

Study on Chinese Characters How to Represent Chinese Ancient Architectural Culture

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Many of the rich thoughts of Chinese ancient architectural culture are condensed in Chinese characters. In the different applications of configuration, original meaning, escape, and metaphor of Chinese characters, there are implications of ancient architectural activities, architectural image, and architectural psychology. Many Chinese characters are a kind of spatial concept and residential category. The original consciousness of the ancients' perception of Chinese architecture was first solidified in ancient Chinese characters. The original "text" of ancient architectural construction can be found in ancient Chinese characters. Ancient Chinese characters as hieroglyphs have natural and coherent continuity with ancient architecture as visual space. By investigating the configuration of Chinese characters and a single Chinese character as a word or morpheme which display the architectural cultural images, this paper explores the ancient architectural cultural significance embodied in the configuration, word formation, use, calligraphy, and other aspects of ancient Chinese characters as pictographs and ideographs.

Keywords: Chinese characters, Chinese culture, ancient architecture, representation

Introduction: The Inherent Homogeneity Between Concrete Ancient Chinese Architecture and Pictographic Chinese Characters

The living space in ancient China predates writing. The original awareness of the ancient people's perception of ancient Chinese architecture was first solidified in ancient Chinese characters, and the initial "text" of ancient architecture can be traced back to various ancient Chinese characters, or it can be said that the cultural imagery of ancient Chinese architecture originated from the appearance of Chinese characters. The ancient Chinese characters, as hieroglyphs, have a natural and inherent connectivity with the ancient Chinese architecture as a real space. This paper provides a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the relationship between Chinese characters and ancient Chinese architecture for the first time.

John Locke (1999) pointed out that:

I began to examine the extent and certainty of our knowledge, I found it had so near a connexion with words, that, unless their force and manner of signification were first well observed, there could be very little said clearly and pertinently concerning knowledge: which being conversant about truth, had constantly to do with propositions. (p. 477)

In the ancient writing stage of oracle bone inscriptions, bronze inscriptions, and Qin seal scripts before the transformation of Chinese characters to official scripts, Chinese characters maintained a close relationship with pictures, mainly connecting framework and meaning, and were the basic materials for studying the relationship between ancient Chinese architecture and Chinese characters. Different from the Western phonography that

records sound symbols, ancient Chinese characters are characterized by literal (single character) representation of meaning. On the one hand, they record language (sound), and on the other hand, they themselves convey ideas and information, without absolute dependence on language, and have a certain degree of relative independence. This is the basic premise for the primitive architectural consciousness to exist vividly in ancient Chinese characters. In the six structure categories of Chinese characters, ancient buildings and spatial imagery are mostly reflected in three categories: pictographs, compound ideographs, and simple ideographs.

As early as the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, analysis of the structure of Chinese characters had already begun. There were some sporadic materials, such as “夫文，止戈为武”，“故文，反正为乏”，and “于文，皿虫为蛊”，found in the 12th year of Xuan Gong reign, the 15th year of Xuan Gong reign, and first year of Zhao Gong reign in the Zuo Zhuan respectively, indicating that people analyze glyphs in order to clarify certain philosophical or political propositions. This is one direction, and another direction is the systematic analysis of Chinese character structure to explore the form and meaning relationship of Chinese characters in Xu Shen’s *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*.

Ancient architecture (of course, buildings from the period when writing was produced, mostly residential houses) provided convenience for people’s survival at that time, while reflecting the rich living conditions, conceptual values, and humanistic connotations of ancient times through the configuration of Chinese characters. Ancient buildings are transformed into font symbols in a unique way of understanding, and they also combine with other things and phenomena to showcase people’s various ways of thinking and humanistic orientations.







This paper mainly examines the architectural significance displayed by the character structure of Chinese characters and individual Chinese characters as words or morphemes. It does not involve identifying ancient characters or restoring architecture, but rather conducts architectural cultural analysis of recognized ancient words based on archaeological data. As ideograms and sign writing, ancient Chinese characters embody the imagery of ancient Chinese architecture in various aspects, such as their structure, word formation, usage, and writing. Or rather, they themselves are a direct expressions of the cultural imagery of ancient Chinese architecture, because ancient Chinese characters related to ancient Chinese architecture are the result of the real understanding of the building objects constructed by the ancient people as subject.



