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The Study of Political Culture in View of Public Architecture

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Abstract

Public architecture is the container of public life and idea, which expresses the political culture. Political symbolism can be used to analyze the political meanings of the public architecture, and this meaning can be vividly expressed in political rituals. The political landscape which combines the political symbolism and rituals is the first approach of public architecture-political culture. The fate of public architecture mirrors the change of political idea. So the historical study is the second approach. The third approach is based on the environmental, psychological 'space ballet' and 'place attachment.' They decode that political culture is cultivated in the background of public architecture, where persons get their political cognitions and accumulate their political sentiments. The three approaches correlate with each other.

Keywords: Public Architecture, Political Culture, Political Symbolism, Place Attachment

The grand and majestic monument on the square, the wooden stick which is used to hang the national flag in shabby rural elementary school; the magnificent and dignified national congress, the rural weather-stained council cottage in the small village; the modern technology-equipped museum, the simple public toilet in downtown. All these are the public architectures. They are numerous and diversified. They are the containers of public activities and the anchors of political sentiments. It is a challenging work to study public architecture because it needs a multi-discipline theoretical approach, prudent method and foresight. This article aims to take public architecture as the object and frame it in political culture.

In the studies of public architecture the author can access to, the most famous one in the field of architects is *Architecture and Democracy* (Deyan Sudic, 2001), which tells about the congress buildings in the European countries and explores the national cognition in the building. His other book *The Edifice Complex* (Deyan Sudic, 2005) analyzes the public architectures in totalitarian countries. The most excellent description is that Czechoslovakia Prime Minister Chaha was paralyzed in the office of Hitler after walking through the long, terrifying corridor. In Chinese academia *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (Wu Hong, 2005) is the milestone in analyzing the Tiananmen Square and modern Chinese political culture. Later *Chang'an Avenue and the Modernization of Chinese Architecture* (Shanshui Yu, 2012) in views of Chinese architecture modernization and state identifications, sorted the construction of Chang'an Avenue and discovered the political operations in the designs and bids of National Opera. All these three authors are in a group of architects. In the field of political science Charles Goodsell in his *The Social Meaning of Civic Space: Studying Political Authority through Architecture*, classified the states congress' inner space into three

categories: traditional, middle and contemporary. Furthermore, he explained to them as follows: imposed authority, confronted authority and joined authority. (Charles Goodsell 1988)¹ *The Teahouse: Small Business, Everyday Culture and Public Politics in Chengdu, 1900-1950* (Di Wang, 2008) is a typical historical work, which described the public life in a teahouse and depicted the political culture of the ordinary persons. By using the sociological method *Scenescapes: How Qualities of Place Shape Social Life* (Daniel Aaron Silver 2016) explained that amenities could construct the atmosphere which could affect the votes, stimulate the social movement and create new political values. Daniel designed 15 indexes which are grouped into the theatricality, the authenticity, and the legitimacy to calculate the culture.

Part One Concepts: Public Architecture, Public Space and Political Culture

It is not easy to define the 'public architecture.' Philip Jodidio said if the architectures are classified into 2 kinds, the private and the public, the public architecture is referred to the architecture which is outside of the family. For example, the court and the university are the public architectures because they are the common good of the people as a whole. Stadium and museum will charge the audience. This seems contradicted with the 'common good of the people as a whole.' But they are regarded as the public architectures. (Philip Jodidio, 2010, *Public Architecture Now!*) To define public architecture by illustration is not wise. It is not necessary and impossible to define public architecture in a strictly academic sense.

In this article public architecture is referred to the artificial architecture which excludes the private and commercial ones. The shopping malls are open to the public, but they are not public architectures because the activities there are individual and private. Public architecture usually has features as follow. It is constructed by public finance. If the schools and libraries which are built by private funds are used in public purposes, they are still the public architectures. It is open to the public and for the common good. So public architectures can be the symbols of political power, the buildings of political power which provide the public services. In physical structure, public architecture can be divided into 2 kinds. First, a single one. It can be symbols of the political power such as monument and triumphal arch, also can be the functional buildings such as congress building, stadium, and library. Second, the compound one. It can be the buildings surrounding the square or the congress building connected with the museum. In function, public architecture can be the typical political organs, such as congress house, court, and prison also can be the education and sports facilities such as stadium and library.

There is a kind of architecture which is in the middle of private and public. They are for a certain group of people such as a yacht club. Only the qualified people can access to it. It can be called semi-public architecture. In traditional China society, the ancestral hall is the semi-architecture. For the persons in the clan, the ancestral hall is the public architecture. But the ancestral hall is not open to the other persons in the village. The author believes that this semi-public architecture is important in cultivating the political culture so it can be regarded as public architecture.

