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The 8-5 Chinese National Important Research Project of
Philosophical and Social Science and Artistic Studies

CHINESE ARCHITECTURAL ART HISTORY

Compiled by

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the Chinese Academy of Arts*

Chief editor

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ABSTRACT

The following book is a result of a national-level research project and is listed on the 1990's national key-topic research program in the region of Philosophical and Social Science and Artistic Studies. It is actually a book of Chinese Architectural Art History. It opens a window on Chinese ancient culture and draws an explicit picture on the traditional Chinese architectural art with brilliant characteristics. The book consists of a foreword and five parts with totally 18 chapters. They are 1) Primary and Evolution, 2) Mature and Climax, 3) Complementary and Summarize, 4) Brilliant Stars, 5) Resplendent Nous. It begins since the architecture of prehistory period via the dynasties of Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, Two Jins, Sui, Tang, Five Dynasties, Song, Liao, Jin, West-Xia, Yuan and Ming till the end of Qing dynasties. The actual contents include Cities and Towns, Imperial Palaces, Confucius and Taoist Temples, Buddhist Monasteries, Pagodas, Grottos, Tombs, Gardens, Yams and the Communal Buildings for ordinary people such as Ancestor Memorial Halls, Conference Houses, Confucius Schools and the buildings of Landmark and so on.

The art of Chinese traditional architecture widely separated in time and place invariably opens new possibilities of interpretation. The principles and examples of architectures in either the far or middle ancient as well as the architectures of Ming and Qing dynasties illuminate between each other constantly revealing hidden facet of their respective arts. The research of traditional Chinese architectural art is so complicated a topic, it cannot be within the scope of a single book to cover the whole range of the task, but still we have concerned a very large amount of this subject, limitation should only be taken in a few vague points to make the work possible.

The present book is intended to bring out the cultural and artistic aspects that exist through the history of traditional Chinese architecture. It focuses on the theory of the architecture arrangement, with reference to either the analysis of architectural concept or artistic characteristic as well as spacial organization. As for the reason that the design concept and spacial idea are the cultural kernel of almost all architectural element, including the architectures of both East and West or both traditional and modern.

The book is the one concerned with the headspring, the evolution, as well as the historical distinction of the

ancient Chinese architectural art. It is indeed a book covering the artistic characteristics, epoch style, domestic style, and ethical style of traditional Chinese architecture. Some traditional Chinese cultural aspects such as the artistic idea of Confucius, Taoist and Buddhist, the theory of Feng-Shui, the design idea of Chinese architectural space and form, the decoration style, the history of architecture color, the history of architecture culture exchange between China and foreign countries are also concerned.

China is a great country with 56 nationalities and a literal recordation history of more than 3000 years. It has created a featured superexcellent civilization. Chinese traditional architecture is a most beautiful flower on the tree of the whole civilization. It is one of the three major architectural systems in the history of the ancient world. The other two are the European architecture and the Islamic architecture. All the three important ancient and conventional architecture had achieved a great deal in their artistic level.

The highest achievement the Chinese ancient architecture had reached is, as it was, the imperial palace complexes. The human heart will be unbelievably shocked in facing an architectural environment of such kind building complexes. It is an architectural representation of the power, the feudalistic order and the political or social ethic and morality. Both the capital city and the imperial palace were built in the same time. The city always encloses the palace in a way to make the palace in the highest rank of the whole country. The imperial tombs, the memorial halls of the ancient oracles, and the sanctuaries for worshipping the natural gods were always with the same feature.

Chinese Buddhist architecture includes Buddhist temple, pagoda and grotto. An atmosphere of tranquil, gentle and inward looking fills all these buildings. Chinese classical garden is the kind of naturalness. It expresses the Chinese cultural spirit of respect for the nature. The various types of popular communal architecture and residential building have directly displayed the cultural intention and the regional artistic characteristic.

In aesthetic aspect, Chinese people has always pursued an artistic situation of placid and gentle, simple and plain, connotation and consideration in their traditional architecture. Moreover, as the Western buildings turn their backs on nature whilst the Chinese have always kept closer to the earth-whether by the use of courtyards and careful choice of view, or, in the invisible realms, by using the techniques of Feng-Shui to control the flow of Chi. Actually, the Chinese traditional architecture was formed as an orientationally distributed place to symbolize the harmony between Yin Chi and Yang Chi, or between Earth and Heaven, based on the spatial concept of Chi.

