 2022). These mosques featured rectangular or square plans with central courtyards, surrounded by arcades or porticos. Architectural elements included minarets, domes, intricate geometric patterns, tilework, and calligraphy. Vibrant colors and floral motifs further enhanced the aesthetic appeal. Over

time, mosque architecture in Iran evolved and incorporated influences from the Seljuk, Timurid, Safavid, and Qajar eras, resulting in a diverse and rich architectural heritage. Iranian mosques served as places of worship and as centers of community life, education, and social activities, shaping the country's religious, cultural, and architectural identity. They remain significant landmarks in Iran's history and heritage (Biglari et al., 2022; Ramzy, 2022; Pirnia & Memarian, 1995; Pirnia & Memarian, 2004; Pirnia & Memarian, 2005a; Pirnia & Memarian, 2005b; Pirnia and Memarian, 2007, Pirnia and Memarian, 2008).

Evolution of Mosque Architecture in Iran

The early mosques built in Iran followed the Khorasani style. This style was the first style of building mosques in Iran, and Table 2 shows the changes in mosques in this style according to time (Pirnia & Memarian, 1995; Pirnia & Memarian, 2004; Pirnia & Memarian, 2005a; Pirnia & Memarian, 2005b, Pirnia & Memarian, 2007, Pirnia & Memarian, 2008).

Khorasan-style architecture in religious buildings is a mixture of four-arched Zoroastrian architectural designs. Khorasani architecture is the first style of designing mosques, and the main components of this style cannot be reduced to simplicity, low decorations, rectangular plan, use of raw materials such as natural clay and brick, use of Arabic plans in the design of mosques and buildings with Iranian design (Zibaenejad & Jowkar, 2008, Hashemi et al., 2015). Over time, the characteristics of Khorasan period mosques have gradually increased, but they have always maintained their original features, as shown in Table 2.





Investigation of Prototypes of Mosques in Iran

The examples were selected based on the book of Pirnia; these examples were among the most prominent early mosques in Iran, which researchers in many studies set. In the following, each of these examples will be examined. Also, the time process of the formation of these mosques is shown in Figure 2 and Table 3.

Table 2: Evolution of early mosques in Iran

Courses of Khorasani style	Early mosques	middle mosques	late mosques
Architectural components of the mosque	Simple design without decorations		
	The use of Iranian architecture, along with the Arabic plan		
	Using brick and clay materials		Shabestan design
	Use of square medians		The use of a plastered altar
	Rectangular plans		Limited use of decorations
	The use of canvas materials		
	The portico leading to the dome of the house		
Single porch design			

Table 3: Introduction of selected mosques (Image source: [NewsLaw, 2022](#))

Name	Jameh Mosque of Fahraj	Tarikhaneh Mosque	Jameh Mosque of Nain	Jameh Mosque of Kabir Neyriz
District	Fahraj	Damghan	Naein	Neyriz
Province	Yazd	Semnan	Isfahan	Fars
Dynasty	Dynasty Sassanid		Buyid Dynasty	Seljuq Dynasty
Style	Khorasani style			
Picture				

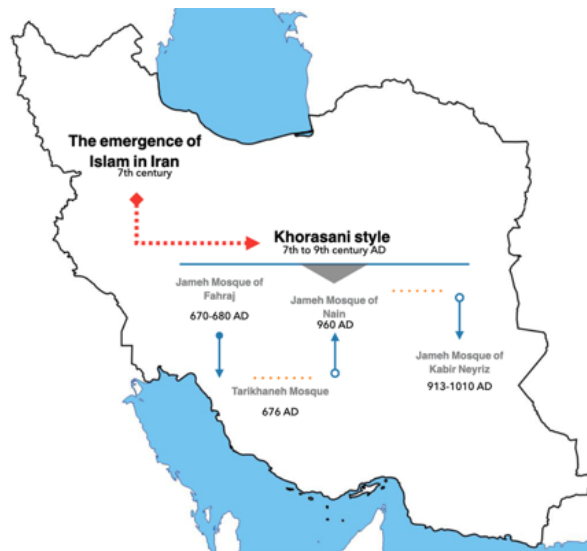


Fig. 2: Chronological diagram of early mosques in Iran

Jameh Mosque of Fahraj

The Fahraj Jame Mosque, built in 670-680 AD, is considered one of the earliest mosques in Iran and holds great historical significance. Located in Fahraj, Yazd province, this mosque exhibits a unique architectural blend influenced. Constructed primarily with adobe, the mosque underwent subsequent additions, including incorporating a minaret. Unlike other mosques in cities that were converted to Islam, the Fahraj Jame Mosque was specifically established as a mosque from its inception, retaining its original appearance over time. It stands alongside other notable mosques in Iran, such as the Yazd Jame Mosque, Borujerd Jame Mosque, Niriz Mosque, and Mohammad Nayin Mosque. The architectural design of Iranian mosques finds inspiration in the first mosque of Islam, the Medina mosque, incorporating certain principles in their construction. The Jameh Mosque of Fahraj serves as

both a spiritual sanctuary and a communal gathering place, upholding the cultural and religious heritage of the region. Its architectural elements, including minarets and rocking arches with geometric patterns and calligraphy, exemplify the rich artistic traditions of Islamic and Persian cultures. (Holakooci & Karimy, 2015, Dizany, 2017).

