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Study on the Phenomenon and Features of Ancient Chinese Cities and Architectures Affected by the Traditional Concept of Time and Space

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ABSTRACT

Chinese ancestors interpret and understand things around them with the macroscopic heaven and close-level nature. They apply this experience to people and things around them with vivid analogy and direct simulation. The human body, a building, a courtyard and even a city is a complete picture of the universe which integrates heaven, earth and man. They are homogeneous and isomorphic. This differentiation from the biggest to the smallest will not alter its intrinsic structures with scale changes. During the processes of site selection, layout, architectural design and engineering construction of ancient cities, the method of symbolism is often adopted. It simulates the structure of the model of time and space to build small universal space and time. Accordingly, cities and architectures have obvious spatiotemporal schema.

Keywords: Concept of time and space; Ancient Chinese cities; Ancient Chinese architectures

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STUDY ON THE PHENOMENON AND FEATURES OF ANCIENT CHINESE CITIES AND ARCHITECTURES AFFECTED BY THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF TIME AND SPACE

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Abstract

Chinese ancestors interpret and understand things around them with the macroscopic heaven and close-level nature. They apply this experience to people and things around them with vivid analogy and direct simulation. The human body, a building, a courtyard and even a city is a complete picture of the universe which integrates heaven, earth and man. They are homogeneous and isomorphic. This differentiation from the biggest to the smallest will not alter its intrinsic structures with scale changes. During the processes of site selection, layout, architectural design and engineering construction of ancient cities, the method of symbolism is often adopted. It simulates the structure of the model of time and space to build small universal space and time. Accordingly, cities and architectures have obvious spatiotemporal schema.

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1. Introduction

Time and space are the most basic elements in human beings' cultural activities. Different nationalities' time and space concepts reflect their cultural difference. China's traditional time and space concept reveals ancient Chinese's unique cultural experience, way and angle to learn the world. Unique inspiration and experience of time and space have affected Chinese ancestors in depicting the world, scientific exploration, philosophical thinking, artistic creation, building cities and construction and so on. ^[1]

2. Literature Review

Studies of ancient city construction thoughts have made great development in recent years. In *The History of Ancient Chinese City Planning* (1996), He Yeju used current theory, concept and terminology of city planning to explain, analyze and evaluate ancient Chinese city planning. In *Cultural Thoughts of Ancient Chinese City Planning* (1997), Wang Dehua made research on ancient Chinese city planning from the perspective of cultural thoughts. *Theory and Practice of Ancient Chinese Feng Shui—Recognition*

of Theory of Ancient Chinese Feng Shui, Yu Xixian devote himself to the study of Fengshui theory and combined with modern science to give explanation. *The Pivot of the Four Quarters ----A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins of the Chinese City*, (Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago 1971) of Paul Wheatley studied ancient Chinese city development and unique oriental thoughts.

3. Research Methods

The first one is the method of combining affective thinking with empirical study.

Traditional Chinese thinking lays emphasis on image and is characterized by sensibility and experience. This study adopts the method of combining affective thinking with instance analysis to understand the time and space concept revealed by architectural form and city space. ^[3]

The second one is the method of combining reference carding with field experience.

On the one hand, seeking, verifying and carding enormous ancient Chinese

documents are the premises of the study. On the other hand, field experience and investigation can help gain accurate and precise data.

The third one is the method of combining graphic analysis with explanatory note. Graphic analysis helps researchers to understand their feelings towards traditional architectural features in contemporary context to express key points of the study more accurately.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Main conclusion includes three aspects: cognition process of traditional Chinese time and space concept, design concept of using universe diagram to construct city and building and the impact of time and space concept such as “round sky with square earth”, “space-time unification” and “center-oriented principle” on architectural design and city planning.^[4]

1. The cognition process of traditional Chinese time and space concept can be divided into intuitive time and space, myth time and space, experience time and space and scientific time and space. Ancient Chinese concept held the view that heaven, earth, God and all things of human beings were composed of the same universe diagrams. Ancestors used the method of image analogy to understand things around us through macro heaven and micro nature. Corresponding city and building should be echoed with time and space diagram of the universe, namely building the national capital in the pattern of heaven and constructing buildings based on the diagram of universe. Ancient people imitated the universe diagram of “round sky with square earth” to build city and building.^[5]

2. In traditional Chinese time and space is closely linked to time and space concept. Traditional Chinese city and building space certainly has the element of time.

3. Advocacy of “center” is a great feature of Chinese culture. The site of important

building will be the center of city, and important room is in the center of building. In the planning of empire city, north-south central axis is generally the main axis of the whole city, and main buildings are listed on the main axis. Such structure reveals strict etiquette, hierarchy and orderly capital planning system.

5. References

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