The Pattern and Structure of Chinese Characters Simulate the Form and Construction of Ancient Chinese Architectures

Ancient Chinese architecture generally presents its visual state through Chinese characters in two ways: First, it is directly expressed by shape and layout; and second, it is expressed in conjunction with other things. This is the initial and vivid elucidation of the features of ancient architecture. Ancient buildings are man-made artifacts closely related to the lives of ancient people. It is natural for ancient Chinese characters to directly reflect buildings, but it is not a mechanical imitation, but rather reflects the ancient people’s understanding of architecture, which is both “observing objects and taking images” and “using images to indicate meaning”.

1. In Chinese characters, the radicals related to architecture include “宀”, “广”, “冂”, “阝”, “户”, etc. Some of them outline the main structure characteristics, or depict specific components of the building, or refer to the entire building, such as using “户” for a single door, “双” for two doors, “口” for a wall, and “井” for a well.



The door is written as “户” in oracle bone script and bronze script, as “户” in small seal script, resembling the shape of two doors. *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*: “Half a door is called 户”. In ancient Chinese, the characters with “冂” as radicals are all related to the door.











The hieroglyph of the window is “” or “”, pronounced as Jiǒng, and other pictogram of the window is “” or “”, pronounced as Chuāng. The two later merged and evolved into phonetic compound “窗”, while “” and “” became phonemic units based on their pronunciation: The former represents bright; and the latter refers to holes or channels dug in the wall.



“向” (direction) is written as “” in oracle bone script and “向” in small seal script; the meaning of “向” is related to the components “” and “口”. It looks like a roof or cave on the top, with a “口” added at the bottom, indicating “where to face”. *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*: “向，北出牖也”. The original meaning of “向” was a window facing north; later on, it gradually extended to mean facing and direction.

The appearance of localized building components in writing is a phenomenon that emerged later. In the early stages of ancient architecture, people paid more attention to the external form of the entire house, because the structure was relatively simple, and the characteristics of the house were mainly identified by its appearance. In fact, with the development of productivity and the improvement of construction level, ancient houses have become more and more technological. This can be seen from characters, such as “穴”, “宀”, “室”, “高”, etc.

2. The four basic stages of early ancient architecture include cave dwelling, semi-burrow dwelling, ground dwelling, and platform dwelling, all of which are continuously represented in the initial text.

(a) In the savage era, cave dwelling was the first choice, and the pictographic character “” about cave appeared in the shape of mud and stone on both sides of the cave. Therefore, the character “穴” came into being earlier, but later, in order to distinguish it from the celestial symbol “丙”, another dome-shaped hut shape “”. “穴” is a natural cavity with not many artificial structures in it. Therefore, in addition to specifically representing caves, it also serves as a structural symbol to express certain “spatial” or “empty” nouns, such as “空”, “窖”, “穹”, “穹”, “穷”, etc.

(b) In the late Paleolithic Age, shack-style semi-cave dwellings with pillars inside were created, featuring an artificial roof. The pictographic character “” (Miǎn), namely, “” was added to the text, which indicates the ancient people’s emphasis on their creations, and it is a close-up of people’s living patterns. The relics of “” shaped houses have been discovered at the Egou Site in Mi County, Henan Province, the Pengtoushan Site in Li County, Hunan Province, and the Lujiakou Site in Weifang, Shandong Province. “” is an icon of home, related Chinese characters including “家”, “宫”, “室”, “宅”, “宇”, “宿”, “宗”, “客”, and so on. The “” cluster also has this meaning. “” is used as a radical often written as “” or “” in bronze inscriptions, while written as “” in small seal script. The lower part resembles a cliff; the upper part resembles a towering house. Its original meaning is a house built near the cliff, half dug and half built. Therefore, all words with the radical of “” are related to houses or places.

