Authenticity of Heritage & Meaning of Material Elements

Yifeng Wen

ABSTRACT

Culture place is a comprehensive concept with which combination of tangible and intangible heritages. It is helpful for us to understand purpose and value in terms of heritage conservation by combing time-space concept, meaning of natural/material elements and architectural archetype. The natural/material elements in the culture place and architecture are not only instrumental, but also ontological and axiological.¹

INTRODUCTION

What should be done for heritage conservation in terms of architectural discipline and Why? How to deal with the problem of “authenticity” is still the key issue today to face. These problems can be further reduced to two levels: one is a theoretical level, that is, what is the authenticity of heritage and its value; another one is technical level, it is how to formulate standard and measurement to guide corresponding protection technology according to the different value of heritage based on significance of authenticity.

THE OBJECTIVE AUTHENTICITY OF HERITAGE

Because of the long-standing confusion in the understanding of the authenticity of heritage and the differences brought by the different situations in Eastern and Western heritage, it causes difficulties in the practice of heritage protection in China. In 2005, luoZhewen and other scholars jointly signed the Declaration of Qufu in

¹Yifeng Wen, Guangzhou University
Shandong province. The Declaration emphasizes the principle of "not changing the original state" in heritage conservation. It further explains this as "four originals" -- namely "original form, original material, original structure and original technique". Contrast with the previous attitude of emphasizing in line with international standards, while the Declaration, based on decades of positive and negative experiences and lessons in heritage conservation practice in our country, focuses on our own traditional wooden architecture heritage that have different material and conditions to that of western, so the Declaration has strong pertinence. However, the Declaration still lack value discuss concerning relevant heritage protection technology, not mention heritage’s fundamental significance for human and civilization; how to make heritage play its proper role in contemporary society in terms of current cultural benefits, which must be regarded as the precondition of what technology should be taken for heritage protection. It involves how to comprehensively interpret the concept of “authenticity” in the field of heritage conservation.

The concept of “authenticity” in traditional heritage conservation’s sense just refers to the objective authenticity which is biased to the meaning of natural science. While social science research has shown that such a view is limited. Even in sense of natural science, a heritage has a natural decadent process even without human intervention since it be originally produced, so the heritage’s authenticity is more or less be constructed by society based on interpretation and ideology. The authenticity of heritage is impossible to be divorced with subjective assessment. Why we build monuments and impose artificial intervention in their historical process, the reason is the value of "subjective authenticity" connecting with heritage.

THE SUBJECTIVE AUTHENTICITY AND AESTHETICS

Objective authenticity refers to the authenticity of heritage material. As the literature points out, (objective) authenticity is a matter of degree, not either or. The degree of objective authenticity of heritage can be defined as the natural process of material properties of heritage since its creation, that is, the degree of no human interference. Therefore, any change of natural process of material properties of heritage can be theoretically considered as derogation from the objective authenticity. Why people to intervene heritage is just because of "subjective authenticity". The meaning of “subjective authenticity” is derived from the philosophy of existentialism, so it is also named as existential authenticity [1]. In this paper, it can be defined as authentic experience of existence of subjectivity triggered by cultural heritage. That is to say, the fundamental meaning to human caused by the property of heritage object. There are two basic ways: first is “emic” way, and second is “etic” way. The emic authenticity emphasizes that the heritage inherits the real historical context of aboriginal people and integrates into the real life of local culture. The etic authenticity refers to people who not as host to
participate activities related with recognition, identification and appreciation of the authenticity of heritage by means of social construction.

Moritz Geiger asked a question in The Significance of Art: Stones - just ordinary stones - pile up on top of each other, but together they fit our ever-changing experience of a gothic castle. People make symphonies with tone, make ornaments with lines, and, no matter where they are, the experience is the same -- the colors, the lines, the sounds, the stones exert some incredible influence on us. How exactly did this happen [2]?

Kant's emphasis on "non-utilitarianism" and Schopenhauer's emphasis on "the disappearance of will" belong not only to the field of aesthetic experience, but also to the field of knowledge, both of which are subject to objectivity, both of which are "objective" and "divorced from the ego". Whereas, as Moritz Geiger pointed out, compared with belonging to knowledge, this tendency to obey objectivity unconditionally belongs to the aesthetic field to a higher degree. Because aesthetic perception is different from knowledge, it does not need to use concept as an intermediary in its contact with the world at all -- and this kind of conceptual intermediary is indirectly related to "utilitarianism" if we look deeply (as revealed by pragmatism philosophy). In aesthetics, we confront an object directly, let it enter into our heart, and give ourselves over to it. Here the empirical self is eliminated, but it does not involve the erasure of the authentic self. When we "obey" the objective object in this way, and let it enter into our heart, it becomes something inside of us, which is spiritually integrated with us and becomes a part of our true (authentic) self, and we become the owner of it. That is to say, the aesthetic experience reaches a deeper level, as like in religious and metaphysical experiences, it touches the "existence" of the "authentic self".

