Inheritance of Historical Elements and Poetic Expression of Contemporary Architecture

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Abstract

Historical elements are loaded with the essence of human civilization. The magnificent and ever-lasting charm is passed down via contemporary architecture, which immerses people in this long path simultaneously. With the diversification of contemporary architecture, large quantities of architecture works have left us with profound impressions and beautiful memories as they successfully inherit the unique historical elements. This paper states the inheritance of historical elements by comparison of multiple cases, analyzes its silent transforming influence over architectural design, and explores constructs for the poetic expression of contemporary architecture.

Keywords: Historical Elements; Inheritance; Contemporary Architecture; Poetic Expression

1. Introduction

“Poetically, man dwells on this earth” originates from the poem “In lieblicher Bläue blühet” written by a Germany poet in the 19th century, Hölderlin. With philosophic interpretation by Heidegger, “poetically dwelling on the earth” becomes what everyone is dreaming about. However, the obscure and disordered expression of the urban architectural style in current times, resulting from either the excessively fast steps of city development, or the misunderstanding of history by contractors and architects, has made residents bewildered, let alone “poetically”.

For historical elements, what the architects should do is not to mechanically apply historical symbols, but to commit themselves to the multi-level and multi-perspective excavation and interpretation of the history, and to

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apply its creative use in the design work. In this paper, a few cases in China and Japan are selected and will
be compared in order to explain how historical elements can be inherited in contemporary architecture works,
and how the historical precipitation of the contemporary architecture design can reveal new vitality.

2. The contemporary inheritance of historical elements

2.1 Inheritance of original symbols

Tadao Ando has ever mentioned two ways to ponder tradition: one that follows traditional forms and the
other that inherits the spirit of non-morphology (Ando, T. 1999). Kenzo Tange agrees with the former in which
the modernization of non-spiritual traditions are inherited and combined with future development; while Tadao
Ando believes that the fundamental and spiritual things should be inherited and passed on to the next era.

Kenzo Tange’s design of Kagawa Prefectural Government Hall in the year of 1955 (Figure 1) shows his
understanding of the “new form of traditional semantics”. Kagawa Prefectural Government Hall has a
distinctive appearance. The outrigger on the structural column is divided into two beams, with each small
room divided into five by the concrete beams and slabs, which is quite typical in Japanese traditional wooden
buildings (Wu, Y. 2015). The outer corridor in higher parts bearing some resemblances with the traditional
five-pagoda in Japan is composed by the concrete slab and outrigger. The rough concrete surface is exposed
directly, which employs the reinforced concrete to imitate the traditional wooden structure, reflecting the
simple style of the building.

Fig.1. Appearance of Kagawa Prefecture Hall

However, the 1980’s TIME’S project is more inclined to reflect the Tadao Ando inheritance of traditional
spirit. TIME’S is located at the intersection of Takase River and Sanjo Streets in the center of Kyoto. Ando
treats Takasago as a garden with different expressions of the seasons and times, and TIME’S is designed as
a water-aware garden. The three-story building with two on the ground floor and one basement enables you
to see the river from any layer. The river has become the meridians of the building, and people, nature and
architecture are blending with one another (Figure 2).

Both Kenzo Tange’s inheritance of the traditional forms and Tadao Ando’s inheritance of the non-form spirit
are actually the succession of the original symbol. Design works are able to assume unique and poetic
attributes by our digging into the characteristics of the original symbols in the traditional civilization, where the
architectural space and form are tending to be more diverse.
2.2 Reconstruction of architectural space

The old buildings are not only the evidence for the study of historical changes and social development, but also the reflection of the achievements of various arts and technologies in their times, which not only have historic value but also have important practical significance. However, the continuous development of the city has led to a variety of architectural types, and the design and construction of new buildings in the city will never stop, but the addition of new elements do not mean compromise. Therefore, the abstract reconstruction and organic renewal of architectural space become the prerequisite for the combination of new and old buildings.

