

# Pointed Cusped Arch\*: Islamic Architectural Element of the Goryeo Dynasty\*\*

In-Sung Kim HAN

## Abstract

This paper explores the influx and localization of Islamic cultural elements into medieval Korea through the architectural style of the cusped arch, which emerged during the Goryeo Dynasty. ‘Pointed cusped arch’ or simply ‘cusped arch’ referred to here is a polylobed arch with a pointed apex, a style that Korean art historians have long attributed to Islamic influences, labeling it as Arabic or Persian style. While the Song Dynasty, Goryeo’s primary diplomatic and trade partner, has traditionally been attributed to the introduction of this style, this paper demonstrates, through literature and material cultural evidence, that the Liao, then a dominant force in East Asia, actually served as an agent of cultural transmission. Furthermore, by exploring the Islamic architecture of northern India and Afghanistan, where the Ghaznavids, a major trading partner of the Liao Dynasty, were located, this paper traces the trajectory of the transmission of this Indo-Islamic architectural style to Goryeo. It confirms that the cusped arch style originated in Indian Islamic architecture, not in the architecture of Arab or Persian Islamic regions, as commonly presumed. This allows for a more precise conceptualization of the term “Islam,” previously used vaguely, within the context of the contemporary geopolitical landscape, and broadens the horizon of Korean medieval art.

## Keywords

Goryeo, Khitan Liao, the Ghaznavids, Islam, Hyeonmyo Pagoda of State Preceptor Jigwang, Arch (cusped arch, pointed arch, corbel arch).

In-Sung Kim HAN is a Research Associate at SOAS, University of London.  
(iskim.han@gmail.com)

\* This term can be translated into Korean as ‘첨경다엽(尖頂多葉)형 아치’.

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## Introduction: The Research Issue

The subject of contact between the Korean Peninsula and the Islamic world has long remained largely unfamiliar to most, except a few specialists (Kim Du-jong 1961; Yoon 1984; Go 1983; Jeong 1992, 2013). While prominent historians, including art historians, have suggested various connections between these two cultures (Jin 1999), the lack of in-depth follow-up studies has resulted in little impact. In an increasingly globalized world, however, Korea has had to engage with geopolitical developments surrounding the Islamic world, which has led to a shift in this academic climate and a surge in research output. It is now widely accepted that the Korean Peninsula has long been exposed to the peoples and cultures of the Islamic world. In particular, many Muslims migrated to the peninsula during the Goryeo period under Mongol rule (c. 1270–1356), and lived alongside the local people until the early Joseon Dynasty.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, the Korean Peninsula was by no means the “Land of the Morning Calm,” as often misunderstood previously.

In addressing the topic of contact between these two different cultures, this paper examines examples of material culture from the Goryeo Dynasty to explore the influx and localization of Islamic cultural elements into Korea. To date, I have uncovered and presented numerous examples of this in various aspects of Korean material culture, such as vessel shapes, decorative motifs, and artifacts (Kim 2025). These cases can be broadly divided into two categories, depending on whether they allow us to identify, or at least infer, the trajectory of interaction between the two cultures. That is, while it is difficult to determine the route and process by which Islamic cultural elements, such as vessel shapes or decora-

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<sup>1</sup> Muslims entered the Korean Peninsula during the late Goryeo Dynasty, actively participating in various social activities and living alongside the local population while maintaining their religious and cultural identity. In 1427, King Sejong issued an edict requiring Muslims living on the Korean Peninsula to abandon all their cultural expressions and fully assimilate into Joseon culture. No records of Muslims living in Joseon after this date remain. See the article of April 4 (9th year of King Sejong’s reign) in the *Annals of King Sejong*.

tive motifs, entered the Peninsula, in some cases it is possible to trace the route of their introduction and the agents that facilitated such movements.

As a case study to understand the trajectory of Islamic cultural inflow into Korean culture, this paper examines the architectural decoration of the ‘pointed cusped arch,’ a type of polylobed arch with a pointed apex (abbreviated as ‘cusped arch’ hereafter). The first instance of a cusped arch is shown in the Hyeonmyo Pagoda (or Stupa) of State Preceptor Jigwang in 1085. As will be discussed later, at least two other examples of this feature have been identified, both dating to the final stage of the Goryeo Dynasty. There appear to be no further examples of this style in the mid- and post-Goryeo period. As the absence of such examples from the mid-Goryeo period is highly likely due to the lack of surviving Goryeo relics, it would be reasonable to argue that this architectural style is characteristic of its era. The Pagoda is often cited as an example of the internationality of Goryeo architecture, both in its structure and decoration. Particularly the cusped arches that adorn the Pagoda’s body part are considered to have been influenced by Islamic architecture, leading Korean art historians to refer to them as ‘ornamental windows of Persian style (Ko Yu-seop)’ or ‘Arabian-style arches (Ahn Hwi-Joon)’ (Lee 1985, 43–46, 60–71).

The cusped arches of the Pagoda are one of the very rare instances in Korean culture where Islamic artistic elements have been academically recognized. The discovery of an Islamic artistic element in Korea is a significant finding that can vastly broaden the horizon of Korean medieval arts. Nonetheless, research on Islamic art and architecture related to this pagoda, particularly regional characteristics and its historical changes, is severely lacking. As Islam spread across Eurasia during this period, from the West of China to Andalusia in Spain, Islamic arts and architecture underwent diverse regional variations which cannot be explained away by single terms like ‘Arab’ or ‘Persian.’

Taking these points into account, this paper aims to fill the gaps in existing research and explore the following questions: 1) If the artistic expression in the Pagoda reflects Islamic architectural style, through

what channels did it enter Goryeo; 2) who or what facilitated its influx? ; and 3) If it is Islamic, what kind of Islam are we referring to? Further to identifying the conduits of the artistic transmission, this study will help define the term ‘Islam’ within a more specific temporal and spatial context, thereby contributing to a more concrete reconstruction of the medieval world to which Goryeo belonged.

## 1. Cusped Arches of Goryeo

As the first and foremost example of cusped arch, the Hyeonmyo Pagoda of State Preceptor Jigwang (Fig. 1) is a Buddhist shrine to commemorate the life of monk Haerin (海麟 984–1070), who served as the royal preceptor (Wangsa) before holding the state preceptor (Guksa), the highest Buddhist rank of the period, during the reign of King Munjong (r. 1046–1083). Originally located at the Beopcheon Temple site in Wonju, Gangwon Province, it was disassembled and taken to Japan, then returned to Korea before moving to various places (Park Jiyoung 2018, 166). After a lengthy conservation process at the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage due to its structural fragility since 2016 (Shin and Jo 2015; Jo 2015), the Pagoda was finally returned to its original location in Wonju in 2024.

The stone Pagoda was completed in 1085 (2nd year of King Seonjong of Goryeo), fifteen years after the monk’s passing. This is one of the earliest surviving examples of a square-based Pagoda, in an era when the octagonal base was in fashion. Although lost during the Japanese occupation period, the Pagoda’s body part contained the monk’s cremated remains as a relic within it (Hong 2015, 80–92). Haerin, the object of worship in the Pagoda, was from a powerful Wonju family. His rise to prominence as a central figure in East Asian Yogacara (法相宗)(Nam 2009) was as much due to his renowned scholarship as to the support of the Inju Lee clan, a prominent clan of the time (Shin 2005, 259–296). Lee Jayeon (李子淵), the head of the Lee clan, sent his son Sohyun (韶顯) to Haerin to become a monk (Lee 1995; Hong 2015, 93–96). Naturally, his funeral was held with solemnity and reverence befitting a person of the highest

social ranking. The epitaph accompanying the Pagoda at the same site records that, by royal decree, the funeral procession received full financial support from Wonju Granary and Storehouse (原州倉) (Lee 1995).

