

Overturning Conventional but Conform to Dao in Contemporary Architecture

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Abstract. In this paper, the “Overturning Conventional but Conform to Tao” from the traditional poetry but a very new perspective is borrowed to discuss contemporary architecture activities. The author hopes that this research can help people find the meaning of architectural forms and the value of creation.

Keywords: Overturning Conventional; Tao; Garden; Criticism.

1. Introduction

Feng Jizhong's “Overturning Conventional but Conform to Tao” architectural design concept, such as “wrinkling a pool of spring water”, which is described in (Conversation with a friend on Helou Shelter) by Feng Jizhong, makes people yearn for it. He once asked himself: “Does bamboo paint make people feel incongruous?” “I do like the natural colors of bamboo and wood. But sometimes changes need to be made depending on the circumstances. Why did I use black paint? Let me put it this way: usually the joints of the support frame of a structure are exposed so people can see how stable the structure is. But I coloured the joints in black on purpose to make them less visible. Parts of the support structure are painted white to show an assembling effect. The white, shining portions also stand out from the black roof top structure, appearing like giving an impression that something is floating around. This is an adaptation of the poet Su Dongpo's idea ‘Overturning Conventional’!” [1]

After reading Liu Zongyuan's poem (Yu Weng), Su Dongpo thought that “The poem is based on the peculiar interest and overturning conventional. Ripe taste, this poem has a strange interest.” The poem combine unconventional scenes with things that are not related at all. After careful observation, people can feel the lonely mood of the fisherman from this combination, and feel a kind of tranquil and indifferent life realm, with endless aftertaste. “Overturning Conventional” refers to the content and expression of poetry does not conform to the man known by natural conventional modalities, According to the Tao, it is “Overturning Conventional” precisely because the expression correctly conveys the poet's unique discovery and feeling of life, thus create both conforms to the law of artistic innovation and unusual novelty image, however, how architectural design just like the poem can be done ?

As a determinative term, “Overturning Conventional But Conform To Tao” actually contains two subjects in architecture: the subject of “Overturning Conventional” is the “viewer”, which refers to the architectural maze perceived by the viewer, that is the core of innovation. And the other subject: “Conform To Tao” is the “author”, its close to the author find out different “Tao”, which is also the foundation of innovation. Perhaps in this process, the author does not know its unconventional, and the readers do not know its principles.

The more readily available logic is, the more questionable the limitations of cognition. People's interpretation, and historical contingency present the limits of the world. To some extent, the emergence of new problems is the meaning of architectural existence, but many modern architects have long forgotten the ability to go back to the original place and capture information intuitively. The questioning of existing phenomena and reflection on thinking can break through the inherent experience, making people see things are not as self-evident as they believe, and this process makes “Defamiliarization” natural.

2. Garden Revelation

Chinese traditional gardens are the most close to the design practice of “Defamiliarization nature”, which is a kind of alien space that is in the mundane world, but tries to present an endless nature.

People peep into the source through the garden, which creates an ideal viewing scene for the inner experience. In the mutual reflection of life, the vitality of the audience enters into the space object through the empathy, which is both familiar and strange. Garden building such as “Antelope hanging angle, No trace to be found”, it gives the author's great imagination a reality realization, just like “A miniature hypothesis and true virtual reality”, both in unknown build of coincidence and cannot be copied. Gardening is quite similar with the process of “Look for Tao”, they both can be arbitrarily increased and reduced. It is not only the whence, but also the way home.



Fig 1. Helou Shelter

What the garden creates is a vague world without beginning and end. All the elements can be randomly changed and freely connected. The builder only keeps adding and subtracting contents to realize imagination. The garden itself is in a kind of passive reappearance. The natural rhythm contained in the garden gives people an unexpected feeling. It is illusion in reality, also reality in imaginary.

3. Unconventional Structure

Although traditional gardens are faraway, but people's resistance to the urban restrictions has not been reduced. Is gardening still feasible in modern times? “Helou Shelter”(Fig.1), a small building located in the corner of Shanghai Fangta garden, is a teahouse designed by Feng Jizhong. When I first saw this building, I was puzzled that it was abnormal from the general garden architecture. Why is this construction that has no wall or window not named “Pavilion”, otherwise known as “Shelter”?

After consideration, author thinks that this is a glimpse of Feng Jizhong's reflection on the construction itself. First of all, the walls and windows of “Helou Shelter” actually exist, but are separated from the building itself, thus having the effect of being like shelter rather than pavilion. Feng Jizhong discovered the key of landscape architecture design at the beginning: The site factors of landscape design are complex, there should be no so-called absolute subject, but each element should be independently displayed, so that the boundary of shelter is pulled apart, opening and closing around the roof, communicating inside and outside. It is an amplification of the overturning conventional structure of the garden and highlights the tension and affinity. As Wang shu put it, “Bring out the buildings and put them in front of people.” Secondly, pavilions focus on letting people stay and observing outside of pavilions. However, what shelter focuses on is people's internal observation and communication. The two ways of enjoying both exist in “Heluo Shelter”. It is a state between “stop” and “non-stop”, so it is not a “Pavilion”. The most important thing is that