In a short, the strictly arranged cities, palaces and dwelling houses of the traditional Chinese reflect the ideal social order of Confucianism. And the nature-like Chinese traditional gardens express the thirst of Taoist towards the natural environment. Both are in pursuit of the harmony between Heaven and Earth, Yang Chi and Yin Chi, active and passive. Theoretically, the search for harmony between Heaven and Earth in the Chinese tradition is epitomized by the highest ranked ritual building of the Chinese emperors, the Hall of Brightness, which according to legend was first built in the Xia dynasty, about 2,000 B.C. To pursue the harmony between Heaven and Earth, or Yang Chi and Yin Chi, an architectural idea of moderation had been developed to keep the traditional Chinese architecture, both interior space and exterior form, in a moderate size.

Chinese architecture is the only building system with the wooden-framed structure for several thousand years. The beauty of its form comes from the structure and the decoration. The characteristic system is one of the most important elements on forming the artistic style of Chinese architecture. Otherwise, Chinese traditional furniture has also played a great role in creating the interior environment of the traditional building.

The architecture of Chinese Minorities is also multiform splendidly. The religion building of Zang nationality rooted in Zang style Buddhist cultural ground with its characteristic of rough and grand fairness. The Islamic ar-

chitecture of Uygur nationality has a feature of quiet and solemn, plain and connotation. The temples and pagodas of Tai nationality Mahayana Buddhist group are exquisite and charming. The village building of Dong nationality looks rustic and age-old. All the other minority architectures, such as the Islamic building of Hui nationality, the building of Naxi, Bai and Tujia nationalities, are splendid with their features as well.

The influence of Chinese architecture had reached the Korea Peninsula, Japan, Vietnam, Mongolia and the other parts of the East Asia since the very early period of the history. And, at the same time the influence of southern Asia or western Asia had also been received by China, and been gradually turned into an organic part of ancient Chinese culture.

It is proved by the highly maturity and the great achievement of ancient Chinese architecture that there had already been an architecture artistic theory and an architecture philosophy in ancient China. The arrangement of building space and other human-made environment as well as the methods of architecture design and composition are also reached a very high level.

It is not surprising that the turn-of-the-century air has filled the whole world in an identical wind in the tendency of culture development on one hand, and the wake of cultural individuality has also become an urgent need on the other. The world is in a developing situation with the multifold and symbiosis culture. The milk of human kindness in architecture, the spirital requirement for building environment, the civilization, the architectural artistic feature and the national and rustic building style have recured to visualize their value of existence. In short, the tradition will now, in an era like this, bear an important meaning in creating a new life for the human beings.

The research presented below illustrated the development of the concept, the idea, the form, the feature, as well as the organization of traditional Chinese architecture in both the spacial or formal arts and the constructive technique. It has stemed from the cultural backgrounds or from the special circumstance, religious, social, and technical, in the process of its development.

Some more than 1,200,000 words and about 2,000 photographs and drawings are included in the book. By observing the main characteristics of the Chinese architecture art, and by relating each back to the symbolism of its guiding vision or archetypal origin, we hope to shed some light on the essential nature of Chinese architecture. At the same time, we are interested in learning what can be gained from this kind of research, and what, if anything, it does produce that could not be extracted from a study of one or other separately.

Translator : Dr. Wang Guixiang

建史梁刻不朽篇开基
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羅哲文



目 录

序	89
引 论	95
小 引	
第一节 中国传统建筑艺术	96
第二节 中国建筑史学	98
一 中国建筑史学回顾	98
二 中国建筑史学的新任务	102
第三节 建筑艺术的特性	107
第四节 建筑的艺术语言	108