Tarikhaneh Mosque

The Tarikhaneh Mosque is one of the early mosques of historical significance and one of the oldest mosques in the country. It was built in 767 AD in Semnan, Damghan region, making it one of the early mosques constructed in Iran. This mosque, also known as the Damghan Historical Mosque, is a testament to Iran's rich cultural and architectural heritage. The mosque's rectangular plan and central courtyard showcase intricate architectural elements such as arcades, porticos, and

minarets. The use of geometric patterns and calligraphy further highlights the artistic traditions of Islamic and Persian cultures. The spacious central courtyard provides a gathering space for worshippers, while the surrounding covered porticoes feature curved arches and circular columns. Notably, the southwestern part of the mosque houses a pillared hall, reminiscent of the palaces from the Sassanid era. The materials used in the construction include endemics, and the mosque is characterized by its historical value and cultural significance, acting as a place of worship for the local Muslim community and preserving Iran's ancient architectural heritage (Azad, 2013; Azad, 2022).

Jameh Mosque of Nain

The Jameh Mosque of Nain, located in Iran's Isfahan province, is an early mosque with rich architectural and historical significance. Built in 960 AD, it exhibits a unique blend of Islamic and Persian influences in its design and decorations. The mosque's rectangular layout features a central courtyard with arcades adorned with plastering, intricate geometric patterns, and calligraphy. Notable architectural elements include the tall minaret and a beautifully crafted mihrab (prayer niche). The mosque's spatial structure emphasizes the vast central courtyard, providing a gathering space for worshippers and reflecting the grandeur of its construction. The Jameh Mosque of Nain, boasting a rich historical heritage across ages, is a dynamic center for religious and cultural endeavors. It proudly exhibits Iran's multifaceted architectural legacy and the harmonious amalgamation of artistic customs prevalent in the area (Salimi & Sharifzadeh, Soltani Mohamadi & Azad, 2018).

Jameh Mosque of Kabir Neyriz

The Jameh Mosque of Kabir Neyriz is an early mosque known for its historical and architectural significance. It is considered one of the oldest mosques in Iran and represents the peak of Khorasani architectural art. Built in Fars province, Niriz area, between 913 and 1010 AD, the mosque showcases distinct architectural features and design elements influenced by Sassanid architecture. The building's construction followed a rectangular plan with a central courtyard surrounded by arcades and porticos. Iranian-Islamic influences are evident in tiling with geometric patterns along with complex plastering. The Jameh Mosque of Kabir Neyriz stands out with its brick minaret and five arches. These elements, including a single porch and plastered altar, contribute to its visual appeal and architectural uniqueness. Over the years, parts of the mosque have been added, repaired, and maintained, solidifying its status as a selected work of Iranian art and architectural design. The Jameh Mosque of Kabir Neyriz maintains its cultural and religious importance, functioning as both a sacred sanctuary and a communal hub. It splendidly showcases Iran's opulent architectural legacy and seamlessly integrates Islamic and Persian artistic customs, symbolizing the harmonious fusion of these traditions (Monazzah & Khazaei, 2013; Akbari et al.,

2014; Taghavi Nejad and Moazzeni, 2016).

The Emergence of Islam in China

Architecture is the solidification of culture, and silent buildings embody a lively culture. The architecture of Chinese mosques embodies Chinese Islamic culture and is a beautiful commentary on the cultural exchange between China and Iran. According to their architectural styles, Chinese mosques can be divided into three main architectural types: Chinese style, Arabic style, and Sino-Arab combined style. From these three architectural types of mosques, we can see the degree, history, reasons, and results of combining Chinese and Iranian cultures. We can also look forward to the future Chinese Islamic architectural culture trend. In a certain sense, Chinese mosques are a part of the history of Islam in China (Erie and Carlson, 2014; Utaberta et al., 2015; Ma, 2006). Mosques can explain different historical stages. Using mosque architecture to illustrate the history of Islam in China can better reflect the process and characteristics of the cultural exchange and integration between China and Iran. The current Chinese Islam in the context of globalization is also reflected in the recent mosque architecture (Gladney, 2003; Armijo, 2008; Erie & Carlson, 2014; Utaberta et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2021; Norris, 2001, Ma, 2006, Lane, 2016, Hagra, 2019b, Liu et al., 2021, Jeong, 2022).

A mosque (Masjid) is one of the Islamic architectural groups. It is central for Muslims to hold worship, religious homework, religious education, and missionary activities. Also called a temple of worship. It is a free translation of the Arabic "Masjid" (the place of prayer). The Qur'an says: "All mosques belong to Allah, so you should pray to Allah and not to anything." During the Tang and Song Dynasties in China, it was called "Tang," "Auditorium," "Sacrificial Hall," and "Worship Hall." After the Yuan Dynasty, it was called "Temple," "Huihui Hall," and "Worship Temple." In the Ming Dynasty, Islam was called "Halalism." Then, the "auditorium" was renamed "mosque," which is still used today. Muslims of Hui, Dongxiang, Baoan, Salar, and other ethnic groups in the northwest region still follow the original name of "Masjid" or "Jama'at" (the temple). In China, mosques are called Qīng Zhēn Sì (Temples of the Pure Truth). Other names include Huí Huí Táng (Hui people's hall), Huí Huí Sì (Hui people's temple), Lǐ Bǎi Sì (Temple of worship), Zhēn Jiào Sì (Temple of the True Teaching) or Qīng Jīng Sì (Pure and clean temple) (Gladney, 2003, Armijo, 2008, Erie and Carlson, 2014, Utaberta et al., 2015, Harris et al., 2021, Lane, 2009, Feng, 2017a, Hagra, 2019b, Bhatt & Wang, 2022, Miranti et al., 2022).

