

The Geometrical Cosmology: The Projective Cast of the Collective Subjectivity of the Chinese Traditional Architectural Drawings

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Abstract : Chinese traditional drawings related to buildings and construction apply a unique geometry differentiating with western Euclidean geometry and embrace a collection of special terminologies, under the category of tu (the Chinese character for drawing). This paper will on one side etymologically analysis the terminologies of Chinese traditional architectural drawing, and on the other side geometrically deconstruct the composition of tu and locate the visual narrative language of tu in the pictorial tradition. The geometrical analysis will center on selected series of Yang-shi-lei tu of the construction of emperors' mausoleums in Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), and will also draw out the earlier architectural drawings and the architectural paintings such as the jiehua, and paintings on religious frescoes and tomb frescoes as the comparison. By doing these, this research will reveal that both the terminologies corresponding to different geometrical forms respectively indicate associations between architectural drawing and the philosophy of Chinese cosmology, and the arrangement of the geometrical forms in the visual picture plane facilitates expressions of the concepts of space and position in the geometrical cosmology. These associations and expressions are the collective intentions of architectural drawing evolving in the thousands of years' tradition without breakage and irrelevant to the individual authorship. Moreover, the architectural tu itself as an entity, not only functions as the representation of the buildings but also express intentions and strengthen them by using the Chinese unique geometrical language flexibly and intentionally. These collective cosmological spatial intentions and the corresponding geometrical words and languages reveal that the Chinese traditional architectural drawing functions as a unique architectural site with subjectivity which exists parallel with buildings and express intentions and meanings by itself. The methodology and the findings of this research will, therefore, challenge the previous researches which treat architectural drawings just as the representation of buildings and understand the drawings more than just using them as the evidence to reconstruct the information of buildings. Furthermore, this research will situate architectural drawing in between the researches of Chinese technological tu and artistic painting, bridging the two academic areas which usually treated the partial features of architectural drawing separately. Beyond this research, the collective subjectivity of the Chinese traditional drawings will facilitate the revealing of the transitional experience from traditions to drawing modernity, where the individual subjective identities and intentions of architects arise. This research will root for the understanding both the ambivalence and affinity of the drawing modernity encountering the traditions.

Keywords : Chinese traditional architectural drawing (tu), etymology of tu, collective subjectivity of tu, geometrical cosmology in tu, geometry and composition of tu, Yang-shi-lei tu

Conference Title : ICADD 2020 : International Conference on Architectural Design and Drawing

Conference Location : New York, United States

Conference Dates : April 23-24, 2020