The design, decoration, and function of public architecture are closely connected with the public activity and express some political meaning. Public space and public architecture are twines. Public space is formed by the surrounding public architectures or inside the public architecture. Actually, public space can refer more than that. For example, the street as a public space is not related to public architecture.² Habermas talked about the birth of right in 'public sphere,' which refers to the café, club, and salon. They are commercial areas, but they embraced public activities and brewed the political idea. So against the semi-public architecture, they are semi-public spaces. This space is valuable in the study of political culture because it is in this relatively closed space that people strengthen their political idea. So this semi-public space also can be regarded as public space.

¹ This book is classic in the study of congress building. Charles set up the framework to analyze the public architecture and authority by introducing the symbolism, rituals, historical and psychological approaches. I borrowed the framework and enriched them with my own ideas.

² Lu Yuan Yi Xin, a Japanese architect, who by analyzing the transitional area between the family house and street describes the difference between Japanese and Italian idea about public life. Lu Yuan Yi Xin, *The Aesthetic Townscape*, Jiangsu Phoenix Literature, and Art Publishing. LTD. Chinese version, 2017.

In this article, I follow Almond's classic definition about 'political culture,' believe that political cognition, political emotion, and political evaluation are the main branches. Political ideas are referred to as ordinary persons' idea mainly. In brief, public architecture is the physical layer of the political culture, and public space is the cradle of the political culture.

To analyze the cultural meaning of public architecture is the main mask of post-modern architecture theory. It supposes that architectural critics and comments should be in the context of history and society. This article tries to embed the public architecture-political culture in historical change. As a bridge linking the public architecture and political culture, public space shapes the persons' minds. How does this shaping occur? Environmental psychology provides a road to explore.

Part Two Landscape: Political Symbolism and Political Ritual

In symbolic theory, the subject and meaning are the interrelated two parts. Public architecture as the subject expresses certain political meaning, which is the saying from the power's mouth and can be called the self-cognition of the power. As Sudic said, the shape of the congress building reflects the country's tradition and democratic ambition. This reflection reveals how the country treats itself. To be accurate, by way of space designing the country showed how it should be treated (Deyan Sudic, 2001).

To explain its political meaning is a way to study public architecture. Who will make the explanations? What is his or her stance? What method do they take? All these questions need further considering. 'Subjects and certain meanings are not fixed well. They have alternatives.'³ So for a public architecture different explanations will come out. Similar public architectures in structure will encounter different explanations in different cultures. For example, Tulou in Fujian Province was a great closure building which protected the clan from invasion. It is a symbol of family union. Roman colosseum is the similar closure style, but it represents the cruelty. How to explain this difference? This difference just reveals that public activities are the source of meanings. So does the public space. Space itself is natural and primary, but the meaning of the space is the fruit of social change and experience (Soja, 1989).

G·Broadbent in his *Signs, Symbols, and Architectures* analyzed the symbolic meaning of architecture by way of semiology and tried to find a set of code to organize the explaining. He did not mean to disregard the cultural feature of the building but to find a new way out. He believed that it was possible to take the adventure to make a historical definition. Its core was hard, and its edge was soft and open in order to include some new code. He thought architecture was supposed to use methods(structural, economic, technological and mechanical) to make the physical things express its meaning(way of living, value, and function). (Broadbent 1991 Chinese version) Broadbent was respectable because his effort makes the trans-culture explanation possible.

The organized or scheduled activities in public space are the rituals. Political rituals are the most vivid way for the citizen to learn political knowledge and cultivate political sentiments. In view of political rituals, the study of public architecture and political space can follow the roads below. First, the rituals are organized in certain backgrounds which include the decorations of the space. The purpose of this decoration lies that it constructs a special space which is different from the ordinary. So the sacred air of the rituals is built. Then the sanctity of the rituals is strengthened. Second, the location itself is the legitimacy of the ritual's sanctity. For example, the American president has his inauguration in front of the Capitol. This location means that his power is from people's granting. Besides the custom the basic principles in jurisprudence and politics are decisive. The scheduled and repeated actions will strengthen the legitimacy of the location. The location will correspondingly strengthen the legitimacy of the ritual. That is why the 'sacred place' came into being. Third, the ones who watch and the ones who be watched, the ones who in the upper and the ones who in the lower, the ones who are inside and the ones who are outside their positions in physical space are connected with their social relations.

³ Ma Min, *Political Symbolism*, The Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2012, p.51.

The political analysis in view of political symbolism and rituals is normative, which mainly depends on the researcher's insights and ability in the analysis. The social meaning of space has got wide agreements from semiology, sociology, architecture, cultural geography, and urban planning. Based on these achievements this article tries to expand the study in the political culture.

Part Three Changes: the Knots in the 'History Net'

Public architecture is the result of public policy. Its design and construction depend on public finance. So from the very beginning, public architecture is political. When it is established the regulations, and daily administrations of it reflect the political principle of the country. After many years of using the fate of architecture will have several alternatives: maintenance, demolish and rebuild, demolish and transform, demolish and leave blank.⁴ All these possibilities will evoke public discussion to be a topic in public life.

The historical study of a certain public architecture is a liner. The public architecture is born to be political, so the study of it is a branch of political history. In this study, there are 4 aspects which can be paid more attention. They are the knots in the history net which helps to grasp the change of political minds.