The mosque is in the land of China. Since the day foreign Muslims entered China, they have been running around, fighting, farming, doing business, and traveling all over China. They migrated there, and the mosque appeared there. Today, mosques of various forms can be seen in many places in different regions of China. Legend has it that the earliest mosque was built in the Tang Dynasty. With the development and spread of Islam, the number of mosques gradually increased. In the Yuan

Dynasty, mosques appeared one after another, but there was no fixed name at the time (Armijo, 2008, Liu et al., 2021, Bugnon, 2019, Wang et al., 2002). At the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, because Islam was sometimes called "Halalism," the monastery was called a "mosque." From the Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, mosques were called "chapels," "mosques of worship," and "mosques," and Islam was called Islam. The teaching staff of the mosque has practiced a hereditary "three ways" system for a long time. The so-called three-path system is a religious organization composed of the Imam in charge, Hai Tuibu, who is to persuade and practice religion, and Mu'anjin, responsible for summoning prayers. In some places, there are religious judges, "Gazui," and spiritual judges, "Mufti." With the formation and development of the Hui nationality, the hereditary Gazui and Mufti's three-way system were eliminated. The school imam and the old school of Xuedong Township replaced it (Gladney, 2003, Armijo, 2008, Eric & Carlson, 2014, Utaberta et al., 2015, Harris et al., 2021, Wang et al., 2002, Ma, 2006, Dilmi, 2014, Bugnon, 2019, Liu et al., 2021, Jeong, 2022, Liu & Yang, 2022).

Evolution of Mosque Architecture in Chinese Dynasties

There are at least two reasons why mosques in central and eastern China have embraced Sinicization. Firstly, throughout history, Muslims in China have developed a close affinity with traditional Chinese culture, merging it with Islamic practices. Chinese Muslims have adopted Chinese as their mother tongue and embraced Han customs, demonstrating the integration of Chinese and Islamic cultures. During the Ming Dynasty, Islam had fully transformed into Chinese Islam, making it a part of the Chinese religious and cultural fabric. Consequently, adapting mosque architecture to Chinese styles became a natural progression. Secondly, the isolationist policies of the Ming and Qing dynasties hindered interactions between Chinese Muslims and the Arab world, leading to a lack of expertise in Arab architectural art among domestic artisans. This limitation further propelled the Sinicization of mosque architecture (Wang et al., 2002, Jinchen, 2007, Lane, 2011, Chen et al., 2019, Hang, 2019, Hanaoka, 2021, Liu et al., 2021, Steinhardt, 2021, Jeong, 2022, Miranti et al., 2022).

However, Xinjiang presents a different scenario. Its proximity

to Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East facilitated communication and exchange with Muslims from those regions. Moreover, Han culture in Xinjiang was less dominant than in other parts of China, allowing Uyghur culture to influence the local mosques. Consequently, Xinjiang mosques have preserved the Arabic architectural style to a significant extent, alongside the Uyghur cultural influence. The historical transformation of Chinese mosques, shifting from Arabic to Chinese architectural styles, signifies the cultural exchanges between China and Iran in architecture. The fusion of Chinese and Western architectural cultures has resulted in the creation of numerous exquisite Chinese mosques that showcase the harmonious integration of diverse influences (Wang et al., 2002, Jinchen, 2007, Lane, 2011, Chen et al., 2019, Hang, 2019, Hanaoka, 2021, Liu et al., 2021, Steinhardt, 2021, Jeong, 2022, Miranti et al., 2022). The developments of early Chinese mosques are shown in Table 4 in summary.

Investigation of Prototypes of Mosques in China

The selected Chinese mosques were the first ones built in China until the end of the 11th century and were selected based on China's research and tourism websites. Also, their chronological chart is shown in Figure 3, and samples are introduced in Table 5.

Huaisheng Mosque

During the reign of Emperor Gaozu Wude of the Tang Dynasty (618-626), Muhammad, the "sealed prophet" of Islam, sent four disciples to China to preach. Among them, Said ibn Abi Waqas (ancient translation of Abu Wan Gesu) arrived in Guangzhou via the Maritime Silk Road during the early years of Tang Zhenguan and began spreading the teachings of Islam in China. In the first year of Zhenguan (627), Abu Wan Gesu and the Arab Muslim community in Guangzhou raised funds to construct a mosque in memory of the "Holy Prophet," which was named "Huaisheng." The Huaisheng Mosque in China is an early mosque of historical and cultural significance. It represents the presence of Islam in China and reflects the cultural integration between Chinese and Islamic architectural styles. Covering an area of 2,966 square meters, the mosque follows a traditional Chinese symmetrical layout. Its central

Table 4: The evolution of Chinese mosques

Dynasty	Tang Dynasty	Liao Dynasty	Song Dynasty
Architectural components of the mosque	The emergence of mosque architecture in China The brick and stone structure represents the connection between Chinese and Iranian architecture. The architectural style of mosques is based on the traditions of Arab mosques	Design based on Chinese traditional architecture	Construction of Arabic mosques in the style of Central Asia Using gates, minaret, and main hall in Arabic style