(c) During the Neolithic Age, houses were gradually built on the ground and supported by wooden pillars, and began to break away from the method where the walls of the houses were cave walls. This new construction method has emerged in the Banpo Site, especially the core large houses in settlements which were highly valued as public buildings. This type of central building with a circular plane is called “” (Lǐn), and its original pictogram is “”.

(d) Buildings with rammed earth platforms began to appear during the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties. High platform buildings were popular during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods; the ruins include the Shang Dynasty architecture in Erlitou, Yanshi, Henan Province, and the Sanchongtai in the ancient city of Houma, Shanxi Province, probably for waterproofing and moisture-proof purposes and to express a sense of solemnity and authority. The outstanding feature of this kind of terraced house lies in its pedestal, so the

reflection in the text is to highlight the typical part of this house, such as the character of “高” originated from the pictogram “宀” (Fáng). In the later process of character creation, the character “高” was transformed into the pictophonetic character “房”. Meantime, “高” (高), “高” (高), “京” (京) are similar in shape to character “高”, evolved into a noun word, adjective word, and verb word with different meanings (see Figure 1) (Mou, 2000, p. 149).



Figure 1. The evolution of living space and architectural forms reflected by ancient Chinese characters.

Buildings are not just objects for viewing, but also have space for people to use. Compared with other things, the ancients had a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the houses they built with their own hands. It is expressed in ancient Chinese characters from different perspectives, neither purely copied nor purely abstract, but a generalization based on its main artificial characteristics. Not only do ancient people create characters based on roof and platform etc. as mentioned above, but they also create characters based on visual perception and the technical structure of the house. Some characters, such as the initial texts of “墉, 室, and 京” are simply the plan, elevation, and section of modern architecture design (see Figure 2). And some words are clearly symbols of the Chinese wooden structure system (see Figure 3).

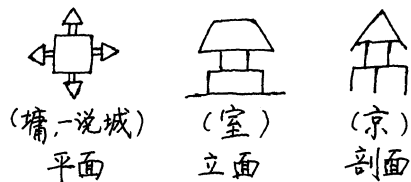


Figure 2. The symbolized images of ancient architecture in ancient Chinese characters.



Figure 3. The imagery of stilt style architecture in oracle bone inscriptions.

Similarly, the character “域” for a region, formerly known as “或”, was used as a signal to defend the city with swords and knives in hand. In the early days, the character “国” was composed of three boundaries surrounding “或”, in the shape of “國”, and later, it developed into the character “國” with borders on all sides (see Figure 6). These all indicate the ruling spaces and power forms of ancient settlements, tribes, and dynasties (Mou, 2000, p. 318).

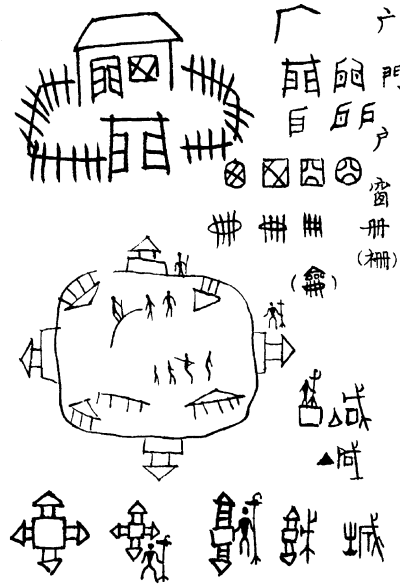


Figure 5. Text imagery from building parts to settlements.

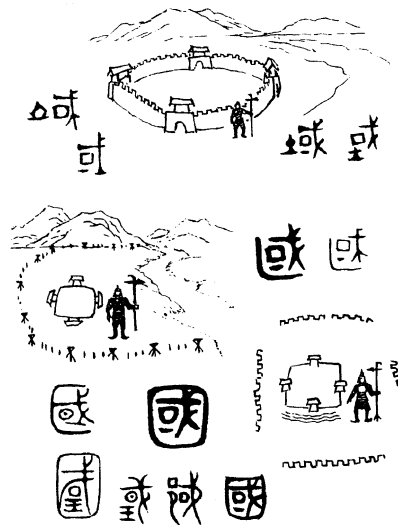


Figure 6. The architectural imagery of characters “或”, “域”, and “国”.

