Homecoming: the Origin and Destination of Architectural Design

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Abstract. Under the background of globalization and urbanization in the 21st century, where will architectural design go? The architect is confused by these problems. The concept of “homecoming” expounded in this paper is that the objectivity and necessity of the homecoming will exist in people’s spiritual life are pointed out from the aspects of literary concept, philosophical dimension and architectural design, in order to alleviate modern people’s state of wandering with no one to depend upon, and it is also a need for cultural root seeking. However, homecoming is not a real sense of returning to the hometown, but a returning in a spiritual sense. Homecoming is a kind of situation consciousness, which builds a bridge between the past and the present by reason and emotion to express the attitudes towards the tradition in order to confront the urbanization process completely separated from the tradition. In this paper, reflection was positively conducted on the issues such as architectural ethics, architectural space and architectural language in the process of intense urbanization, with a view to putting forward personal opinions and exploring the future direction of architectural design.

1. Introduction
In this paper, the reflection on the issue of “homecoming” is based on the rapid advancement of contemporary globalization and urbanization, so where will Chinese architecture develop towards? When more and more people leave their native place to come to cities carrying all kinds of beautiful desires, what’s wondering is not only the footstep but also the soul if cities become hometowns? When the hometown is getting farther and farther, the heart is also in turmoil, and the feeling of homesickness is getting stronger and stronger, so people begin to feel homesick and return home in various ways. Homecoming has also become the origin and destination of modern architectural design, which is the theme to be discussed in this paper. So, what is homecoming?

2. Interpretation to the Concept of Homecoming

2.1. Cultural dimension: homecoming is one of the most important motifs in Chinese and foreign literature
"Homecoming" has an ancient origin in the Chinese literature development history, and it has always been echoed. In China, the motif of “homecoming” is first pointed out in “The Book of Songs”, and there are also lots of descriptions of homecoming in the poems of the Tang and Song dynasties. Whether it is relatives’ separation described in “it’s getting dark, why not go home” in “The Book of Songs • Beifeng • Dark”, or the scared faith and homeland consciousness described in “the bird will eventually return to its old nest after flying thousands of miles away, the fox will head towards the
small hill where it was born” in “The Songs of Chu”, or the helplessness and sorrow described in “don’t return to hometown when you are old, and you’ll be extremely sad when you return home” in Wei Zhuang’s “Pusaman • Everyone Says Jiangnan is Good”, all reveal the mundane feeling of homecoming and psychological rhythm of homesickness, and highlight the irresistible return of life.

Classical literature is the germ of the loss and return of Chinese-style cultural homes. Homecoming, the rich psychological experience described in literary works, is essential to the spiritual life of the Chinese. No matter it is war & famine, seeking of government office & study tour, or the cultural disruption and transformation, nostalgia and return to the native land, all are the themes repeatedly sung by Chinese literati in a specific cultural background. “Homecoming” is an important part of Chinese people’s emotional life. “Homecoming” also occupies an important role in modern literature. Thomas Hardy’s Homecoming, Lu Yao’s The Ordinary World and Zweig’s Die Reise in die Vergangenheit all have a strong sense of the native land and homecoming complex. Therefore, nostalgia for the homeland of the soul is the source of literary creation at home and abroad, and even the entire history of literary writing is the history of the inheritance & continuation and evolution of many motif prototypes similar to “homecoming”.

In literary words, homecoming is a station of wandering and also the end of wandering. Therefore, homecoming is an immortal poem in the history of Chinese and foreign literature.

2.2. Philosophical dimension: the essence of philosophical activity is spiritual homecoming

Germany mysterious poet Novalis said: Philosophy is the mother of all sciences, and the essence of philosophical activities is the spiritual homecoming. Any activity that seeks the spiritual homeland with the impulse of nostalgia can be called a philosophical activity. ① In response to the plight that more and more people are desperate to return to their homes but homeless, and return to their homes without seeing their homes, Heidegger interpreted this “homecoming” complex as an important philosophical issue.