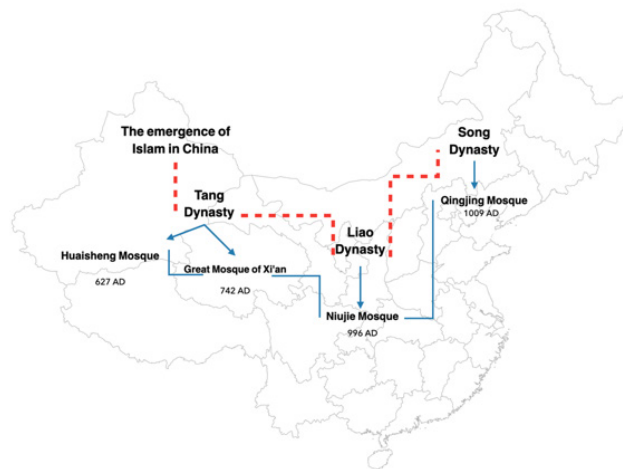






Fig. 3: Chronological diagram of early mosques in China

Table 5: Introduction of selected mosques (Image source: So, 2022)

Name	Huaisheng Mosque	Great Mosque of Xi'an	Niujie Mosque	Qingjing Mosque
District	Guangzhou	Xi'an	Xicheng	Quanzhou
Province	Guangdong	Shaanxi	Beijing	Fujian
Dynasty	Tang Dynasty		Liao Dynasty	Song Dynasty
Style	Taoism		Buddhism	
Picture				

axis consists of three gates, a moon-watching tower, and the worship hall, which faces east and serves as the holy land of Mecca during prayers. Over the years, the mosque underwent multiple repairs, preserving its original architectural style (Jinchen, 2007; Buseri, 2015; Su, 2017; Hang, 2019; Hagra, 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Jeong, 2022).

The mosque complex also features the "Huaisheng Pagoda" situated in the southwest corner of the temple gate. With a height of 36 meters, this Arabic-style pagoda is also known as the "Bangka Tower" due to believers chanting scriptures from its top. Originally built during the Zhenguan period of the Tang Dynasty, the pagoda served as a landmark and was historically used to guide ships on the Pearl River by illuminating its top at night. Huaisheng Mosque exemplifies the fusion of Chinese and Islamic architectural elements. Its design incorporates traditional Chinese spatial organization, colorful porcelain tiles, intricate carvings, and Arabic calligraphy, showcasing the blending of decorative motifs. Beyond its architectural significance, the mosque holds cultural and symbolic value, representing religious tolerance and the coexistence of different faiths within Chinese society. It remains an important spiritual and community center for Chinese Muslims, upholding China's

multicultural heritage (Jinchen, 2007; Buseri, 2015; Su, 2017; Hang, 2019; Hagra, 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Jeong, 2022).

Great Mosque of Xi'an

The Great Mosque of Xi'an, located northwest of the Drum Tower, is an early mosque of significant historical and cultural importance. It is a large-scale Chinese temple-style ancient building complex that showcases a unique blend of Islamic and traditional Chinese architectural styles. The mosque's origins can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty, although it was confirmed to have been built during the Ming Dynasty. It underwent maintenance and protection throughout history, evolving into its current pattern. Designated as a fundamental cultural relics protection unit in Shaanxi Province, the Great Mosque combines the architectural form and keynote of Chinese national style with the strict layout principles of the Islamic system (Ain & Jianyou, 2014, Dilmi, 2014, Hagra, 2019a, Hagra, 2019b, Bhatt & Wang, 2022, Cai, 2022, Miranti et al., 2022).

Within the temple, one can appreciate the ingenious combination of styles, where Chinese and Islamic traditions merge seamlessly. The exquisite carvings and arabesque

decorations throughout the mosque are composed of Arabic script, while the overall layout adheres to the principles of traditional Chinese architecture. This unique synthesis earned the Great Mosque a place among UNESCO's world Islamic cultural relics. Furthermore, the mosque has garnered recognition and acclaim beyond its cultural significance. It was promoted to one of China's critical cultural relics protection units in 1988 and was later listed as one of the top ten tourist attractions in Xi'an in May 1997. Therefore, the Great Mosque of Xi'an is a testament to religious tolerance and cultural integration, representing Islam's rich and diverse history in China. Beyond its architectural and cultural appeal, it serves as a tranquil space for prayer and reflection, attracting both worshippers and visitors alike (Ain & Jianyou, 2014, Dilmi, 2014, Hagra, 2019a, HAGRAS, 2019b, Bhatt & Wang, 2022, Cai, 2022, Miranti et al., 2022).

Niujie Mosque

The Niujie Mosque, located in China, is an early mosque with historical and cultural significance. It is considered one of Beijing's oldest and largest mosques, first built in 996 during the Liao Dynasty. The local Muslim community constructed the mosque using traditional Chinese architecture, except that it displays Arabic calligraphy in the interior, with the original design by Nazaruddin, the descendant of an imam. However, the mosque was destroyed by the armies of Genghis Khan in 1215 and later rebuilt in 1443 during the Ming Dynasty. The mosque exemplifies a blend of Islamic and Chinese architectural styles. It consists of buildings that follow traditional Chinese architectural norms and features two courtyards according to the Siheyuan layout. The mosque includes various facilities, such as a worship hall, the Wangyue Building, the Building for Publicising Etiquette, a lecture hall, the Tablet Pavilion, the Twin Pavilions, and bathrooms.