In ancient times, administrative management units were referred to as “邑”, “乡”, “里”, and “正” in literature, indicating their command over the people through the spatial division of residence. The character “邑” (邑) is a human figure kneeling beneath the city, meaning the largest administrative unit under the feudal state. Later, those with ancestral temples were called the capital “都”, while those without ancestral temples were called the city “邑”. The area outside the city is called “乡”, and the earliest “乡” character that displays the symbol “邑”

is closely related to the square-fields system, in the middle is the “邑田” of aristocrats and slave owners, and around it is the “乡田” cultivated by the common people. “里” is compound ideographs for “田” and “土”, and is a spatial form related to the residential orientation in the square-fields system. There are some words, such as “邦” that are also related to regional planning (see Figure 7) (Mou, 2000, p. 321).

There are also some words that represent storage, such as “窖”, “窖”, “仓”, etc., and their relationship with architectural space is quite obvious and goes without saying.

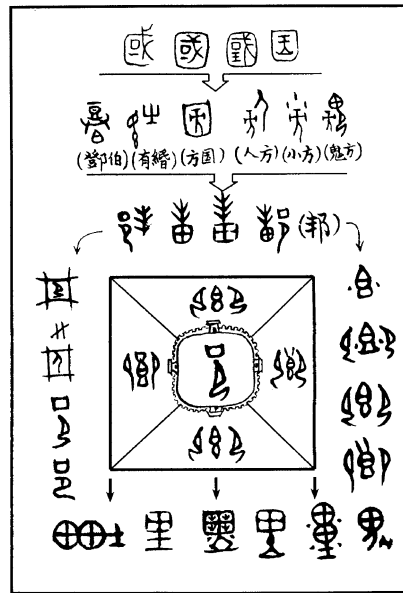


Figure 7. Characters composition related to space and administration in the square-fields system.

Characters Related to Architectural Adjective Category

As the subject, humans have different cognitions and perceptions of many objects in nature and society. This imagery of world's connotations is often conveyed through architectural forms, which are reflected in ancient Chinese characters, specifically in physiological, psychological, interpersonal, and other aspects, as shown in the following examples:

1. Perceptual category: In addition to visual perception, architecture is also involved in other aspects of human perception symbols, such as the “寒” and “凉” of somatosensory. “寒” is a compound ideographs, when inside a house (宀), it uses both hands (夂) to seal or block it, but the cold air and cold wind still cannot be blocked, and there is still ice underneath (冫). Here, “冫” is the pictogram of ice, a symbol of cold. And the initial text “冫” of “凉” is the word “亭” with a “冫” shape added next to it.

2. Psychological category: Someone (male) is meditating inside the house, as described in the initial text of “安”, which symbolizes not being affected by the outside world, feeling calm and safe. Later, in a patriarchal society, the person inside the house was concretized as “女” (female) shape. There are also synonyms for “宁” and “定”. The initial text of “宁” refers to placing a pottery vessel on the altar of a house, with the pictogram “宀”, indicating wealth and tranquility. Later, in order to highlight the psychological effect, a “心” character was added above the “皿” character, or the lower altar was omitted. “定” character is written as “宀” in oracle bone inscriptions, which means indoor safety without disturbance.

bone script or “𠄎” in small seal script, its upper half is in the shape of a door, and the lower half is in the shape of a gap, and its original meaning is to open the door, which is extended to mean exploring. “废” was written as “𠄎” in small seal script; its upper half is in the shape of a house; *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* referred to “屋顿也” as “废”. “废” means the house is abandoned and not in use; by extension, anything that is discarded and unused is called “废”. Later further extended to disability, “on salt and iron” said: “Without limbs, one will be physically disabled”.