In keeping with such high patronage, the Pagoda demonstrates the mature and refined artistic achievements of Goryeo stonemasons and artisans in many aspects. Its square-shaped core stone forms a perfect symmetry along the North-South and East-West axes, while the corners were decorated in bamboo shapes. The entire surface of the Pagoda is densely covered with Buddhist symbols, various decorative motifs, and narrative scenes (Park Jiyoung 2018). In particular, on one side of the pedestal are two narrative scenes, each depicting two people carrying a



**Fig. 1. Hyeonmyo Pagoda of State Preceptor Jigwang.**

Originally located at the Beopcheon Temple site in Wonju, Gangwon Province, Korea; built in 1085 (the 2nd year of King Seonjong of the Goryeo dynasty), Goryeo period.



Fig. 2. Core stone, detail of Fig 1.



Fig. 3. Detail of Fig. 2.

Two cusped arches (three-lobed arches with a pointed apex) on the side of the core stone.

palanquin with a sarira casket in it, which seems to be a reenactment of the funeral of State Preceptor Jigwang.

As the main point to discuss, the core stone is adorned with cusped arches alongside hanging jewels, beads and flowers. The north and south side of the stone have seven-lobed niches, with a door ornament placed in the centre (Fig. 2). The east and west side each have two ‘windows’ and are surrounded by baluster railing. Each ‘window’ has two three-lobed arches with a pointed apex with hanging jewels within the arch. Two bees and butterflies with splendid wings are placed inside the window (Fig. 3).

Before getting into the main topic, let us first explain the basic concepts that will be discussed in this paper, especially the types of arches and the definition of a ‘cusped arch.’

## 2. Concept and types of Arches

As Hamlin succinctly put it, all architecture is the result of “a struggle between the force of gravity pulling things down, and the strength of materials and the way they are used holding things up (Hamlin 1953, 12).” Over the long evolution of architecture, four fundamental principles have been discovered that allow the protected space below and the surrounding wall openings to be safely covered by a roof, floor, or wall above. These principles are commonly referred to as post-lintel construction, corbel or cantilever construction, arch and vault construction, and truss construction (Fig. 4) (Hamlin 1953, 13).

Among them, arches and vaults appear to have originated in Mesopotamia and began to be widely used around the 4th millennium BCE. From the earliest arch structures, the arch refers to any covering over of an open space below with small units of wedge-shaped material (*voussoirs*) placed with radiating joints (Sturgis 1901, 100-122). While a semicircular form is typical of arches, a ‘flat (Jack) arch’ with a completely flat underside (*intrados*) is also possible only if the joints of the component parts radiate (Hamlin 1953, 13-14). The voussoir at the top,

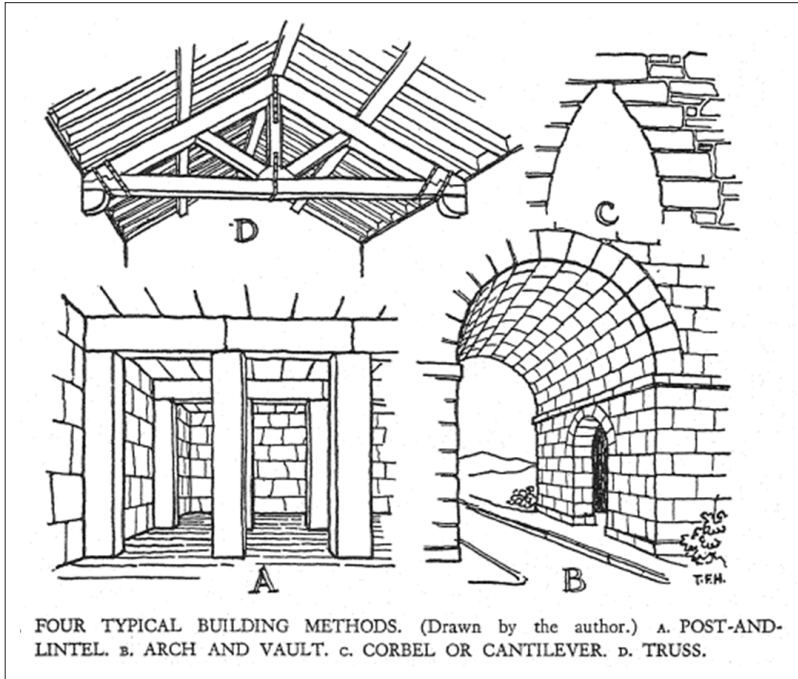


Fig. 4. Four building methods. (Hamlin 1953, 13)

or keystone, plays a crucial role in firmly fixing the components tightly, resisting thrust (outward horizontal force) and creating stability without relying solely on tension.

The arches from the Goryeo Dynasty, including the Hyeonmyo Pagoda, take the form of a ‘cusped arch.’ This refers to an arch with cusps or foliations worked on the intrados and “a point made by the intersection of two curved lines of members (Sturgis 1901, 732).” A cusped arch can thus be summarized as a composite of multiple lobes on the intrados and a pointed crown (the highest point of the arch). Depending on the element emphasized, this type of arch is variously called a foiled arch, foliated arch, lobed arch, pointed arch, ogee, or ogival arch (Sturgis 1901, 116).

An architectural element particularly reminiscent of Islamic styles here is the pointed shape of the arch. Pointed arches were prevalent in Is-

lamic architecture long before European Gothic architecture, becoming a defining feature of Islamic buildings. This perception has led to the assertion that the arches of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda bear Islamic resemblances. Widespread throughout the Islamic world from Syria to Iran and Spain, pointed arches were attributed to Islamic origins by prominent Islamic art historians of the first half of the 20th century, such as Ernst Herzfeld (2016 [1910], 35–6) and K.A.C. Cresswell (1958, 103). However, pointed arches were used even before the Islamic era, and can be found in the famous Nippur Arch in Iraq, which dates back to the Bronze Age (before 2700 BCE) (Peters 1897, chapter 5, especially 109; Fischer 1905). Although the pre-Islamic origins of the pointed arch are now irrefutable (Warren 1991, 61–63), its widespread use and architectural maturity in the Islamic world make its connection to Islamic architecture impossible to ignore.

One thing to underline here is that the pointed arch of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda, even when viewed on its flat surface, differs significantly from a so-called ‘true arch.’ A true arch is a self-supporting structure, relying on voussoirs held in compression by a central keystone. This point becomes clearer in the actual arch structures used in late Goryeo architecture. The Pagoda of Venerable Boje (普濟尊者) of Sinreuksa Temple was built in the fifth year of King U’s reign (1379) and dedicated to the late Goryeo Zen Master Naong Hyegeun (慧勤, 1320–1376). The stone lantern accompanying the pagoda features an opening decorated with cusped arches and lintels running horizontally just below the top of the arches (Fig. 5-1, 5-2). While these arches appear to be true arches with their curved shape and pointed crown, they belong to ‘false arches’ in a structural sense relying on the lintel for holding the shape in place.

Another cusped arch from the Goryeo period is also in the category of a false arch. A nine-story, 12.9cm-tall, gilded pagoda dating from the 14th century was discovered among the sarira reliquaries of Sujongsa Temple in Namyangju in 1939 (Fig. 6). The first floor of this small pagoda features entrances in the shape of cusped arches. One of the four identical arches is surrounded by a latticework pattern reminiscent of the door decoration of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda. While they look similar to true



**Fig. 5-1, 5-2. Stone Lantern for the Pagoda of Venerable Boje.**

Stone lantern for the pagoda of Venerable Boje (普濟尊者, Zen Master Naong, Hyegeun 慧勤), Sinreuksa Temple, Namyangju; dated to 1379 (the fifth year of King U's reign), Goryeo period.