The Tsinghua University Library is a typical work of the abstract reconstruction of architectural space. Its three-time successful expansion enables the architects to combine the new and old buildings altogether. Tsinghua University Library was founded in 1919 by the American architect Henry Murphy, with the construction area of 2114m². It was initially composed of three parts: the library, reading room and hall. Since 1928, the collection of the library has increasing remarkably on yearly basis. Mr. Yang Tingbao presided over the library expansion in 1930, increasing the area to 7700m². He smartly "replicated" the original construction, and designed a tilt connector to join the original library and the second phase together, forming an axis of 45 degree (Figure 3). The appearance of the second phase is the same as that of the original one without any destruction, but establishing new orders.

In 1987 and 2011, Tsinghua University Library undertook its third and fourth expansion, which was hosted by one of the winners who first got "Liang Sicheng Architecture Prize" -- Mr. Guan Zhaoye. He insisted on the principles of "respect history, respect the environment, and respect ancestors’ creative achievements". The third phase maintains the original features of Tsinghua Park in its spatial scale, style and color. Although its spatial volume is much larger than the previous two phases, the building is implicit and modest. Mr. Guan Zhaoye pays attention to the appropriateness and harmony of the design, but he also stressed the idea of "harmony but different". He opposes to blend the elements of different times stiffly together.

As one of the 14 most beautiful campuses in the world selected by Forbes, one of the reasons for Tsinghua Garden's acceptance is the harmonious transition between history and modern architecture. Dwelling in this "new" and "old" library, not only can people feel the architects’ adept intention to reconstruct space and inherit the historical elements, but also can experience the poetic atmosphere in study and life while reading.
2.3 Regeneration of historical elements

The well-known architect, IM Pei, started the design of the Suzhou Museum in 2002 (Figure 4), adhering to the idea of "Chinese style, Suzhou style and innovative style", and following the principles of "not high, not large, and not prominent." The new Suzhou Museum is designed based on the traditional architectural style. As the historical elements, the white walls and gray top, originating from the Suzhou-style buildings, are updating and regenerating in the new museum. The redesigned Suzhou Museum highly fits for the urban environment with pure, simple, and intriguing tastes. Glass roofs and stone roofs are against each other, unique in both shape and style. The natural light shines into the exhibition hall through the roof, assuming the alteration between light and shadow, as well as the contrast between light and darkness, via the soft-hued shutter bar, which not only guides the visitors, but also provides a pleasant atmosphere for anyone in it.

The city walks forward unceasingly with the intersection of new and ancient traits, and still has its own life cycle and cultural deposits. The steps of ancient cities are slow, but the city in today turns out a new look every day as the result of the rapid development of science and technology (Wang, J. 2002). The aesthetic value of today's society is diverse, and people have more ways to explore how the historical elements in the architecture with the combination of old and new traits are updated and regenerated. It is worth constant thinking and innovation by the architects during their practice.

3. Poetic interpretation of spirituality

3.1 Worship of traditional spirit

Frank Lloyd Wright once described the building materials in prose language: "Each kind of material has its own language ... Each kind of material has its own story", "For a creative artist, every kind of material has his own message, has his own song" (Xiang, B. 1992). The building material, as the most intuitive visual response of facade effect, is slowly getting highlighted. Many architects who are well-versed in the use of the materials, like concrete, red brick, glass and other personal building materials, begin to apply them in their personal ideas, and constantly create wonderful works, expressing the unique poetic attributes of their buildings.