Initial characters related to the use of building space include “宿”, “梦”, “子”, “学”, etc. The character “宿” is a kind of compound ideographs, indicating the shape of a person sleeping. In the initial text, a human figure was lying on a mat, but in order to avoid confusion between a normal sleeping person and a dead person, the person and the mat were erected together. Later, the shape of the room was added in text. The initial text and original meaning of “字” represent a woman’s pregnancy through the image of the fetus. Later, with the emergence of formal education consciousness, the character of a child in a room appeared, which means “child to learn”. The original word “学” (學) was the same as “效”, with a “交” character plus a stick-holding hand shape. Later, the shape of a house and the symbol of “子” representing children were added; the meaning of the word “学” in education and learning becomes clear. As a specialized learning venue, the “塾” was originally a fence with the addition of the word “日” to indicate the meaning of a document “册”, which is also relatively obvious that it is related to the form of building enclosure (see Figure 9) (Mou, 2000, p. 343).



Figure 9. Ancient educational texts and architecture.

From the perspective of parts of speech, in addition to nouns, verbs, and adjectives, there are even other parts of speech words that originate from the image or meaning of architecture. For example, the character “向” mentioned above, as a preposition, is obviously related to architecture. Another example is the interrogative pronoun “孰”; it originally written as “𠄎” or “𠄎”, indicating a person knocking on the door outside the house, which looks like an interesting painting visiting someone’s house:

Ask: “Who is it?”

Answer: “It’s me.”

Ancient Chinese characters are a series of “cultural schemata”. The interpretation of the original meaning of the configuration and relationship between their forms and connotation cannot only focus on their inherent surface properties, such as the connections between form, sound, and meaning. In the ultimate sense, the function and meaning of Chinese characters are the same as specific historical activities and cultural connotations. The ultimate direction of traditional Chinese characters’ interpretation is the presentation of human concepts towards the various interfaces of nature and human society.

The ancient architectural forms (mainly residential forms), as artificial objects, are themselves objects of people’s understanding and products of culture, and also participate in the creation of culture. People use methods, such as imagine, analogize, and empathize to conceal ancient architecture from its partial components to its external image, from structure to the whole, in ancient writing. The feelings, perceptions, psychology, behavior, and systems of ancient people can be seen in ancient writing. The architecture, as an object, is transformed into the ancient Chinese character symbols from multiple angles and levels, both concretely and abstractly, which can be called the “cultural framework” of ancient Chinese characters.

Chinese Characters Metaphorize the Cultural Connotation of Ancient Chinese Architecture

When ancient Chinese characters were first invented, they serviced as Chinese words (or morphemes) and expressed their meanings (or morphemes) through their form and structure of strokes. As an analytical language with underdeveloped morphological changes and strong semantic expression, each syllable (one syllable is a Chinese character) has its own meaning, and a character is often a word.

The meanings expressed by pictographs and simple ideographs are the understanding of real objects, and when faced with various constantly developing “things”, “states”, and “time and space” in the evolving world, experiences, such as exaggeration, abstraction, and description naturally arise, which are mainly expressed through compound ideographs. Regardless of the method of character creation, imitating the appearance of things is the foundation. However, as time goes by, people’s recognition of the world improves. The meanings of same characters continue to extend and expand, accumulating very rich meanings. Therefore, the understanding of characters (words) needs to be carried out through the combination of linguistic and cultural connotations.

The German language philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt (1997) once said that words are not imprint (abdruck) of things themselves, but reflections of images created by things in the mind. Words are the reunderstanding and conceptual reconstruction of things by the mind. For ancient Chinese characters, as words, one should not only look at that they are a description of objects in East Asia, but also look at their connection with Orientals’ thinking world, that is, the connotation of developmental word meanings. When studying ancient Chinese characters, when they are used as symbols, we must pay full attention to their signified. As words, ancient Chinese characters contain generalizations among symbols, and symbols among generalizations, solidifying many concepts. From material characteristics, diverse behaviors, to abstract ideas, they are constantly expanded under the guidance of imagery thinking. For example, the same form of “口” in different characters or words has diverse meanings based on pictograms, such as mouth, window, pond, wall, square, range, earth, etc.