**Fig. 6. Nine-Story Gilt-Bronze Stupa Reliquary.**

Nine-story gilt-bronze stupa reliquary, height 12.9 cm; Suzong Temple; 14th century, Goryeo period.

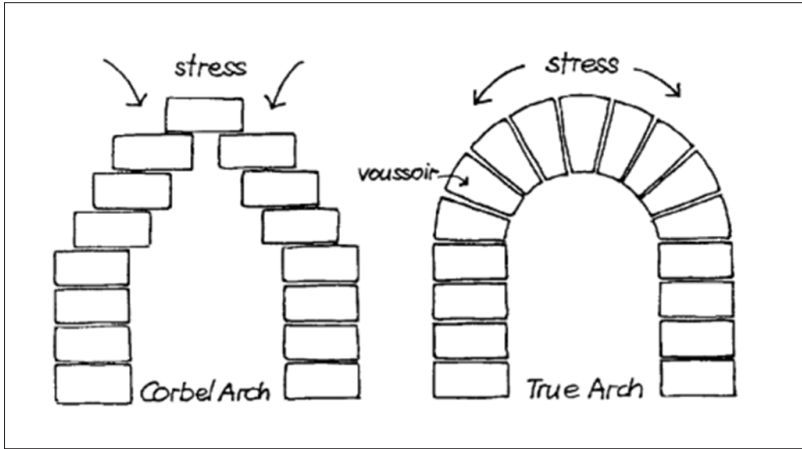


Fig. 7. Corbel arch and true arch. (Loofs-Wissowa 1986, 239)

arches, these arches actually lack voussoirs or keystones to support the structure. Instead, they resemble typical corbel arches, constructed by overlapping material cobbled together. The inner undulations, or foliations, of the arches are believed to have been created by trimming the overlapping sections that were brought together. The structural differences between a true arch and a corbel arch are illustrated in the figure above (Fig. 7) (Loofs-Wissowa 1986, 239).

This type of arch is likely a natural phenomenon of East Asian architecture, which was centered around wooden architecture. The *Yingzao Fashi*, the comprehensive architectural manual compiled during the Song Dynasty, focuses heavily on timber-frame construction and generally does not discuss arches in the structural sense used in Western masonry architecture. While the manual includes sections on stonework and brickwork, the architectural element of the structural arch is generally considered outside its scope. In the section of ‘*Liang* (梁 Beams)’ in Volume 5 of *Yingzao Fashi*, load-bearing timber members such as *Yueliang* (月梁, literally meaning ‘moon beam’ or ‘crescent-shaped beam’), *donggualiang* (冬瓜梁, meaning “winter melon beam”), and *hongniliang* (虹蜺梁, meaning ‘rainbow beam’) are described as having an arched or curved façade

or cross-sections (Li ② 7-10). However, these structures are thought to have been associated with a type of beam structure (*mingbu* 明楹, ‘exposed load-bearing member’), particularly below the ceiling. While this construction method creates a visually appealing arched form, it is not a true arch in the structural sense, as it is not self-supporting but relies on other beams. This demonstrates that East Asian architecture of the time relied on a flexible post-and-lintel timber system even when constructing arches. The Goryeo arches currently under discussion are also built using this structure.

### 3. The Agent of the Transmission: Muslim traders or Song merchants?

As mentioned earlier, the cusped arches on the Pagoda are reminiscent of Islamic architecture, a style never previously seen in Korean material culture. The sudden appearance of foreign elements during this period has been explained by unprecedented occurrences recorded in the official dynastic histories, *Goryeosa* [*History of the Goryeo Dynasty*] and *Goryeosa jeolryo* [*Essentials of Goryeo History*]. *Goryeosa* records Muslim traders visiting Goryeo during the eleventh century (see Table).

**Table: Muslims as ‘Daesik’ in Goryeosa corroborated by Goryeosa jeolryo**

Date <sup>2</sup>	King (reign year)	Translation	Original Text
1024/10	Hyeonjong (15)	This month (in the ninth month), <i>Yeol-Raja</i> [ <i>Al-Raja?</i> ] and 100 people from <i>Daesik</i> have paid tributes. <i>Daesik</i> is in the Western Regions.	是月大食國 悅羅慈等一百人來 獻方物大食國在 西域

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<sup>2</sup> The dates in the table are ordered by year, month, and day, following the conventions of the Korean calendric system. All dates in the primary source follow the traditional Chinese lunar calendar. 1024/10, for example, refers to the tenth (lunar) month of the year 1024. In most cases, lunar months do not correspond exactly to Gregorian months.

1025/9	Hyeonjong (16)	In the ninth month, <i>Haseon</i> [ <i>Hassan?</i> ], <i>Raja</i> [ <i>Raja?</i> ] and 100 others have come from Sea of <i>Daesik</i> to pay their tributes.	九月辛巳 大食蠻夏訛羅 慈等百人來獻方物
1040/11	Jeongjong (6)	In the eleventh month, <i>Daesik</i> [Muslim] traders like <i>Bonagae</i> (or <i>Bonahap</i> ) [ <i>al-Bukhara</i> or <i>Baraka?</i> ] have paid tribute in form of mercury, Dragon's Teeth, sandalwood, myrrh, sappan and other valuables. And the King ordered for arrangement for luxury during their stay in the official guesthouse and awarded them gold upon their departure back to their homeland.	十一月丙寅 大食國客 商 保那蓋(盒?)等來 獻水 銀龍齒占城香沒藥蘇木 等物 命有司館得優 厚 及還厚賜金帛

There are records of three visits in the 15th year of King Hyeonjong's reign (1024), the 16th year (1025), and the 6th year of King Jungjong's reign (1040). Specifically, during King Hyeonjong's reign, 100 Muslims visited each time. While they were collectively known as '*Daesik* (大食)', some of them were also known by their names in Chinese characters, such as 悅羅慈, 夏訛, 羅慈, and 保那蓋. Since these names can be pronounced as 'Yeolraja', 'Haseon', 'Raja', and 'Bonagae' in Korean, it is highly likely that these names could mean 'al-Raja', 'Hasan', 'Raja', and 'Baraka' or 'al-Bukhara'. In 1040, during King Jungjong's reign, the tributes and trade goods they presented during their visit were listed in detail, including mercury, Dragon's Teeth,<sup>3</sup> sandalwood, myrrh, and sappan and other valuables.

When *Goryeosa* mentions *Daesik*, we almost automatically refer to them as Arab Muslims, without much scrutiny. East Asians at the time were unaware of the ethnicity of *Daesik* and the distinction between the terms, Arabs and Muslims. As scholars have rightly pointed out (Agius

<sup>3</sup> A type of medicinal item, probably believed to be good for heart disease. Refer to the 'Biography of Rok Jin (祿眞傳)' from *Samguk Sagi* (三國史記) Volume 45: "At that time, Chung Gong Kakkan held the rank of Grand Master, sitting in the Hall of State Affairs, overseeing the appointment of officials both inside and outside the capital. After retiring from public service, he fell ill and summoned the imperial physician to examine his pulse. The physician said the illness was in his heart and he needed to take Dragon Tooth Soup."

時, 忠恭角干爲上大等, 坐政事堂, 注擬內外官. 退公感疾, 召國醫診脈, 曰病在心臟, 須服龍齒湯.