Firstly at the beginning of initiation the shape, decoration, and functions are designed by the architect who is inspired and granted by the political organs. His or her idea is decisive in constructing the meaning of architecture, which tends to be the official explanation of the architecture. So it is first to step to study the architects' idea. He or she is a political man with professional skills. His or her political idea will be materialized into the architecture. Meanwhile, the position of the architect is a limitation and confines them to do what they should do. Anyway, the designer's idea is the first material we can use to understand the architecture.⁵

Secondly, the revolution period is a critical point in political development. So does the history of public architecture. The new regime's attitude toward the previous public architecture mirrors itself.⁶

Thirdly the persons, especially the ordinary persons in the public architecture are the spirit of the building. If their activities and emotions are recorded that will be a valuable source in the study. From the records, we can comb their attitude toward the building and find the details in a comparative way. We can compare the different persons' idea toward the same building and deduce their political mind. We can also compare the same person's idea toward the building in different ages and fide the reasons why it changes.

Fourthly the administration especially the regulations of the public architecture is a perspective to study. This public administration expresses the governor's idea, which is fostered by the basic values of political power.

The four perspectives above are from the grand view of era change and also from the daily life of ordinary persons. They are all about the stories of public architecture. The first, second and fourth mainly depend on the literature. The third depends on the interview. I believe that this interview is significant because public architecture is meaningful when it is used by ordinary persons. Their experiences are the criteria of the 'common good.'

Part Four Accumulation: 'Space Ballet' and 'Place Attachment' in Environmental Psychology

⁴ I ever studied the construction of Casa del Prado in Bolboa Park in San Diego in the US in the 1970s and analyzed the liberal civic education there. See

<http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/journal/paperinfo?journalid=202&doi=10.11648/j.ss.20170601.14>

⁵ See Pamela Scott, *Temple of Liberty: Building the Capitol for a New Nation*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁶ Amy Russell analyzed the privation of the form in the Roman transitional period-from public the empire. See *The Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome*, Durham University, 2016.

As discussed, individuals, whether the designers, political leaders or ordinary persons need to be paid more attention to the study and their attitudes, can be calculated. This is the classic way of political culture. The study of political culture is based on psychology, so when the individuals in public architecture are observed, their actions in the environment can be studied.

There are 2 kinds of environments one can encounter, himself or herself alone and his or her sharing with the other. In the first environment, he or she learns the history of the architecture and may evoke the meditation. This is the process which he or she acquires the political cognition and political evaluations. In some cases, he or she does not have too much thinking. They are just users of public facilities. If someday the environment is changed such as the facilities are moved away their emotion will be evoked. In the second environment, a group of persons is in the environment. They may be visitors or users of certain facilities. In environmental psychology David Sermon use 'space ballet' to describe that a group of persons who share the same values and have similar views of world and life often visit a place regularly and finish the certain tasks. Their actions are in regularity and repetition, just like ballerinas' performance with rhythm on the stage. The persons can have a sense of security in the place where they had their 'place ballet.' This sense of security comes from their familiarity, which can grow into an unselfconscious regularity.⁷ So the 'place attachment' comes into being. These two terms can be used in the public architecture-political culture.

Actually, the framework of the political culture can be established by the two terms. 'Space ballet' is the process in which persons acquire their political cognition and accumulate their political emotion. 'Place attachment' is the result of space ballet and works as the core of the political unselfconsciousness. This unselfconsciousness is the mature political value. In this part, the sampling and questionnaire can be used to collect the data. The interview also can be used. So both the quantitative and qualitative methods are available.

In a word the three approaches are interrelated. In a micro-genetic way 'space ballet' and 'place attachment' explains why a public architecture has its symbols which are the common idea shared by the people. The symbolic meanings as the source of political legitimacy affect the political changes. The changes are the symptoms of the psychological process.

Part Five The Study of Public Architecture-Political Culture in China

The study of political culture in view of public architecture is a trans-discipline exploration. It has significance as follows in contemporary China.

Firstly political patriotism in view of 'place attachment' focuses on the importance of space and individual experience. Previous verbal education and communist preach are improper. In school education field trip and on-spot study are necessary. The environment can be constructed purposefully to meet the patriot requirements. So the students can be moved both reasonably and affectionally to love the 'motherland' and evoke the political sense of belonging.

Secondly, in the urbanization, the peasants from the countryside can cultivate their agreement to the city by public activities in architecture facilities.

Thirdly in downtown, the regeneration of the old community especially in the area with relics should improve the public facilities and rebuild the cultural features to strengthen the residents' place attachments.

Urban governance lies in the active public activities which fine public architectures and friendly public space can construct. Meanwhile, in methodology, this article hopes to combine the empirical quantity study and normative quality study.

⁷ David Seamon: "Body-Subject, Time-Space Routines, and Place-Ballets," from Anne Buttimer, David Seamon: *The Human Experience of Space and Place*, London 1980, pp.162-163.

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