Additionally, it houses a library with ancient manuscripts. The design of the Niujie Mosque incorporates traditional Chinese elements like the distinctive Chinese roof and courtyard layout, along with Islamic architectural elements such as domes and minarets. Adorned with intricate decorations, including Arabic calligraphy, geometric patterns, and colorful glazed tiles, the mosque serves as a religious and cultural center for the local Muslim community. It provides a space for prayer, worship, and community activities. The Niujie Mosque represents the long-standing presence of Islam in China and stands as a testament to the integration and coexistence of Islamic and Chinese cultural traditions (Norris, 2001, Wang et al., 2002, Hasmath, 2014, Ridgeon, 2020, Liu & Yang, 2022).

Qingjing Mosque

Qingjing Temple, also known as the Holy Friends Temple, was originally constructed in the second year of Dazhong Xiangfu during the Northern Song Dynasty (1009), coinciding with

the 400th year of the Muslim calendar. Spanning an area of 2,184 square meters, the Qingjing Mosque combines elements of Islamic and Chinese architectural styles, exemplifying the cultural fusion between these two traditions. While the mosque's overall orientation follows the east-west axis, resembling the majority of mosques in China, its internal layout exhibits a flexible distribution with a distinction between primary and secondary spaces. The main worship hall, Fengtian Temple, retains its prominent position at the forefront of the complex, while auxiliary structures like personnel housing and water rooms are discreetly located in the rear area. The mosque's functional spaces demonstrate the Islamic architectural characteristic of dispersion and decentralization. Yet, some buildings, such as the Mingshan Hall and the newly constructed worship hall, form a cohesive system, encompassing facilities essential for Islamic religious activities such as worship and bathing. Situated in China, Qingjing Mosque holds historical and cultural significance as an early mosque that embodies the harmonious coexistence of Islam and Chinese culture. Its architectural design seamlessly blends traditional Chinese elements, including sloping roofs with upturned eaves, with Islamic features like domes and minarets. The mosque's exterior is adorned with intricate carvings and colorful glazed tiles, integrating Islamic and Chinese decorative motifs. A central courtyard is surrounded by prayer halls and pavilions, creating a spatial layout conducive to prayer, religious rituals, and community gatherings. Serving as a spiritual and community center for the local Muslim population, Qingjing Mosque stands as a testament to the multicultural heritage of China, symbolizing the cultural integration between Islam and Chinese traditions (Clark, 1995; Ma, 2006; Feng, 2017a; Feng, 2017b, Bugnon, 2019, Hagra, 2019b).

Analysis

This section compares selected examples of mosques in Iran and China based on their spatial structure and architectural features.

Mosques of the First Series

The first mosque built in Iran was Fahraj Mosque, and in China, Huaisheng Mosque. Huaisheng Mosque has a stone minaret, and its spatial structure is broader and more integrated than Fahraj Mosque. Fahraj Mosque generally has better connectivity based on the area-to-connectivity ratio. However, based on the spaces, Huaisheng Mosque has better connectivity in wisdom spaces such as the entrance, courtyard, and paths. The connectivity level in the place of prayer is the same in both. Fahraj Mosque was built in the Qibla direction, but Huaisheng Mosque was built in the south-north order based on the beliefs of Feng Shui and the flow of qi energy. Also, in Table 6, the spatial relationships of these mosques are shown based on software analysis.

Mosques of the Second Series

The Tarikhaneh and Xi'an mosque were both built in the 8th century AD. The Xi'an Mosque has wooden and stone materials, but Tarikhaneh Damghan has used brick and adobe materials. The spatial structure is also very different in these two mosques. Tarikhaneh had a square-shaped plan facing forward Qibla; however, the Xi'an Mosque is rectangular based on the flow of Qi energy and in the south-north direction, contrary to the imagination. Also, due to its large area, the Xi'an Mosque has less connectivity than connectivity. But in the micro-spaces, this mosque has a better spatial relationship than Tarikhaneh in all parts. This is because the mosque of Xi'an has a greater extent, and this extent makes the structures of the space sit better next to the monolith. Also, in Table 7, the spatial relationships of these mosques are shown based on

software analysis.

Mosques of the Third Series

The time of construction of these mosques goes back to around 960 AD; in the third period of comparison of early mosques in Iran and China, Jameh Mosque of Nain is compared with Niujie Mosque, which can be seen in Table 8 of the survey of the spatial structures of these mosques is Niujie Mosque has a more robust system of spatial relations and also a greater extent than Jameh Mosque of Nain. Jameh Mosque of Nain also has better connectivity in the entrance part and approximate unity in the connectivity structure in all regions. However, the more we move from the southern part of the building to its northern territories, the more spatial connectivity is added until finally, In the prayer room section, we reach the peak of spatial

Table 6: Comparison of the spatial structure of mosques in the first period

Mosques	Entrance	Courtyard	Routes	Place of prayer	The extent of the connectivity			Connectivity Plan
					Min	Mid	Max	
Huasheng Mosque					3	490.865	1442	
Jameh Mosque of Fahraj					15	1198.22	2091	
Guide								

Table 7: Comparison of the spatial structure of mosques in the second period

Mosques	Entrance	Courtyard	Routes	Place of prayer	The extent of the connectivity			Connectivity Plan
					Min	Mid	Max	
Great Mosque of Xi'a					1	490.865	1442	
Tarikhaneh Mosque					269	4941.92	6489	
Guide								

communication, which is due to the design of the mosque based on Qi energy flows.