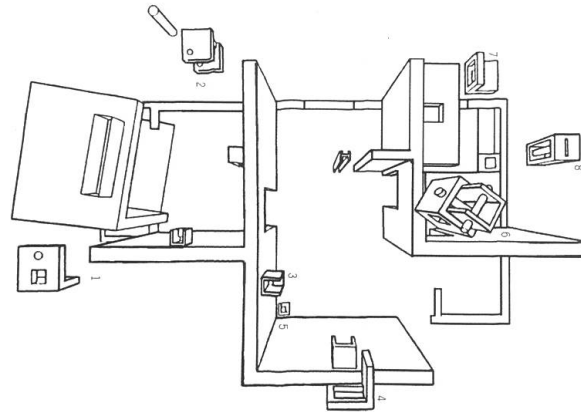


Fig 2. Garden Apartment.

Feng Jizhong's thinking is "Ask the building itself". From the reflection and disassembly of the building itself, there is

no restriction of the technique. Feng Jizhong said "A pavilion, several corridors, that set of things in Suzhou, not enough weight." [2]

"In any era, people need a place to keep away from worldly worries and daily tiredness." Wang shu tried to play the role of Li yu in modern times. He built the garden in his apartment to delight himself (Fig.2). In the modern life with little connection with the garden, his reconstruction of the garden was structurally: he used disassembly, dislocation and blankness to highlight each individual, and deconstructed the hierarchy to fit the garden. "Garden is so pleasant and interesting in China that even without flowers and trees, it's still a garden." (Tong jun) Gardening can let huge different factors perfectly blend together, not only involves the concrete existence, also involves literature and painting. Because of this special significance, both tangible and intangible factors can be organized in a garden with the purpose, but the purpose is not all about "combination", also includes the "separation". Wang shu thinking about Tong jun's words about the unconventional of garden structure, and reflect on his own architecture design: dramatic "room pavilion" and those fragmented traditional languages appeared in his closed flat. It's all about finding a natural way to do things in a heterogeneous relationship, not just use form technique to depict the general practice in build. Wang's "Garden Apartment" has a more intimate and hard-to-see relationship with the traditional gardens.

4. Criticism of the Conventional

"You cannot see the true face of Lushan mountain because you are in it." Architects often unconsciously exclude other perceptions outside of the purpose of activities that only aim at design, ignoring the fact that real life often does not consider appearance. On the contrary, keeping a distance from design, fully experiencing and reflecting on daily life is a feasible way to return to

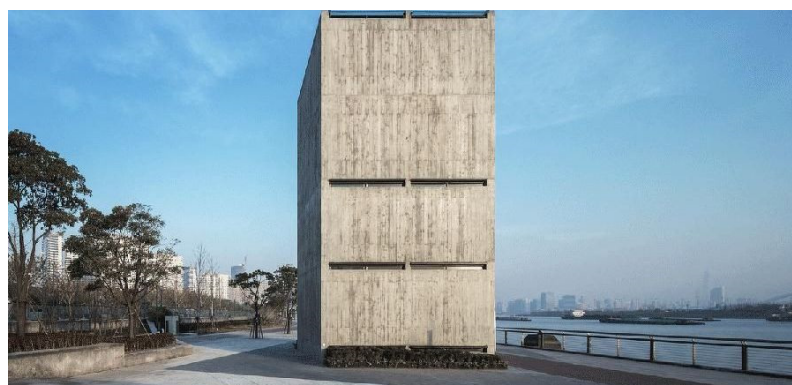


Fig 3. Vertical Glass House.

perceptual sensitivity, which enables the invisible to be “seen”.

The “Vertical Glass House”(Fig. 3) on the west bank of Shanghai is an experimental house built along the Huangpu river. It is also the designer's reflection on the “River Scene” in daily life. Facing the question of why “River Scene House” without “River Scene”, Zhang Yonghe asked in reply: “If you live by the river, you can see the river every day when you go out and return home. Do you still need the river scene in your home?” This is indeed a very abnormal and normal thinking, out of the architect's independent and real understanding of life. Similarly, in the “Lighthouse Design” competition attended by RCR architectural firm in 1988 , the thinking about architecture is similar to the “River Scene House” : “The lighthouse does not have to be a tower, but reflects its height like a lighthouse in the form of light.”[3] Their design is different from the conventional approach of starting out in architecture, which throws off the shackles of the existing definition of things and seeks inspiration from the original intention of using the lighthouse(Fig.4). They do not need predetermined methods, do not need unified methods, and re-read the form. The key is to criticize the conventional, which follows nature, and is faithful to all forces. “I prefer to close my trained eyes on a site. Therefore, everything has to be operated and touched by hands. Just like using the hand to talk with the scene, using the body to feel in the scene, the unique symbol solution is not as blind, but also as myopia through the meaning of the maze.”[4]



Fig 4. Lighthouse



Before use

After use

Fig 5. Semi-Finished Good House.