2008, 8-13; Redford and Ergin 2010, 1-11), however, a certain danger lies in equating Arabs with Muslims in general. The Arabian Peninsula has been inhabited by people of diverse ethnicities, religions, and languages, intermingling with outsiders from other regions. ‘Arabs’ thus cannot be equated with ‘Muslims’, as Jews, Christians, and other religious communities existed and still exist in Arabia and the Islamic world. Hence, the term ‘Muslim’ can encompass not only Arabs but also Persians, Turks, East Africans, Indians, Southeast Asians, and many more.

Given the lack of detailed geographical knowledge of China and Korea in the medieval times (Park 2012; Waugh 2013, 207-208) Goryeo Koreans did not have a generic term to define Islam or Muslims. Goryeo people used a rather metonymical term to refer to Muslims when the foreign traders first came to the Peninsula. The ethnic or religious identity of their new trading partners would not have been of great interest to local Koreans. Their foreign appearance and strikingly different costumes must have been the most visible difference of Muslim visitors and traders. Suffice it to say that *Daesik* refers to Muslims or Muslim traders from distant places, including but not limited to Arabia.

Although these records claim to reveal the remarkable diversity of Goryeo’s trading partners, there are no written sources that mention Muslim visitors settling in Goryeo at the time, or Muslim artisans among the visiting Muslim groups. The mere presence of Muslim traders on the Korean Peninsula does not support the transmission of the Islamic architectural style during the Goryeo period, nor does it explain the sophisticated artistic expression of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda. If there were artisans or craftsmen among the Muslim visitors not recorded in historical documents, their artistic influence on Goryeo art would not have been limited to this architectural decoration alone. The absence of similar examples of Islamic influence further makes the involvement of Muslim craftsmen seem improbable.

More importantly, the arches of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda, as inferred from the Pagoda’s other decorative elements, provide a reasonable basis for assuming that the structure containing such decoration actually exist-

ed. The scenes of a palanquin being carried, for example, carved on the platform beneath the arch decoration, can be compelling evidence that it reenacts an actual event occurring at the funeral of State Preceptor Jigwang. Similarly, rather than viewing the arch as a mere fictitious architectural decoration, it would be more accurate to view it as a representation of an actual Buddhist structure of the time. The fact that Buddhist buildings in contemporary China adopted this architectural style lends support to this argument. Unlike portable items such as ceramics, glassware, or textiles, architectural styles could not have been transmitted solely through the visits of foreign traders. Moreover, the complex processes of creating elaborately decorated structures required the involvement of skilled experts.

Instead of Muslims' involvement, it has been proposed that the path of cultural transmission can be traced to trade and diplomatic relations between Goryeo and Song China (960–1279) (Hwang 2010, 64–66; Shin and Jo 2015, 225–227; Park Jiyoung 2018, 185). Park Dae-nam(2018, 227–230) emphasizes the strong Muslim presence in Quanzhou in Fujian Province, an international port city during the Song Dynasty, and argues that the city's multicultural and global nature may have contributed to the transmission of Islamic architectural styles to Goryeo.

A major issue regarding the Song influence on the arches of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda lies in the uncertainty surrounding the dating of the relevant architectural examples. While mosque ruins in southern China are presented to have played a significant role in the transmission of the arch style, their construction dates are unclear. These ruins are often attributed to the Song and even Tang Dynasties, but it is difficult to determine which parts of the structure were rebuilt and which survived the turmoil of Chinese history. Regarding the cusped arches, some mosques in Quanzhou bearing this particular style date back to the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), while others were rebuilt at a later date. Most of Quanzhou Muslim tombstones feature the cusped arch design (Fig. 8), but their inscriptions indicate that they were created from 1171 to 1381, making them later than the Goryeo Pagoda.



**Fig. 8. Muslim Tombstones of the Qingjing-si Mosque.**

Located at the Qingjing-si Mosque in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China; dated to 1171–1381, Yuan Dynasty.

This raises the question of whether Southern Song cities may have served as conduits for the introduction of Islamic artistic elements into Goryeo. While the Song's active maritime trade fostered a multicultural society across the port cities of Fujian Province, similar arched styles have been found in pagodas built in other parts of China further north. In Jiangsu Province, the Tiger Hill Pagoda of Yunyan Temple (雲岩寺 虎丘塔, 959) in Suzhou (蘇州) (Fig. 9), the Stone Pagoda in Lingyin Temple (靈隱寺), the Longhua Pagoda of Longhua Temple (龍華寺, 977) in Shanghai (Fig. 10), and the Luohan Twin Towers (羅漢院 雙塔, 982) of Suzhou all attest to the wider adoption of the cusped arch style during the Northern Song period (960–1127). Furthermore, cusped arches are also found in several Liao Buddhist architectural structures. The Main Hall of the Shanhua Temple (善化寺) in Datong, Shanxi Province (山西省), built



**Fig. 9. Tiger Hill Pagoda of Yunyan Temple. (Detail)**

Yunyan Temple's Tiger Hill Pagoda (雲岩寺虎丘塔), Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, China; dated to 961, Song Dynasty.



**Fig. 10. Cusped Arch of the Longhua Pagoda (龍華寺) (detail).**

Longhua Temple (龍華寺), Shanghai, China; dated to 977, Northern Song Dynasty.



**Fig. 11. Main Hall and Cusped Arch Entrance of Shanhua Temple.**

Main Hall (大雄宝殿) and its cusped arch entrance (detail) at Shanhua Temple (善化寺), Datong, Shanxi Province, China; dated to the 11th century (1038), Liao Dynasty.



**Fig. 12. Detail of the White Pagoda.**

Ten Thousand Copies of the Huayan Sutra Pagoda (萬部華嚴經塔), Hohhot (呼和浩特), Inner Mongolia; 1047–1049, Liao Dynasty.

in the 11th century during the Liao dynasty, has an opening with the cusped arch having a multi-lobed arch with a pointed apex (Fig. 11). The nearly faded finial is surrounded by wooden architectural ornamentation. The same arch style is also found in the Ten Thousand Copies of the Huayan Sutra Pagoda (萬部華嚴經塔, 983), commonly known as the White Pagoda (白塔), located about 20 km east of Hohhot (呼和浩特) in Inner Mongolia (Fig. 12).

These examples point out that the arch style of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda was not limited to the Song Dynasty, but was influenced by a style that was widespread in northern China. While cusped arches appear in the Buddhist architecture of the Northern Song, they cannot be claimed to be a unique style of a single dynasty, either Song or Liao, because of the continuity of material culture amid the dynastic changes and power shifts in the relevant regions. Yunyan Temple shows that this arch style may have been present in Chinese pagodas prior to the Song dynasty. While the Temple was completed in 961 during the Song dynasty, construction of the pagoda began in 907 during the later Five Dynasties, when Suzhou was part of the Wuyue (吳越) kingdom. Shanhua Temple is a similar case. Originally built during the Tang dynasty, particularly during the Kaiyuan period (713–741), it was maintained during the Liao Dynasty before being largely destroyed by the wars of the late Liao Dynasty. It underwent extensive restoration around 1128 during the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) (Liang 1984). Other regions also show such cultural continuity. Even within Song territory, the southeastern Shanxi province during the 11th and 12th centuries reflects some of the architectural styles of the northern region, rather than the capital city of Kaifeng (Steinhardt 1995; Miller 2008).