Japanese architectural historian and architect, Fujimori Terunobu, is known for his Avant-grade architectural style, many of his works are a reflection on the modernism architecture. His aims to use natural materials such as earth, stone, wood, etc., to transcend territorial forms to create buildings of unknown nationality. In other words, he tries to use the natural materials to create "new international" architecture in the 21st century (Bao, M. 2005). The tea house designed by Fujimoriis always exudes a warm, humble
atmosphere, especially touches the hearts of people who are thirsty for simple life. His Teahouse Tetsu (Fig. 5) in Hokuto City of Japan is surrounded by beautiful cherry blossoms, which is a perfect blend of minimalism and fantasy. The internal decoration is simple and modern, while its dreamy exterior is as wonderful as that of the scene in the animation works of Miyazaki. For the Ruchuan Pavilion he designed in Taiwan (Fig. 6), he employs the giant Taiwan bamboos to meet the owner’s requirement in height. He arranged them in a row, which assumed different forms from different perspectives. His unique use of the original material endows the tea houses with zen and poetic charms. This architecture with special form, natural material, original style and unique visual effect appeals to people to have more reflection on spiritualism.

Throughout the architectural trends in current times, new building materials provide architects with a variety of design ideas and a broader imagination, but they also give birth to ever-changing forms of architecture. Both the metal which is full of industrial vibe and the wood which is rich in warmth can create poetic ambience by architects’ creative interpretation.

### 3.2 Representation of humanistic concern

The first person to combine poetry with architecture was Louis Henry Sullivan, the backbone of the Chicago School, who for the first time proposed the application of poetry and nature in the creation of architecture in his article “Characteristics and Tendencies in American Architecture”, which was published in 1885. Poetic architecture is always with the power of warmth, making people wander along but forget the existence of the building itself. This power is often derived from the careful attention to life and the devoted care for sentiments.

Completed in 2003, the House in Plum Grove designed by the Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima, is located in a quiet residential area on the outskirts of Tokyo surrounded by rows of plum trees. She explores the poetic connotation of architecture from the residential buildings. Kazuyo Sejima did not completely abide by the owner’s requirements, to design a “large space” with only one room in a very limited space. What she has done is to compress the bedroom function to the minimum, and the wall into the thinnest, in order to partition several small rooms with independent functions. And then she use the openings inside the house to create another kind of “large space”. When the daughter of the owners was watching the model, she mentioned unintentionally: “If there is a window, my brother and I can chat through it. That is wonderful!” Therefore, the added system of openings not only caters to the little girl’s desire, but also enriches the internal space. Vibrant plum trees can be seen through the window aperture (Figure 7), along with the natural scent. Family members can also encounter and chat with each other somewhere beyond expectation, creating sweet memories.
Like Kazuyo Sejima, the Taiwan architect, Huang Sheng-Yuan can also skillfully express the architectural poetic attributes in life. In 2008, he built the Jin-Mei Pedestrian Bridge across Yilan River (Figure 8), which provides comfortable and interesting walking space. Jin-Mei Pedestrian Bridge takes advantage of the original motor vehicle bridge to rearrange the mode of transportation and build a walking corridor in a simple but non-traditional way. Space for activities and overlooking is reserved at intervals along the pedestrian bridge, with some fitness equipment underneath, which becomes a favored place for the residents along the Yilan River to stroll along and entertain themselves. The side of bridge is joined by the intentionally extended steel structure, reflecting with the distant mountains just like the reed echoing with wind. The old and new pedestrian bridge carries people's life vision to move freely in the city. Therefore, Mr. Huang shows his concerns from the subtleties of life.

Poetic attributes in the architectural form does not always need to rely on superb skills and gorgeous appearance. The space that is created in a reasonable way with the concern of people's inner needs essentially carries the unique poetic charm, as the result of its intensive characteristics and emotions.

4. Conclusion

By comparing selected works in China and Japan, this paper explains inheritance of historical elements and poetic interpretation of spirituality in contemporary architecture works. Under the global context of architecture interaction, it is of great importance for architects to understand and pass on the tradition.

It can be seen from above cases that history is not only the resource of design. The contemporary heritage of its elements and spirit, as well as the poetic expression of the architectural connotation, is what architects need to ponder in their design. The poetic state of architecture is derived from the warmth of life. This kind of warmth is presented in the bizarre realities and is closely related to people's lives. Even the simplest materials, the simplest design will show a clear and inescapable poetic attributes.

References