In 2003, Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena faced with the thorny problem of resettlement:100 families living

illegally on 5,000 square metres of land in the northern Chile, are poor people living in the city, with government subsidies of \$7,500 per household. Given the high price of land in the city centre, \$7,500 is a drop in the bucket for families who want to buy land and build new homes, so these residents are forced to move to the suburbs, leaving their old surroundings, friends and jobs. Mr. Aravena, as a designer, has identified this big problem of housing as a specific problem of architecture design, and has come up with ingenious solutions: “If we don't have the money to get everyone to build a good house, why not build half a house for them? Leave the rest to themselves. ”“Semi-Finished Good House” refers to the use of limited subsidies to build the complex half of normal residential , which set up the most necessary part of daily use, such as kitchen, bathroom, roof..... The remainder is left to the inhabitants to perfect themselves. On a certain basis, they can maintain or improve their living standards according to their own needs and situations.This unconventional

scheme of “Semi-Finished Good House” not only successfully solved the problem of illegal settlements, but also cultivate the occupants of a sense of accomplishment and personal investment consciousness (Fig.5). After that the scheme is widely used in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina . “The cost seems high from an economic point of view, but we're not throwing money away, just prepaying for a permanent home,” Mr. Aravena said.

Contemporary architects' lack of confidence in ordinary things is often due to their lack of keen observation or lack of in-depth understanding of things. This depends on the fact that people are living in an insufficient way, so that there are no details of life in their mind when designing, which will lead to the lack of or beyond people's life in the buildings that should be the daily background. However, how to make the daily details get attention? There is a method: Criticism of the conventional.

5. Unconventional Material

Shigeru Ban has been thinking about how to effectively solve the practical problems of architecture. The most incredible thing is that he built the building with paper. In 1986, far before ecological buildings and energy buildings, Shigeru Ban began to pay attention to how to use “paper” for environmentally friendly construction. Initially, he built a public toilet with a paper tube. He jokingly said, “If you find that the toilet paper is used up when you go to the toilet, you can tear it off the wall, so it is very practical.” Even composite materials such as bamboo, fabric, recycled paper fiber and plastic are used in Shigeru Ban’s design: Christchurch Cardboard Church, Pompidou Meisi Center, L'Aquila Paper Concert Hall, Japanese Paper Gallery and so on, he expanded the tools and techniques of construction step by step. At the same time, he helped the architects expanded the possibility of thinking about materials and increased the probability of materials. The second unconventional rule in Shigeru Ban’s design was that he publicly stated that his design goal is not in how to construction the building, but in the way in which the building is well removed. He strongly opposed the buildings that left a lot of industrial waste after use and emphasizing that the house is not a show. The architects has the responsibility to design a building that can be recycled and reused. So the Japanese Hanshin Paper Church designed by Shigeru Ban moved after dismantling and then reconstruction in Taiwan. What's more striking is that Shigeru Ban does not want to build for rich and powerful people, but insists on finding a reasonable construction method suitable for the poor. In 1994, he observed and tracked a catastrophe in Rwanda, Africa: more than two million people became refugees because of the mutual killing of the Hutu and Tutsi tribes. But the tents arranged by the United Nations for these refugees are too dilapidated to be inhabited, forcing them to cut down trees to build their houses. Thus directly causing serious deforestation of more than two million people. To prevent such environmental damage, the United Nations provided refugees with aluminum pipes to build shacks. But the refugees sold the aluminum pipes for money and continued to cut trees to build their houses. The problem has not been effectively solved. Shigeru Ban discovered that the key to this problem is how to make the refugees live in a “poor” building that is comfortable but can not be money-changing. From then on, the environmentally-friendly paper material has become cheap and sturdy for the post-disaster transitional housing and school construction. For example, the Hua lin schoolhouse built after the Wen chuan earthquake in 2008 (Fig.6) and the Miao miao kindergarten built after the Ya an earthquake in sichuan in 2013.



Fig 6.Hua lin schoolhouse

Shigeru Ban has once said “Transition or permanent? A permanent building of reinforced concrete. If its design is not reasonable, it will be demolished or collapsed in a relatively short period of time. It is short-lived. But a transitional building, it is in the life cycle. It has fulfilled its mission, and it also embodies the words of many people's dedication and love. It is not short-lived. It can even be considered eternal because it will remain in people's hearts forever.”

6. Conclusion

The architecture of the “Overturning Conventional But Conform To Tao” often expresses a subtle emotion that is difficult to express. The expression of this emotion sometimes must be achieved by the combination of unconventional words. It is exactly in response to Le corbusier's words: “I seem to be at the end of the road of logic. I've been exposed to the basics: architects are going to spell new words . You have to start from scratch. Questions must be asked. A good question bodes well for an answer.”Nowadays, the world is undergoing tremendous changes at an alarming rate. There are many strange buildings, but few “Overturning Conventional But Conform To Tao” buildings.

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