At the time when cusped arches were a widespread artistic phenomenon throughout northern China, it was not Song but the Khitan Liao that ruled much of the region. Since the 10th century, as the entire Eurasian continent underwent rapid change, China experienced significant border shifts during a long period of division following the fall of the Tang Empire. Contrary to popular belief, the multi-ethnic society of the Tang Dynasty was inherited by the Liao Dynasty of northern China (Twitchett

and Tietze 1994, 43-153). This stands in stark contrast to our common belief that the Liao dynasty was alien to Chinese tradition, a belief that has emphasized historical continuity within the standard Tang-Song lineage (Chun 2011, 171-197). Recent archaeological excavations and analysis have shown that the Liao prided itself on being the successor to the Tang dynasty and its imperial family, securing its legitimacy in the Central Plains, whereas the Song dynasty, founded 50 years after the fall of the Tang dynasty, found its cultural identity in the Five Dynasties (Tsao 2000, 3-21). The material cultures of the Tang and the Liao richly demonstrate the continuity between the two dynasties. As the cusped arch appeared in northern China since the early 10th century, the Liao, inheriting the artistic traditions of the region, most likely played the role of the cultural agent transmitting the style to Goryeo.

#### **4. Liao as the Cultural Agent between the Islamic World and East Asia**

To understand better the cultural contact between Goryeo and the Islamic world, it is necessary to view East Asian medieval history from the perspective of the Eurasian continent, not just the Han Chinese. From the fall of the Tang Dynasty to the rise of the powerful Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), China experienced the political upheaval of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907-960), which fragmented the region into competing powers. While the Song Dynasty was culturally the most advanced, East Asia experienced fierce competition among equally powerful states such as the Khitan Liao (915-1125), the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the Tangut Dynasty of Xixia or Western Xia (1038-1227), the Jurchen Jin (1115-1234), and the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1396) on the Korean Peninsula (see map). As international trade intensified amidst constant conflicts over political hegemony, these states competed to maintain constant contact, both directly and indirectly, with other parts of Eurasia including the Islamic world. Overland contact and exchange with the Islamic world developed significantly during the Tang Dynasty, which was



### Map. Asia in the 11th century.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asia\\_1025ad.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asia_1025ad.jpg)

inherited and flourished by the nomadic kingdoms in northern China, most prominently the Liao.

The eleventh century, when the Hyeonmyo Pagoda was built, was the golden age of the Liao Dynasty, whose cultural influence was no less than that of the Song Dynasty. As Liao and Goryeo formally established diplomatic relations during the reign of King Hyeonjong of Goryeo (1009–1031), and continued to engage in national and commercial exchanges between the two countries, cultural elements of the Liao were transmitted in greater variety than ever before, and their influence on Goryeo was further strengthened. While most of their pagodas and temples are poorly preserved, their grand scale and elaborate decoration of the remaining sites demonstrate the patronage of the Liao imperial court. Contemporary with Song and Goryeo, the Khitans built a variety of magnificent Buddhist monuments to disseminate their faith to other states of East Asia including Goryeo (Solonin 2013, 184–214; Nam 2013; Kim 2014, 13–14; Park 2021, 179; Kim 2022; Jung 2023, 141–151). The title of State Preceptor (國師) itself, which originated in the Northern Qi Dy-

nasty, was adopted by the northern nomadic peoples of the Western Xia and Liao Dynasties before being transmitted to the Goryeo Dynasty (Heo 1975). When Buddhism in East Asia exhibited esoteric tendencies from the early 9th century onward (Lü 1955; Kim 2021, 78-88), the Liao played the cultural forerunner of East Asia by adopting the Buddhist traditions of the conquered territories and developing them to a higher level. The First Edition of Tripitaka Koreana, *Shinjo Daejang-gyeong* [literally meaning ‘newly carved Tripitaka’], one of the finest Tripitaka produced during the Goryeo period (Kim 2012, 269-278), is known to have been influenced by the Khitan Tripitaka (Ha 2020), which has recently been proved to have left an influence on the extant Tripitaka Koreana as well (Yoo 2004; Yoo 2011). The Liao also encouraged active exchanges between monks (Kim 2022, 5-6; Jung 2023, 143-148). Since Buddhism was central to Goryeo culture, this high level of interaction between the two countries implies active economic trade and cultural diffusion (Jung 2022). The Liao's powerful influence is also evident in aspects of Goryeo material culture, such as ceramics, metalwork, and Buddhist monuments (Jang et al. 2011).

Apart from cusped arches in the core stone of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda, Liao's cultural expressions are found in other aspects of the Pagoda. The square foundation of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda echoes the finest Liao pagodas, such as the Chaoyang South Pagoda (朝陽南塔, 984) and Chaoyang North Pagoda (朝陽北塔, 1043-1044) in western Liaoning Province. Some of the decorative motifs of the Pagoda also point to the artistic expressions of Liao material cultures. Among them are the motifs of cloud and treasure surrounding the cusped arches and a row of hanging jewels with bees and butterflies in the inner space of the arch. Known as one of the Liao's signature objects (Ahn 2010), a lotus-shaped, long-handled incense burner appears in the commemorating stele accompanying the Hyeonmyo Pagoda; a graceful apsara in the upper part of the stele elegantly holds this incense burner.

Another quintessential Liao item is the palanquins carved in the upper stylobate stone of the Hyeonmyo Pagoda. The presence of the palanquins in the funerary architecture evokes the Liao tomb painting in the



**Fig. 13. Women Standing beside a Carriage with a Bride (Princess?)**

Wall painting from Tomb M1 at Qianweulibugecun, Nailingagongshe, Kulun Banner, Inner Mongolia (Source: Xu 2012, Fig. 169).

Kulun Banner (库伦旗), which depicts a bride standing next to a carriage (Fig. 13). According to contemporary records, a crucial part of the bride's trousseau was the coffin in which she would be buried. The carriage in the funerary painting is actually a funeral bier intended for use at her death (Hansen 2000, 311-313). Relating to this Liao custom, the palanquins, both sumptuously decorated, may symbolize the grand funeral ceremony for the eminent monk. The Liao court, particularly during the reigns of King Gwangjong and King Munjong, sent luxurious carriages and palanquins to the Goryeo kings and their families, a practice mentioned more than a dozen times in *Goryeosa*.

Probably the more important point here is that most of these artistic expressions are the Liao's adoption of cultural heritage that has been long passed down in Tang and other states of northern China. Among the cases that show such cultural inheritance are the canopy carved along the edge of the roof stone of the Pagoda, which is more likely another decorative technique of northern Chinese stone architecture, rather than simply a Liao invention as suggested by Ahn (2010, 119–120); the decoration of neatly arranged curtains with short tassels, which can be found on a small Northern Qi stupa, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; and the motif of flamed Chintamani also used in Buddhist paintings of Xixia, another northern state in China at the time. Like other nomadic states, the Liao artisans and craftsmen were not just Khitans but from many ethnic and religious groups within its territory, creating an artistic synthesis of northern China and its contacting partners. In this respect, borders during the Medieval period were not defined as "thin, artificial lines" like today's but as "quite fluid territories" (Naum 2010, 102).

As recorded in its history, the Liao established a multi-ethnic empire. This empire included not only the pastoral-nomadic Khitans and other nomadic tribes, but also the Han-Chinese, refugees from defeated states like Balhae (Bohai) and Silla, immigrants, and traders, most notably Muslims (Wittfogel and Feng 1949, 46–49). By the time of Shengzong (982–1031) of the Liao Dynasty, a dual governmental structure was firmly established with the Northern Privy Council largely governing Khitan populations while the Southern Privy Council ruled the non-Khitan area, a majority of which was a Han Chinese population. These records reveal the Liao's conscious process of cultural blending (Twitcsett and Tietze 1994; Seo 2006).