Mosques of the Fourth Series

These mosques are the last series of mosques to be compared. In this section, two mosques from around 900 to 1100 AD have been reached, and their spatial structure has been examined in Table 9. Qingjing Mosque, unlike other Chinese mosques that have been reviewed in the past, has Arabic designs and is a different representation of the mosque in China. Also, the area of this mosque is smaller than in the previous examples. Jameh Mosque of Kabir Neyriz followed the designs of its last mosques and only increased the number of decorations. Connectivity is more in Qingjing Mosque, mainly in the entrance and hall, but in Jameh Mosque of Kabir Neyriz, the connectivity in the central courtyard and entrance is low and has peaked in the secondary spaces.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Investigating early traditional mosques in Iran and China is paramount due to their immense cultural significance and recognition in both societies. These religious structures serve as vital embodiments of historical, artistic, and architectural heritage, necessitating comprehensive exploration. By Delhe architectural and historical aspects of each country's mosques, this research presents a Detpresents Additionally, the comparative analysis of these mosques, encompassing their cultural identities, traditions, and physical manifestations, will enable a deeper comprehension of these two civilizations' cultural exchanges and influences. To enhance the accuracy and rigor of this comparative analysis, the advanced Depthmap X software will be employed, enabling precise spatial and

architectural examinations.

This research thoroughly investigates and thoroughly investigates By unraveling their historical development and individual identities, this study sheds light on the importance of comprehending the intricate details of these remarkable religious edifices. The comparative analysis, aided by sophisticated software, further enhances the accuracy and depth of the research, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the unique cultural and architectural elements associated with these mosques.

This research explores the significance of early mosques and their distinctiveness within the cultural contexts of Iran and China. By meticulously investigating these mosques' architectural, cultural, and spatial elements, the study highlights the necessity of understanding their historical development and structural compositions. Through a comprehensive examination of each country's unique mosque designs, this research provides an insightful analysis of their identities. Furthermore, employing advanced software such as Depthmap X, a comparative study is conducted to elucidate the disparities and similarities regarding cultural significance, socio-spatial dynamics, and physical attributes of these architectural marvels.

Chinese mosques embody the fusion of ancient Chinese architectural art with the religious components of Islam, resulting in a distinctive Asian flavor. One notable aspect of Chinese mosque design is the attention given to the spatial arrangement of environmental elements. Different spaces are created to induce varied environmental feelings in visitors. Additionally, nature plays an integral role in the design, as mosque architects seek to imitate natural scenery rather than dominate it. Traditional Chinese identity is also evident in the orientation of courtyards and the overall structure of the

Table 8: Comparison of the spatial structure of mosques in the Third Period

Mosques	Entrance	Courtyard	Routes	Place of prayer	The extent of the connectivity			Connectivity Plan
					Min	Mid	Max	
Niujie Mosque					19	4436.02	8195	
Jameh Mosque of Nain					9	1386.42	2483	
Guid								

mosque, which sometimes faces north based on the belief in energy flows.

In contrast, traditional mosques in Iran maintain a closer adherence to the early mosques of Islam in Saudi Arabia while incorporating elements of Iranian architecture. These mosques were typically built in hot and dry areas, featuring square-rectangular enclosed structures. The design focused on simplicity, devoid of excessive decoration, and drew inspiration from the four arches and porticoes of the Zoroastrian era. Iranian mosques project an Islamic identity within an Iranian architectural context, with their Qiblah-facing orientation emphasizing their Islamic nature.

The research aimed to conduct an analytical comparative analysis of early traditional mosques in Iran and China, focusing on their architectural, cultural, and spatial structures. By examining these dimensions, the investigation sought to understand the distinct characteristics and influences that shaped these mosques in their respective regions. Starting with the architectural dimension, the analysis explored the unique architectural styles, design elements, and decorative motifs employed in constructing the selected mosques. Iranian mosques exhibited a fusion of Islamic and Persian architectural influences, with prominent features of intricate tilework, geometric patterns, and calligraphy. These elements showcased the rich artistic heritage of Persia and its incorporation into Islamic architecture.

On the other hand, Chinese mosques blended Islamic and traditional Chinese architectural styles, incorporating elements such as sloping roofs, upturned eaves, and decorative carvings. Combining these features resulted in a distinctive architectural character that reflected the integration of Islamic design principles with the local Chinese aesthetic. This analysis highlighted the cultural and artistic diversity represented in the mosque designs of both regions. The investigation then delved into the cultural dimension by considering the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the construction of these mosques.

In Iran, the mosques were influenced by Arab conquests and served as symbols of Islamic presence and religious identity. They represented the spread of Islam and the establishment of Islamic communities in the region. The architectural and cultural fusion observed in Iranian mosques reflected the integration of local traditions with the religious and artistic influences brought by the Arabs. In contrast, the mosques in China were built without military conflict and were embraced by the Chinese people, representing a harmonious coexistence of Islam within the local cultural fabric. These mosques were often constructed by Chinese craftsmen who incorporated traditional Chinese architectural elements into the design, blending them with Islamic features. These mosques' presence in China reflected Islam's acceptance and assimilation into Chinese society. This research provided valuable insights into the distinct characteristics and influences that shaped

early traditional mosques in Iran and China by examining the architectural, cultural, and spatial dimensions. It sheds light on each region's unique historical narratives, societal dynamics, and artistic expressions, emphasizing the cultural and artistic diversity within the broader Islamic architectural tradition.