**TIME, SPACE AND MATERIAL ELEMENT AS ARCHITECTURAL ARCHETYPE**

Why the aesthetic experience, which to be said not to relate with utilitarianism, produce deep pleasure for human? According to Jung said, It is because “archetype”. Archetype is collective image, emotion complex as "super subjectivity" in the level of collective unconscious plays its significant and fundamental role. The archetype was viewed by Jung as typical pattern of apprehension, it is related with the percept of object, forming concept and stimulating emotions, thus it is inevitable part of authentic self of human. Humans have been building houses since the beginning of civilization, while we cannot see this as just a process of building nests.

Human build houses to create a cultural space in the natural world, which is a process to construct the human self. The Old Testament tall a story of human coming out of the Garden of Eden, which reveals the idea that we don't have to build a house in the Garden of Eden. That is to say, we do not and do not need to create a cultural space of our own through conscious will. But Rykwert raised a controversial issue of our need for a house in the Garden of Eden. He tried to let us know that,
Adam build, is same as name things for creatures, which is human behave to imitate the creation of God. Adam building is "not to resist the weather, but he can use a body language to express a book which is presentation of heaven planning, and he is in core [3]. Adam's house was built according to the archetype of the Heaven. All the art of architecture can be traced back to the original imitation of the archetype.

The tremendous social transformation since the industrial revolution has led to the rapid disappearance of traditional architecture triggered modern protection awareness for traditional architecture’s heritage and cultural place. In field of heritage protection, cultural place gives an integrated concept of combining material heritage with intangible heritage. Cultural space refers to the place where cultural activities such as ritual and festival are held regularly, which has the dual nature of space and time. Cultural place is not only an important type of intangible cultural heritage, its core value and theoretical basis lies in its complete, comprehensive, authentic, ecological and living presentation of intangible cultural heritage [4]. Cultural place can be deeply analyzed from the perspectives of core symbols, core values, collective and historical memories, symbols and subjects[5].

When we think about the meaning of concepts of time, space, material elements in the area of cultural place in terms of heritage’s history, art and scientific values, a proper way is to go back to the archetype of these concepts. Archetype is regarded by Jung as a typical mode of apprehension. Archetypes produce myths, religions and philosophies that influence and characterize the whole nation and history. The symbol of archetype is its expression in the specific mental image. The structure of archetype is a complex network of psychological organization, including power, symbol and meaning content, and its center is the archetype itself [6]. Archetype is often expressed not through the concept of reason but through symbols. The symbolic realm includes the concrete ways and processes of the spiritual reality in the physical objects and practices, by which the spiritual reality obtains the concrete and visible social existence. Architecture is a kind of physical object. It is generally believed in the discipline that architecture is a space art, while this space does not refer to natural physical space, but more to social space and cultural space. Architecture is created through our imagination instead of natural existence. Imagination has a profound connection with archetype and its symbolism which refers to the inner world of ideas and spiritual reality, but it cannot obtain any visible existence or social validity unless it is embodied in symbols and practices in various forms. Because of this, institutions, Spaces, buildings and other settings were created [7].

Ancient cosmology unfolds around some common archetype in the form of myth (imagination). The time and space in cultural space are often guided by myths (legends) and cosmology into the religious structure of a certain culture and the collective image of a certain community, which is formed and accumulated into a kind of psychological space by integrating the ancient collective unconscious and the individual's transcendence experience. As revealed by Victor Turner, a cultural space (place) is first to isolate a sacred domain to distinguish it from the daily path
of time and space. It is mediated by ritual and leads to the unknown world through the symbolic meaning of the known things[8].

Line and circle are the most basic representation of the concept of space and time, which are widely used in the shaping of cultural space. Those geometric concepts in ancient times were used as archetypes which contained the fundamental meaning of life and were directly embodied in the sacred symbols of cultural space. In ancient Chinese culture, there was a typical cosmology of "round heaven and square earth". Mandala architecture has many levels of interpretation about of the archetype of circle and square.