The inclusive attitude of the Liao nobles is best testified to in the astrological maps painted on the vaulted ceiling of the tomb chambers of Zhang Shiqing and Zhang Gongyou in Xuanhua, Hebei. They combine the Chinese lunar lodges with the twelve symbols of the Western Zodiac in the ceiling paintings (Wu 2010, 160–163, 177–179). In addition to this remarkable mixture of different cultures, many of the findings from the tombs of the Zhang family also indicate the tantric Buddhist belief of the

deceased. As their surnames reveal, the Zhang family was Han-Chinese, as Zhang Shiqing was a Han official serving the Liao court. His grandson married a woman of the Yelu clan, the royal lineage of the Liao Dynasty. The Khitan Liao dynasty, in particular, produced many high-ranking Han Chinese officials and diplomatic envoys, including Han Chun (韓楫) and Meng Chu (孟初), who were Liao's congratulatory envoys for the royal birthday (賀生辰使) dispatched to Goryeo (Kwon 2022).

While embracing East Asian cultures of Confucian principles and Buddhism, the Liao maintained trade and diplomacy with the dynamic world of Inner Asia through its continental network with Muslims. Like great powers of all times, the Liao adopted every cultural element channeled into their territory and utilized it to the fullest extent in their cultural endeavours. Through this process of integrating diverse ethnic groups within the empire, the Liao emerged as one of the major powers in Inner Asia. The Khitans pacified the Turks, Tibetans, Shatuo, and other ethnic tribes one by one, monopolising the northern and southern routes to the Tianshan, a frequent passage of trans-cultural trade. They received tributes from 59 states and emerged as one of the main players of the Silk Roads (Kim Chai Man 1961, 87)

The ecumenical attitude of the Liao was reflected in their willingness to trade with Muslims despite Buddhism being the Khitan's religious belief. This attitude of embracing diverse beliefs and cultures allowed the Western Liao Dynasty to be established after the fall of the Liao Dynasty, and gave rise to a unique dynasty of Buddhist Khitan people ruling over a Muslim population.<sup>4</sup>

Shangjing, the capital of the Liao, had an establishment of Turkic Uighurs, who played a vital role in the Silk Road trades (Shangjing, Geography, Book 37, *Liaoshi*). Through their network, the Liao formed the basis for intercontinental trading with Islamic states like the Kara-Khanids, Ghaznavids and, even farther, Abbasid Baghdad, and could enjoy

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<sup>4</sup> For the probable reason of Qara Khitai's observance of Buddhism amidst Islamic lands, see Biran 2005.

exotic cultural imports from the Islamic world. The frequent contact of the Liao with Turkic Muslims was not confined to trade and commerce. They made several marriage offers to Islamic states. *Liaoshi* mentioned a marriage proposition of 1022, in which their marriage partner might have been the Qara-Khanid ruler, Yusuf Qadir Khan (r.1026-1032), the Persianate Turk (Wittfogel and Feng 1949). The name ‘Goryeo (Korea),’ or ‘Kaoli’, was most likely spread to the Islamic world through the Liao Dynasty’s extensive trade network.

The objects (Shen 2006) and the murals (Su 1989) found in the Liao temples and tombs,<sup>5</sup> as evidenced by elaborate funeral practices involving the use of funerary masks, demonstrate that the Liao maintained a traditional culture with nomadic roots, and at the same time, imported goods from the Islamic regions of Central Asia and Inner Asia. Archaeological finds from the tomb of the Princess of Chen (Xiao Shaoju) in northern China (dating back to 1018) help us better understand the connections between the Liao and Islamic art (Archaeological Institute of Inner Mongolia et al.1993, 48; Shen 2006). The finds from the Liao sites include a large number of luxury objects, with elaborate ornaments made of exotic material, including amber and crystal. Islamic glassware, in particular, clearly demonstrates their familiarity and fascination with Islamic artefacts. Among them are glass bottles excavated from the tomb of the Princess of Chen State at Qinglongshan, Naiman Banner, in Inner Mongolia, and a glass pitcher containing a miniature ewer discovered in the underground chamber of the Northern Pagoda in Chaoyang (sealed in 1043) (Fig. 14). Alongside these rarities, everyday objects from the Islamic world, exquisitely decorated, are also discovered. A bronze wash-basin unearthed from the tomb of the Princess of Chen State (Fig. 15-1, 15-2) is such a case. It is densely engraved with Persian script along its interior rim, with its base adorned with a hexagonal star pattern.

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy Steinhart (1997, 363-379) argues that Liao tombs were not based on Tang Chinese models, but were sourced from their northern pastoral-nomadic world. She finds particularly close links between the tomb structures of Liao and those of Goguryeo, the strongest power among the three kingdoms of Korea.



**Fig. 14. Persian Glass Jug with Miniature Ewer.**

Persian glass jug containing a miniature ewer, from the underground palace of the Chaoyang North Pagoda (朝阳北塔), Chaoyang City, Liaoning Province, China; palace sealed in 1043, Liao Dynasty  
Source: Waugh 2011, 68.



**Fig. 15-1, 15-2. Basin (and Its Detail.)**

Source: Bronze basin with Persian inscription, excavated from the tomb of the Princess of Chen and Xiao Shaoju at Qinglongshan Town, Naiman Banner; Liao Dynasty/Persian, dated to 1018 or earlier; height 19 cm, diameter (mouth) 57 cm, diameter (base) 9.33 cm.

Source: <http://sites.asiasociety.org/arts/liao/swf/main.html> (accessed 2015)

Like other excavated Islamic items from the tomb, this basin may have been an import from the western part of the Persian cultural domain. It could have been a commodity or a gift from local Muslims, mainly Uighur merchants who had already settled in the Liao territory with their trading business (Wittfogel and Feng, 1949, 170-173). Considering the Liao's trade connection and diplomatic contacts, the Ghaznavids (975-1186) would be the most likely source of such influx. The Muslim writer Sharaf al-Zaman Tahir Marwazi (1050-1120) recorded the arrival of a Liao envoy from Emperor Shengzong (r. 982-1031) to their court (Marvazī c.1120, 19-20). Shengzong's letter of 1024 to Mahmud of Ghazni (r.998-1030) is a unique document revealing the Khitan's internationality and multi-cultural mentality at the peak of its dynastic power.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. Arches of the Indo-Islamic World

Given the geographical proximity and historical evidence, the cusped arch style we are now discussing can be traced back to the contemporary Islamic architecture of the Ghaznavids (977-1186). As the map shows, the Ghaznavid territory under Mahmud of Ghazni (r.998-1030) stretched from the Oxus, the Indus River, and the Indian Ocean in the east to Rey and Hamadan in the west (Bosworth 2012). Although the Ghaznavids invaded northern India and sacked Delhi, their centre of power continued to be in present-day Afghanistan, where they built two massive palatial cities: Ghazna and Lashkari Bazaar in Bust. They built numerous palaces, mosques, madrasas, bathhouses, gardens, and villas for their nobles in the cities they conquered, all of which now lie in ruins. The remaining Ghaznavid sites are almost entirely scattered in Afghanistan, including palaces, mosques, and minarets in Ghazna, Lashkari Bazar in Bust, square-

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<sup>6</sup> Mahmud was unwilling to entertain closer relations with the Khitans until they accepted Islam. Karl A. Wittfogel and Jiasheng Feng 1949, 50-52.



**Fig. 16-1, 16-2. Central Palace (Lashkari Bazaar), Exterior and South Façade.**  
Exterior view showing the gate and south façade with the main entrance, Bust, Afghanistan;  
11th century, Ghaznavid Dynasty (photo taken in 1960).  
Source: [https://www.archnet.org/sites/19955?media\\_content\\_id=145728](https://www.archnet.org/sites/19955?media_content_id=145728)

domed tombs made of brick in Bukhara, Merv, Sarakhs, and Mar Sharif.