Based on the amount of connectivity structure, according to the Diamond abundance chart in Table 10, Chinese traditional mosques have the lowest and average connectivity. However, traditional Iranian mosques exhibit a higher level of connectivity in the highest connectivity component. Additionally, when examining the different spaces of Iranian and Chinese mosques according to the Connectivity network of mosque spaces in Table 10, the entrance of Iranian mosques is found to have a direct spatial relationship with the place of prayer while having an inverse relationship with the courtyard. Moreover, the place of prayer in Iranian mosques demonstrates an inverse relationship with the courtyard and routes. Conversely, Chinese mosques exhibit different characteristics, as they showcase a direct relationship between the courtyard and the place of prayer, with inverse relationships among other elements such as routes and entrances. This study reveals that early Chinese mosques prioritized the courtyard and its relationship with the place of prayer, whereas Iranian mosques focused more on the entrance and its connection with the place of prayer.

The spatial structure dimension was explored to understand the layout and functionality of the mosques. The analysis revealed that Iranian and Chinese mosques emphasized the central courtyard as a gathering space for worshippers but with variations in architectural arrangements. Iranian mosques featured rectangular plans with surrounding arcades, while Chinese mosques showcased traditional Chinese courtyard layouts with prayer halls and pavilions. This spatial organization served the functional needs of the Muslim communities and reflected the architectural traditions prevalent in each region. Based on the analytical investigation, it can be concluded that the early traditional mosques in Iran and China exhibit remarkable architectural, cultural, and spatial structure dimensions. While influenced by Islamic architectural principles, the mosques in each region also reflect Iran and China's unique cultural and artistic traditions. The mosques in Iran display a fusion of Islamic and Persian influences, while the mosques in China showcase a harmonious blend of Islamic and Chinese architectural styles. The mosques' spatial organization caters to worshippers' specific needs and is influenced by local architectural traditions.

CONCLUSION

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the early traditional mosques in Iran and China, shedding light on their architectural, cultural, and spatial characteristics. The findings emphasize the significance of historical and cultural contexts in shaping mosque architecture and highlight the cultural diversity and syncretism prevalent in these regions. The analysis

Table 9: Comparison of the spatial structure of mosques in the fourth period

Mosques	Entrance	Courtyard	Routes	Place of prayer	The extent of the connectivity			Connectivity Plan
					Min	Mid	Max	
Qingjing Mosqu					104	1899.75	3766	
Jameh Mosque of Kabir Neyriz					5	777.053	1922	
Guide								

underscores the importance of preserving and appreciating the architectural heritage of these mosques, providing valuable insights for scholars, architects, and enthusiasts interested in the field. In the context of Chinese mosques, they serve as representations of ancient Chinese architectural art, blending the religious components of Islam with a distinct Asian flavor.

Notably, these mosques focus on the spatial arrangement of environmental elements. The design of Chinese mosques aims to evoke various environmental sensations, creating diverse spaces for worshippers. Nature plays an integral role in this design philosophy, with mosque designers seeking to imitate natural scenery rather than dominate it. One interesting aspect