Xu Shen’s *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* proposed that the so-called “文字” refers to “盖依类象形，故谓之文；其后形声相益，则谓之字。文者，物象之本；字者，孳乳而寝多也”。 In the historical context of experiential thinking in ancient times, ancient architecture is both imagistically preserved in the “image of the soul” of ancestors—the character shapes, and also imagistically “transformed” in semantics from different angles and levels. The so-

called experiential thinking relatively neglects experimental verification and logical analysis, emotions and values play a dominant role in the thinking process, and the subject focuses on integrating rational cognition into real feelings, grasping the core meaning of things in an experiential way.

The concreteness, technology, and placeness of ancient Chinese architecture have been continuously strengthened and infused into the words about architecture in the experience of our ancestors, forming imagery symbols and imagery combinations of word. The imagery of ancient Chinese architecture in written symbols needs to be explained by us. This interpretation between architecture and word is not exactly the same with traditional exegetics. Exegetics can be called semantic interpretation, and it is generally believed that there are three methods for exploring semantics, namely, “seeking meaning based on form”, “seeking meaning based on sound”, and “explicitly stating the meaning of words”:

1. “Seeking meaning through form” has already been discussed earlier in this essay;
2. “Seeking meaning through sound” has little to do with the interpretation of ancient Chinese architectural imagery;
3. “Straightly and explicitly stating the meaning of words” is different from methods, such as defining facts and using true definitions; it is based on the existing definitions in dictionaries and classics to illustrate the definition, often using definitions of synonyms and genus-species relationships.

It can be seen that exegetics neglects both cultural significance and value of ethnic groups and nations, and the inherent imagery of character (word) meanings is also overlooked. Therefore, the imagery of ancient Chinese architecture in writing must be analyzed through word meanings, pointing to humanism. In addition to using dictionary and classics, methods should also be combined with specific historical conditions, object development, lifestyle, thinking concepts, etc. The relationship between ancient Chinese architecture and people’s production and life, including ancient Chinese characters, is inseparable, and mutual interpretation is an effective research approach.

Take the word “城” as an example. The etymology of “urban” (“城”) in many European countries is the Latin word “urbs”, which originally means “city life” and extends to city, municipal, etc. The basic meaning of the related word “city” coming from ancient Greece is “the civil rights that citizens can enjoy”. There are also some related words, such as “civil”, “municipal”, and “civilization”. It refers to settlements where the rights of citizens as subjects can be respected and enjoyed, and where a high level of education is achieved. The initial text of the ancient Chinese character “城” has been analyzed above. In summary, the city walls and towers are the basic symbols, as *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* states, “城，以盛民也，墉，城垣也”. Essentially, the character “城” means the same as enclosure, defense, rule, territory, etc. In fact, most Western cities do not have city walls and tend to expand naturally from the inside out. However, Chinese cities attach great importance to spatial politics, ethics, and other concepts, emphasizing planning and building walls first. Therefore, Western “城” often points to the social values and cultural connotations of cities, while Chinese “城” focuses on the significance of safety, region, and administration. The culture imagery of Chinese “城” lies on the coordination among humans, nature, and environment; and the political imagery of Chinese “城” lies on the unity of opposition complex between the upper class as the main body and the ruled lower class.

Chinese characters are “holographic” perceptual symbols loaded with visual, auditory, and conscious information. Tracing their historical meanings can reveal the perception orientation and psychological structure of ancient people towards the world. The ancient spatial imagery in Chinese characters has abundant expressions from physical objects to abstract spirits, from the whole to the parts. Here are a few more examples:

The word “家” (家) is inseparable from the architectural form, and there are at least three different imaginative and humanistic understandings of it. Firstly, some refer to it as a form of residence. *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* interprets “家” as: “居也，从宀，豕省声”. In ancient times, it was probably a cone-shaped cave dwelling style with surrounding walls and roof beams intersecting. Secondly, some people believe that “家” is both a pictographic character and a phonetic character, the stroke structure of a pig inside the house represents wealth. In agricultural tribes, only domestic pigs can symbolize wealth, so “豕” specifically refers to the “豕” of domestic pigs. The meaning of “家” refers to a blood group living in public housing with common property (Luo, 1982). Thirdly, some people believe that “家” evolved from “豕”, and the word “家” is used to refer to husbands or males, because in traditional patriarchal family societies, males dominated, while boars held a higher position in pig herds. With the development of economy and politics, the meaning of the word “家” became increasingly rich, with more than 30 meanings, including family, property, supporting family, ancestral temple, state, dynasty, group, ethnicity, etc. It can be seen that the combination of residential forms and other things can give rise to numerous Chinese characters and connotations.