The vast ruins of Lashkari Bazaar, a symbol of the glory of the Ghaznavid dynasty, were partially excavated between 1949 and 1951 by the French Archaeological Delegation (DAFA: Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan), led by Daniel Schlumberger (Schlumberger et al 1963; Allen 1988-1990). They stretch for 1.4 kilometers along the river in the ancient city of Bust on the eastern bank of the Helmand River in southern Afghanistan (Fig. 16-1, 16-2). The site contains the remains of hundreds of mudbrick residential and military structures, nearly all of which feature pointed arches for various functions, including archways, portals, niches, and windows. The pointed arches also appear at the portal of Ziyarat-i Baba Hatim, Afghanistan, set in a rectangular frame of a thick, knotted brickwork in Kufic script. As a rare example of Ghaznavid architecture in Iran, the burial site of Arslan Jadhib, an official of Sultan Mahmud, is located in Sang Bast, Iran, where each side of its internal transition zone is articulated with a pointed segmental arch. Despite being badly damaged, the Ghaznavid sites attest to the use of pointed and lobed arches in their various types of architecture from religious buildings to domestic residences.

A point to note here is that the presence of cusped arches in Ghaznavid Islamic architecture does not necessarily mean that they are a unique creation of that dynasty. Because of the continuity from previous cultures to the Ghaznavids, it is difficult to sharply demarcate specific works of art or artistic styles inherited from the earlier years to the Ghaznavids. This also applies to the art and cultures between the Ghaznavids, Ghurids, and the Seljuks as well because of their rivalry in the same territory. Moreover, Ghazna, the capital of the Ghaznavids, was an ancient place where Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism flourished and were integrated. For example, Nalanda, a renowned Buddhist mahavihara, was supported by numerous patrons of both Buddhists and non-Buddhists (Krishnan 2016, 17). Ghazni had been the capital of the Buddhist reign of Zunbil until the 9th century,<sup>7</sup> and the local Buddhist site of Tepe

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<sup>7</sup> The Korean Buddhist monk Hyecho, visiting in 726 CE, recorded that the kings of both Kabul



**Fig. 17. Shewaki stupa, Kabul, Afghanistan, 3rd -5th century, The Kushan Empire.**

Source: [https://issuu.com/aliphfoundation/docs/en\\_aliph\\_dc\\_program\\_single-page\\_2022\\_01\\_28/s/14684304](https://issuu.com/aliphfoundation/docs/en_aliph_dc_program_single-page_2022_01_28/s/14684304)

Sardar near Ghazni reflects a fusion of Buddhist-Hindu culture which dates back in time (Rugiadi 2009). Belonging to the final phase of Buddhism in Afghanistan, the site demonstrates a ‘common international style’, combining artistic features from Gandharan and Hellenistic art with Hindu elements (Verardi and Elio 2005, 433). In this respect, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni was no exception despite his notorious aversion to

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and Zabul were Turkic and “highly revere the Three Jewels (Buddhism)”. He noted the presence of many monasteries with over ten thousand monks, primarily studying Mahayana teachings.” (Jeong 2004, 319-323). In fact, their faith has not been researched as much with some scholars suggesting their Hinduism (Wink 1991, 118-119).

Hindu idolatry. In sacking Delhi, he broke down or burned all the Hindu idols to amass a vast quantity of gold and silver, but harbored a deep admiration for Hindu architecture and its magnificent structures (Ferishta n.d., 58–59). It is therefore not surprising that the Islamic monuments of the Ghaznavid dynasty, despite being strictly fundamentalist Islam, contain spoils and remains of Hindu and Buddhist architecture, some of which still retain iconographies with distinctively religious features.

The appearance of pointed arches in this region suggests a close connection to pre-Islamic local traditions, including Hinduism and Buddhism. For example, the Shewaki Stupa, an important Buddhist monument in Kabul, Afghanistan, still preserves a band of niches decorated with pointed arches along the round body of this ancient monument (Fig. 17).<sup>8</sup> The Stupa, recently reconstructed, was built during the Kushan period, probably between the 3rd and 5th centuries. It was once a major stopover for Buddhist pilgrims on the religious route from lowland India to Bamiyan in Afghanistan. The architectural vocabulary of a niche decorated with a pointed arch has long been adopted in Buddhist architecture from Central Asia to China, becoming one of its most distinctive and iconic architectural features, a visual marker of Buddhist buildings.

In Buddhist art and architecture, niches decorated with a blank arch with a pointed apex often contained images of worship, and the devotion this artistic form evoked in worshippers was carried over to the niches themselves, and particularly their arches. Hence the pointed arch was a religious symbol even before Muslims adopted it in architecture. The adoption of the pointed arch as an artistic expression in Islamic architecture led to religious associations of the mihrab, or prayer niche, in mosques and other religious communities, marking the beginning of the structural application of the Islamic arch. Like the niche containing the Buddha statue, the mihrab came to indicate the direction of Mecca, the holy city (Havell 1913, 14–38).

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aliph-foundation.org/en/projects/conservation-of-buddhist-era-built-heritage>; <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/context-culture/the-largest-standing-stupa-in-afghanistan-a-short-history-of-the-buddhist-site-at-topdara/>

For a long time, European scholars assumed that there were no arches or domes in Indian architecture before Islamic times (Petersen 1996, 25).<sup>9</sup> More recent archaeological evidence and analysis, however, confirm the existence of true arches in India before Islamic times, including ones in pre-Mauryan or Nanda period (5th century BCE) and at Harappa dating to around 1900–1300 BCE (Vats 1940, vol.I. 488, vol II, plate 139). Coomaraswamy mentions eight examples of true arches, including Bodh-Gaya, all situated in the northern part of the peninsula, from Kashmir in the west to the gates of Bengal in the east (Coomaraswamy 1965, 73). The prevailing scholarly consensus today is that while the true arch was known and used occasionally for specific structures like drains, furnaces, and certain palace or temple elements (e.g., at Kausambi, Bhitargaon, and the Mahabodhi Temple), the trabeated system (post and lintel) remained the dominant architectural style to form a corbel arch, which was gradually replaced by the widespread introduction and systematic use of the true arch style during the Islamic period.

Whether constructed with corbelling or a true arch, most arches in Indian architecture have both components of the cusped arch discussed here: a multi-lobed intrados and a pointed crown. The multi-lobed structure inside the arch, one of the components of the cusped arch discussed in this paper, is an architectural style that has been used for a long time in Indian architecture before the Islamic era (Manchanda 2006; Meister 2010, 31, 36–37; Flood 2009, 196–199). The existing theory that the polylobed arch originated in Al-Andalus (Ettinghausen, Grabar, and Jenkins-Madina 2001, 87–89) has been refuted by evidence from a small mosque ruin of the 8th-century Umayyad Empire (Arce 2008), but it is clear that this form was more widely used in earlier Indian architecture. Hindu temples, particularly those in Kashmir and the western Himalayan

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<sup>2</sup> There has been much criticism that Europeans unfairly disparage India and Indian art, probably because of their deep-rooted colonial attitude. Lawrence notes that the ‘vast and numbingly circular literature on Islam in South Asia’ that asserts a depressing teleology of decline centered on the colonial experience (Lawrence 1955); Europeans often gave negative, almost hateful, evaluations of Hinduism and Hindu art in particular (Mitter 1992).

region, are characterized by the widespread use of trefoil arches within triangular pediments on the temple facades. In view of this, the existing polylobed arch structures of Mughal architecture can be seen as a continuation and refinement of local architectural traditions, particularly those of Hindu temples of the 7th and 8th centuries (Patel 2012, 148, 157).