第一编 萌芽与成长

第一章 史前建筑	115
小 引	
第一节 前建筑活动——创造力的闪烁	116
一 自然掩蔽所	116
树居——崖下居——岩洞居	
二 创造的愉悦	118
巢居——风篱和窝棚——窑洞	
三 创造力的突进	120
第二节 北方穴居系列	123
一 人的空间	123
二 形体美	129
第三节 南方干阑系列	131
第四节 史前建筑艺术的集中体现——“大房子”、祭坛、巨石建筑	135
一 “大房子”的情绪意念	136
二 祭坛的空间观	138
三 原始墓葬、巨石建筑的纪念性格	139
第五节 环境选择，向心集团式规划及其破坏	141
第二章 夏商周建筑	146
小 引	
第一节 城堡与城市	148
一 夏代城市	148
二 商代城市	149

尸乡沟城址——郑州商城——盘龙城——安阳殷墟	
三 西周城市	150
丰镐——洛邑	
四 春秋战国城市	152
鲁曲阜——吴地奄城——郑韩新郑——齐临淄——燕下都——赵邯郸	
第二节 宫殿与宗庙	157
一 夏代宫殿	157
偃师二里头一号宫殿——二里头二号宫殿	
二 商代宫殿	159
偃师尸乡沟宫殿——郑州宫殿——盘龙城宫殿——殷墟宫殿——凤雏先周宫殿（宗庙）	
三 西周洛邑王城宫殿	163
四 春秋战国宫殿	166
五 春秋秦国宗庙	167
第三节 园 林	168
一 园林观念溯源	169
二 从神性到人性	170
三 先秦诸子与园林	172
第四节 墓 葬	173
一 商周墓葬	173
二 战国墓葬	174
第五节 建筑装饰与色彩	176
一 台基与柱础	176
二 屋身	176
涂饰和彩饰——雕刻——壁画——金玉珠翠锦绣装饰	
三 屋顶	179
屋顶形式——斗拱——瓦当	
第六节 建筑理论之发轫	184

第七节 家具	186
坐具——卧具——承具——凭具——皮具——屏具——架具	
第三章 秦汉建筑	193
小 引	
第一节 都 城	194
一 咸阳	194
二 长安	196
三 洛阳	199
四 邺城	200
第二节 宫 殿	201
一 秦代宫殿	202
二 汉代宫殿	204
长乐宫——未央宫——建章宫——洛阳宫殿——邺城宫殿	
第三节 园 林	207
一 园林的发展	207
秦代皇苑——汉代皇苑——汉代私园	
二 园林设计手法	210
第四节 礼制建筑	213
西汉长安明堂辟雍——西汉长安宗庙——东汉洛阳礼制建筑	
第五节 陵 墓	216
第六节 住 宅	221
一 中小住宅	221
二 第宅	222
三 坞壁	225

第七节 结构与部件	228
一 先秦结构发展回顾	229
二 三角架、抬梁架、穿斗架和井干	229
三 高台	230
四 楼阁	231
五 结构部件	233
墙体——屋顶——斗拱	
第八节 建筑装饰与色彩	236
一 涂饰与彩画	236
二 雕饰	237
三 壁画	238
四 画像石、画像砖及铺地砖	239
五 金玉珠翠锦绣装饰	241
六 瓦当与脊饰	241
第九节 家具	245
一 家具类型	245
坐具——卧具——承具——凭具——皮具——屏具——架具	
二 家具的髹漆与纹饰	249

第二编 成熟与高峰

第四章 三国两晋南北朝建筑	255
---------------	-----

第一节	都城与宫殿	256
一	魏晋洛阳	256
二	东晋南朝建康	258
三	北魏洛阳	259
第二节	佛教建筑	262
一	佛寺	262
二	塔	264
	塔的传入——窣堵波式——层叠窣堵波式——楼阁式——密檐式——金刚宝座式——其他塔式	
三	石窟	273
	中心塔柱式——覆斗式——毗河罗式——穹窿顶式——窟檐	
第三节	陵 墓	278
一	魏晋十六国墓葬	278
二	南北朝墓葬	278
第四节	园 林	281
一	士人园林之兴起	281
二	园林景观构成	283
三	园林空间特色	285
四	士人与士人园林	286
第五节	建筑色彩与装饰	287
一	涂饰与彩画	287
二	雕饰	288
三	金玉珠翠锦绣装饰	289
四	琉璃	290
五	壁画	291
第六节	家 具	292
	坐具——凭几——卧具——屏具	