Another example is the walking space of road “道路” (道路); the term has evolved into different meanings with the development of history, such as “衢”, “阡”, “陌”, “畛”, “街”, “道”, “巷”, “径”, etc.. There are subtle or significant differences between these words. The earliest forms of writing of road were “阡” and “陌”, which were products of the square-fields system, referring to the small path in the square-fields. Ying Shao’s “Feng Su Tong Yi” of the Eastern Han Dynasty said: “南北曰阡，东西曰陌”. The original meaning of “畛” referred to the path taken by cows and horses. Later, it generally refers to the small path in the field, often used to define territory, boundary, and range. The road of four connections is called “街”, and the straight and accessible road is called “衢”. Zhang Heng’s “Xijing Fu” says “街衢相径”. The idiom “康衢大道” refers to a large road that is connected in all directions, metaphorically referring to a prominent position. The main road that goes straight and has no small path next to it is called “道”, such as “驰道”, “棧道”, “甬道”, etc. The narrow inner path within block is called “巷”. It is interesting that during the Western Zhou Dynasty, people called the place where one carriage could pass “途”, the place where two carriages could pass “道”, and the place where three carriages could pass “路”, but in contemporary China, there is no significant difference in the use of these three words. Commonly used to refer to the “径” in gardens, it originally meant a rural path that could only be walked by cattle and horses. There is no doubt that different character types of road’s title have different corresponding relationships with different eras and regions. The names of public transportation spaces for walking in ancient Chinese characters are diverse, and the imagery of “道” in the text is profound and thought-provoking.

The origin of Chinese characters and words are not only related to the architecture itself, but also to settlement design or urban planning. The term “东西” that refers to all things in the world is related to urban construction. The term “东西” originated in the Tang Dynasty. There were two commercial markets in the Eastern and Western urban areas of Chang’an City, namely, “东市” and “西市”. There were numerous shops and customers from all over the world, with well-developed transportation and a bustling scene, ranking first both domestically and internationally at that time. Does this imagery in architectural planning contribute to the birth of the word “东西”? This viewpoint is worth further investigation.

In the development process of Chinese characters related to architecture, starting from the structure of ancient Chinese characters, different connotations are gradually added during their use, and various parts of ancient Chinese architecture are imitated and symbolized by Chinese characters. With the development of history, people’s different understandings of architecture have been demonstrated in various applications of Chinese

characters, which can be roughly divided into several aspects: (a) the cultural imagery of Chinese characters in the building itself, such as “台” and “阿”; (b) the Chinese cultural imagery of architecture as a place, such as “社”; and (c) the cultural imagery of Chinese characters in the architectural environment, such as “园” and “景”.

Finally, it should be noted that the fixed combination of characters and words (idioms) also reflects the diverse meanings of Chinese architectural culture, such as “大相径庭”, “碧瓦朱甍”, “鳞次栉比”, “偷梁换柱”, “高屋见瓴”, and so on. Compared to the solidification of the cultural connotations of ancient Chinese architecture in Chinese characters, the art of writing the form of Chinese characters (Chinese calligraphy) can be regarded as the virtualization of the structural imagery of ancient Chinese architecture. From an external perspective, calligraphy works such as couplet pasted on buildings are also an indispensable component of ancient Chinese architectural environment and culture. From an internal perspective, the construction of ancient Chinese architecture is similar to the lines and rhythms of Chinese calligraphy.

To sum up, the cultural imagery of ancient Chinese architecture is rich and colorful, and it is elaborately preserved in the ancient Chinese characters, an area of traditional Chinese culture. From origin to development, from configuration to meaning, from word-formation to handwriting, many Chinese characters present a “cultural map of ancient Chinese architecture”, which is worthy of careful savoring and in-depth exploration.

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