In addition to the polylobed internal structure, another element of the cusped arch—the pointed top—may have originated in Indian architecture. Because India was geographically distant from the heart of the Islamic world, its long-standing architectural traditions gave the emerging Islamic architecture a unique character and identity, a prime example of which is the pointed arch. Now considered the quintessence of Islamic architecture, the pointed arch was originally a “synthesis of Indian aesthetics”(Patel 2012, 6, 139-164), favoured in the architecture of eastern Iran and Afghanistan (Flood 2009, 118, 144-149). In summary, the cusped arch shown in the Hyeonmyo Pagoda and other Buddhist structures of the Goryeo Dynasty, combining a pointed apex with a multi-lobed internal feature, is an architectural style that constitutes the defining characteristics of Indo-Islamic architecture.

The first surviving example of a perfectly finished pointed arch in Islamic architecture is the Adhai Din Ka Jhonpra mosque in Ajmer. Originally a Sanskrit college built by the Chauhan ruler Vigrha Raj, the structure was destroyed in 1194 during the late Ghurid dynasty (786-1215) to make way for a mosque (Fig. 18-1, 18-2). The portals, iwans, and mihrab of this mosque show the finest examples of cusped arches of a multilobed interior with a pointed apex. Despite its date, the rapidity with which it was built suggests that the Ghurid Mosque incorporated materials and architectural styles from earlier periods.<sup>10</sup> Like numerous mosques built on the remains of existing Hindu and Buddhist architecture, including one of the oldest mosques at Banbhore (Petersen 1996, 32), Ghurid buildings are well known for their ‘ubiquitous reuse’ of

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<sup>10</sup> The literal meaning of ‘Adhai Din Ka Jhonpra’ is “shed of two-and-a-half days”, referring to the legend that a part of the mosque was built in just two-and-a-half days.



**Fig. 18-1, 18-2. Seven-Arch Façade and Mihrab of the Adhai Din-ka-Jhonpra Mosque.**

Seven-arch façade and mihrab of the Adhai Din-ka-Jhonpra Mosque, Ajmer, Rajasthan, India; dated to 1194, Ghurid Dynasty.

building materials (Flood 2009, 137–150). Much of the reused material from the Kaman Mosque originated from Hindu pavilions and monasteries of the late 8th or early 9th centuries. Some of the recycled materials from the Qutb Mosque are stylistically similar to those from Hindu temples in Rajasthan and Jain temples of the same period. The materials re-

used in Ajmer were taken from Jain and Hindu temples that had existed on the site, indicating that the cusped arches of the Mosque were an Islamic appropriation of age-old Indian architectural vocabulary.

The accomplished and widespread use of cusped arches in extant Ghurid architecture suggests that this architectural style was used in earlier periods as well. The polylobed arches were already widely adopted in pre-Islamic Indian architecture, and numerous examples of pointed arches have been found at the Ghaznavid sites. The Ghaznavid dynasty, an Islamic state contemporaneous with the Liao, Song, and Goryeo dynasties, despite its religious exclusivity, inherited various existing religious architectural traditions from northern India and Afghanistan, creating a unique Islamic architectural style much like later Islamic dynasties, including the Ghurids. Given the architectural examples of the Ghurids, it is highly likely that the Ghaznavids had already adopted this arch style. The Liao, a contemporary trading partner of the Ghaznavids, likely adopted this architectural style through diplomacy, trade, and personal exchange, and subsequently incorporated the cusped arch style into their Buddhist architecture.

At the same time when Islamic architectural styles spread to northern China through exchanges between the Ghaznavid and the Liao, some of the Goryeo Buddhist practices and material culture show influences from the northern states of China, including the Liao Dynasty. During this period, the cusped arch style was transmitted through continuous cultural contact and human movements between Goryeo and the Khitan Liao. Gifts and tributes contributed to the inflow of new artistic vocabularies, whereas interaction between Goryeo and the Liao became more intense over time due to trade, diplomatic interactions, and frequent wars. Beginning around 1010, a constant stream of Khitan refugees and immigrants arrived in Goryeo (Park 2002, 17-18). Surrendered soldiers from the Liao were incorporated into the Goryeo army ('Guards,' Book 12, *Gaoli Tujing*). Meanwhile, other Liao refugees fled eastwards and took refuge in Goryeo. Many of these refugees appear to have been skilled artisans and craftsmen as the Song envoy, Xu Jing (徐兢) astutely observed:

What I also heard is that, among tens of thousands of Khitan prisoners of war who had surrendered to Goryeo, there were craftsmen at a ratio of ten to one, and those with exceptional skill now worked in the royal workshop. This is reflected in their household vessels and dresses increasingly sophisticated these days ('Commoners,' Book 19, *Gaoli Tujing*).

Most Liao exiles with advanced skills were assigned to the state-run workshop of textiles (幞頭所) and to those of building and repairs (將作監) in Goryeo. The fact that these craftsmen were so directly involved in Goryeo culture suggests that they may have left a significant impact on Goryeo architecture and buildings that was noticeable to Su Jing

This direct intervention by Liao craftsmen into Goryeo culture appears to have led to the infusion of Islamic architectural styles into the material culture of Goryeo Buddhism. Specifically, Goryeo and Liao, sharing common religious beliefs and artistic expressions, actively utilized newly introduced artistic vocabularies to further develop the material expression of Buddhism. These arches reappear in a stone lantern and a small gilded reliquary pagoda dating from the 14th century, when Goryeo was under the rule of the Yuan China, becoming part of the Mongol Empire. This reflects a cultural fusion of the time, intensified by the strong influence of nomadic states known for their penchant for exotic expressions. In this respect, the cusped arches of the Goryeo remains occupy a unique position in the history of Korean art, as examples of the cross-fertilization of diverse artistic elements brought about by the migration of craftsmen across Buddhist Asia.

## Conclusion

This paper explores how the cusped arches of Goryeo Buddhist shrines demonstrate the diverse cultural exchanges within contemporary societies of Asia, and argues that the international style of Liao craftsmen who long accumulated artistic traditions in northern China and were also ex-

posed to the architectural style of the Islamic world made an impact on Goryeo architecture. A major cultural trend of the time, Islamic arts moved across the Eastern part of Eurasia to Goryeo through the agent of the Khitan Liao. The paper also identifies the Islamic cultural sphere associated with Goryeo art as northern India and present-day Afghanistan by tracing the route through which Islamic artistic elements entered Goryeo. This pathway of cusped arches indicates that the Islamic art style introduced to the Korean peninsula was Indo-Islamic among various styles of Islamic art, not Arabic or Persian as is commonly believed.

Despite the gap in time, experience, and knowledge spanning more than a millennium from the Goryeo Dynasty to the present, we still tend to make the same mistake as Goryeo people in identifying ‘Daesik’ as Arabs. And we simply associate certain artistic styles with vaguely defined regions or religions, overlooking cultural nuances. This problem is particularly pronounced in understanding Islamic art. The word ‘reservoir’ is often used to describe the multilayered complexity of Islamic art. When Islam rose in the 7th century, Islamic art inherited elements from Byzantine, Sassanid, and Hellenistic traditions, developing its own distinct artistic features. By placing ‘Islam’ or ‘Islamic art’ within a more specific temporal and spatial context, this paper will help to avoid the mistake of the synonymous use of ‘Islam’ with Arab due to our unexamined habit and potential Orientalist thinking (Said 1978).

While we tend to categorize art among the Song, nomadic culture, Islam, Buddhism, and Goryeo, the diverse cultures of the Medieval Ages were not isolated but interconnected. The period we are discussing witnessed a global trend of cultural convergence, and the cusped arch discussed in this paper is one of the medieval examples of such cultural blending and fusion. It shows a local translation of distinct Islamic artistic expression created through multicultural interactions. By tracing Goryeo’s transcultural contact with the Indo-Islamic region, this study offers an opportunity to examine medieval Korean art in a broader and more fluid context.

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