Space-time is not only a form, but also has natural connection with Numbers. Numbers with full of mysterious and transcendent forces have magic power in the cultural space of ancient people. In the Pythagorean School, "number" was regarded as the origin of the world and the essence of everything. As Kant pointed out that the number originates from the transcendental concept of space and time, and the antinomy among the time and space in terms of limited and unlimited, as well as that of limited or infinite of the number has a meaning of cosmology and mythology in ancient times. For example, monumental architecture were often formed by circle and square as basic shape, by which human practicing ritual try to overcome the dilemma of turning square into circle, to achieve symbolically religious transcendence from the limited reality to unlimited world. Irrational numbers with infinite used to confuse people, but also caused people to worship them. The wide use of $\sqrt{2}$, $\sqrt{5}$ and golden ratio in ancient Greek temples is a typical example. Going back to the origin, irrational numbers are fundamentally caused by the tension between the circles and square, i.e. $\pi$. The golden ratio is another famous irrational number, which is considered to measure the optimal proportion of the relationship between things. The most beautiful human body is thought to be created directly according to the golden ratio, which is also used in the construction of many important buildings in human history. The golden ratio is tended ratio between two successive umbers of the Fibonacci sequence (1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21...). However, virtually any two numbers add up, such as random example 3+ 119, and form 122, 241, 363, 604, 967, 1571, 2538, 4109..., if you go on forever, any two successive numbers will tend to be the golden ratio. It may be very difficult to give a mathematical proof of the proposition, but intuition tells us that this is true (because the conclusion is already in the proposition by the infinite process of decreasing up and down despite of the end in the endless remote). This idea of pushing the limited steps and things to infinite that produce awe emotion, is from the application of actual things to cosmology and mysterious religious significance.

The relationship between architecture and number is based on form and number which obviously shows the harmony of the world. The concept of beauty of mathematics embodies the soul of natural philosophy and all poetry. The proportion of number becomes the basic experience of beauty of architecture. According to Padovan, the nature of early mathematics and architecture was so consistent because, in the beginning, ideas about the universe were based on architectural experience.
Architecture is the first physical model of the universe. The earliest palaces and temples were built as representations of the "structure of the universe", which means a local facsimile of the non-artificial temple (the temple of the universe itself), whose form was determined by science at the time; It is the heaven, the observatory, and the calendar [9].

In contrast to today's physical and mathematics view, Plato's connection of mathematical proportion with physical elements and forms is mythology. It is no matter with Newton's idea than that of Plato being much more practical and concrete, but reflect a fact that ancient people seem have a different manner to think, even as a philosopher. However, as modern philosophy reveal, modern science, such as Newtonian mechanics, is not so much an expression of the essence of certain ontology about world and actual system, is just as a simplified model that reflects the universe from a certain point of view in terms of some particular purpose. In the views of phenomenology, the Earth is no matter with a planet running around star, but a matrix (like Great Mother) to produce/create all things, a hidden place for essence/secret of all things and being a fundamental element for human’s being-in-the-world. All material elements, such as water, fire, air and so on, have this fundamental significance for human being-in-the-world in terms of that they are directly given phenomenon, not as introduced abstract things by an indirect manner. Compared with modern science, ancient people are “aboriginal” phenomenology, when they observe thing directly with the meaning of being-in-the-world, with a perspective of all thing being with spirit and mutual responsibility, for example, wind being with soul of phoenix and thunder becoming incarnation of dragon. Those “direct” things, symbols and imagination connect with archetype, embodying collective authentic self in deep psyche. Rather than through concrete material manipulation to control world, the ancient people placed prominent importance for the reverence and religious emotion by cultural activity such as ritual and ceremony, creating cultural place for enrichment of meaning of life. Gods and temple become the center of assemble the life significance of being-in-the-world, and cultural place put the heaven, earth, human and god together [10].

For example, in the case of Myongdang [11] (Chinese ancient supreme ritual and religious building), as a model of universe, it symbolically assemble all five basic material element- metal, wood water, fire, and earth, into one architecture, and each element responsible for particle season (time) and special orientation (space); emperor in ritual according to particle time site in particle position and toward particle orientation in order to response to natural order and further to control it. In Myongdang, architecture as well as its symbols, human, heaven, material elements and gods, are all response for each other. In the ancient Chinese cosmology, the five elements origin from in the Sky in terms of their soul, embody in the Earth in terms of their forms, and filled with everything in the world. It shows that such reflections on things closely related to human destiny that guide the creation of our own cultural place, that make the natural things became most striking cultural symbols.
CONCLUSIONS

Architectural heritage undoubtedly gives us a cultural perspective on material elements different from the general scientific view. In fact, all the ideas about material are actually in some kind of cultural space of human beings, that is, what kind of perspective we use to look at it. Heritage is a memory of our history of being-in-the-world, so the heritage conservation is not just a technique issues, but a humanism one. The natural/physical things in the architecture and heritage are not only instrumental significance, but also that of ontological and axiological, because they are an integral part of construction “material” for human’s authentic self. Therefore, we talk about the issues of objective authenticity of heritage, only when those issues connect with the purpose of construction subjective authenticity for human self, just has its fundamental meanings.

REFERENCES