Table 10: Connectivity analysis with Jamovi software

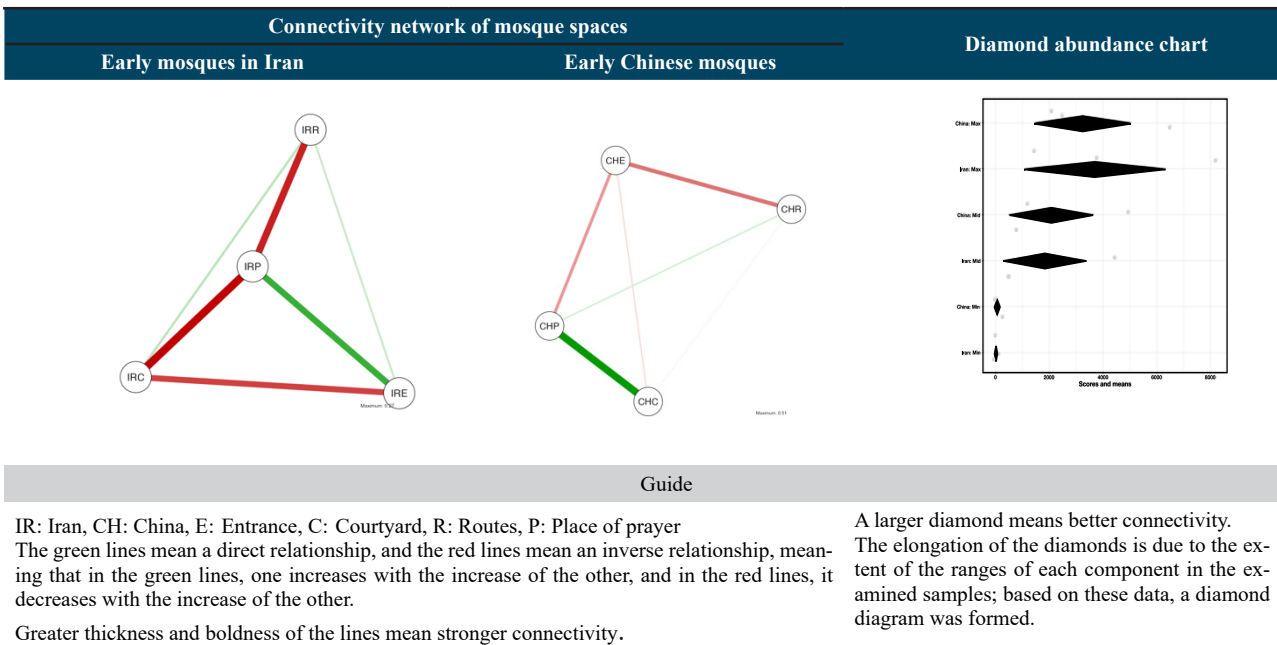


Table 11: Comparison of traditional mosques in Iran and China

Dimensions		Iran	China
Architectural	Features	Iranian mosques often feature rectangular plans, central courtyards, arcades, and minarets.	Chinese mosques exhibit a fusion of Islamic and traditional Chinese architectural elements. They include sloping roofs, upturned eaves, pagoda-style minarets, and courtyards.
	Ornamentation	Mosques display geometric patterns, mud and plaster decorations, inscriptions, plastering, calligraphy, and decorative patterns.	Chinese mosques incorporate Chinese motifs, carvings, and colorful porcelain tiles. Arabic calligraphy is often integrated into the design.
	Styles	The architectural styles range from early Islamic and pre-Islamic influence to the Khorasani style. The use of local materials and craftsmanship is prevalent.	The mosques blend Islamic architectural traditions and traditional Chinese architectural styles.
Spatial Structure Characteristics	Central Courtyard	Iranian mosques typically have spacious central courtyards surrounded by arcades, providing a gathering space for worshippers.	Chinese mosques also have central courtyards, although they may be comparatively smaller.
	Prayer Hall Placement	The prayer halls are often located on one side of the courtyard, facing the Qibla (direction of Mecca).	The prayer halls are commonly situated at the front or sides of the courtyard, accommodating Chinese architectural conventions.
	Spatial Organization	The layout emphasizes the congregation's collective experience and fosters a sense of unity during prayer.	Chinese mosques integrate Islamic and Chinese spatial traditions, adapting to the cultural context of the region.
Conceptual	Symbolism	Iranian mosques convey spiritual symbolism, representing the Islamic faith, transcendence, and the importance of Islamic art and culture.	Chinese mosques symbolize the harmonious coexistence of Islamic and Chinese cultural values.
	Beauty and Aesthetics	The intricate geometric patterns and decorative elements evoke a sense of beauty and visual splendor.	The fusion of architectural styles and decorative elements reflects the cultural exchange between Chinese and Muslim communities.
	Sacred Space	The mosques create a sacred space for worshippers, facilitating a connection with the divine and fostering a sense of spirituality.	Chinese mosques represent religious tolerance and the blending of diverse traditions within the broader Chinese cultural context.
Philosophical	Spiritual Transcendence	Iranian mosques emphasize the philosophical dimension of spiritual transcendence. The intricate geometric patterns, calligraphy, and symbolic motifs evoke awe, beauty, and spiritual elevation, inviting worshippers to transcend the material world and connect with the divine.	Chinese mosques embody the philosophical idea of interconnectedness. They serve as a physical manifestation of the interconnectedness between different religious and cultural communities. Chinese mosques represent a shared space where Muslims and non-Muslims can interact, fostering dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect.
	Unity and Harmony	Iranian mosques often embody the philosophical concept of unity and harmony. The spatial organization, architectural design, and decorative elements aim to create a sense of cohesion and balance, reflecting the Muslim community's unity and connection with the divine.	Chinese mosques reflect a philosophical dimension of cultural synthesis. They symbolize blending Islamic and Chinese cultural traditions, highlighting the philosophical concept of integration and cultural harmony. Chinese mosques can harmoniously combine cultural and religious practices within a single architectural and spiritual space.

is the orientation of courtyards and the entire mosque structure facing north, which is influenced by the belief in energy flows and reflects the incorporation of traditional Chinese identities.

Finally, the early historical mosques of Iran and China have been analyzed based on studies and investigations according to Table 11 based on four dimensions of architecture: spatial, conceptual, and philosophical structural features. And these four dimensions are the most important. It compares the early mosques of Iran and China, which compares them from different perspectives.

Furthermore, this comparative analysis of the early traditional mosques of Iran and China opens avenues for future research and exploration. Several potential areas could be investigated

to expand our understanding of these architectural and cultural phenomena. One potential area for future research could be a deeper examination of the symbolic and conceptual dimensions of the mosques. Exploring the philosophical and symbolic meanings of these mosques' architectural elements, decorative motifs, and spatial arrangements would provide valuable insights into their religious and cultural significance. This could involve studying symbols, representing sacred geometry, and incorporating religious narratives and themes in mosque designs.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the authors, "K. Kiani, A. FathTaheri & R. Rahimnia," worked

equally in writing all research sections, each written by all three authors.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, the authors have witnessed ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and, or falsification, double publication and, or submission, and redundancy.

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