In the seventh volume of Plato’s Utopia, there is a profound exposition of the mysterious cave (figure 1). Professor Yu Zhejun from the Philosophy Department of Fudan University interpreted and analyzed that this is also the three stages of a person. The first stage is the prisoner stage, where people are imprisoned in the cave. The second stage is the liberation of the flesh, where people begin to walk out of the cave. The third stage is called the liberation of the soul, where people return to the cave again. ② Heidegger explained the cave as that the liberation happened by accident, after that, people are able to walk out the cave to become free people. Only when the free people return to the cave again, can the freedom be truly completed. ③ The cave here is certainly not a cave in the physical sense, but it means the piece of native land that the individuals met at the beginning of their life and in their early years, and even the mother’s womb. That familiar place, person and object give humanity stability and confidence, while the sense of security and belonging that is closely related to the source of life provides an overview of people’s lives, and it is also the beginning and end of life. Anyhow, choosing to return to the maternal cave means a stable life and the unknowns and fear that have been placed. While leaving the patent means wandering from place to place, keep fighting and even facing death. Therefore, everyone has a meaning and cave that they do not want to leave, while returning to the cave has become the homecoming and fate of those who have left home.

Figure 1. Plato’s Cave of the Bound Soul and subsubsections.
Both literature and philosophy originate in life, and are targeted at guiding people to better understand and transform the world. No matter the spiritual direction of literature or the warning function of philosophy, homecoming seems to be the eternal direction in all artistic creation, and also be permeated with important contents: finding homes and returning to the original are the innate life impulse of human beings. The instinct of life urges people to overcome the separation from home in the strong struggle of life consciousness, to seek for the healing of incomplete life. Through the constant review of the way to return home, and the thinking and exploration of the past, present and the future, people have re-established gratitude and feedback on the source of life. Therefore, homecoming is of great significance to people’s lives. Homecoming is not a simple return and replication, but a creative transformation that increases or decreases. On the surface, homecoming has distinctive elite characteristics. In fact, it is the direction of thinking opposite to modern lifestyle. It is closely related to the quality of life of modern people, and it is also the most basic needs of survival and psychology of people.

However, it is worth thinking about how to return to the cave? As the philosopher Leo Strauss puts it: returning to classical may be the only way out for modern people, but can people return to the same cave twice? ④

3. Homecoming: Return of Architectural Design
Architectural design is closely related to people’s life, and needs to accommodate people’s material and spiritual activities. Relative to literary works, architecture needs to meet people’s most basic psychological and ethical needs.

3.1. Psychological Appeal
In the 20th century, everything was still self-destructive and unsustainable. People lived in a turbulent environment, and the harmonious relationship between people and people, between people and nature, and between people and society almost no longer existed. Modern society not only means a break from all the previous historical conditions, but also has a process of breaking and fragmentation within itself. As a result, the world has been pushed into a whirlpool, where there are collapses and renewals, struggles and conflicts, chaos and pains. A lot of people have no respect for their past, especially in the construction industry. Wang Shu once recorded that the country’s thousands of years of urban civilization had been in ruins for 30 years, and that the villages on which it was based were either in ruins or in desolation. ⑤ The traditional architectural culture has collapsed, the ancient urban texture has vanished, and the establishment of international cities and the building of exotic towns present unprecedented prosperity and showiness, while what’s behind it is the pervasive sense of homelessness: the past that can not be returned, the future that can not be seen. This has also become a theme commonly sung in the Chinese and western society in this century. In recent years, more and more people have realized that development forward alone can not bring happiness to people. As a result, people begin to reflect back, start to think about the modern lifestyle of life and life experience, and redefine the meaning of life. Traditions begin to be missed, and ancient characters and wisdom are being rediscovered, so the psychological demands of homecoming are getting stronger and stronger, and the psychology of homecoming is becoming increasingly deeper.

Architectural design is also the same as the psychological soil of other artistic creations: the stressful and busy life of modern people is full of the anxiety and helplessness brought by the living environment and lifestyle completely breaking with tradition, as well as the wandering and soul loneliness brought by being far away from home. Not only the literary works need to be expressed and poured out, but also architectural works are also demonstrating this theme. Homecoming is to bridge and relieve the wandering and anxiety after leaving the hometown and find belonging for the body and soul, which is the part that cannot be ignored in all artistic creation. As a way of existence, architecture is closely related to people’s life. It can provide people with a real foothold on the earth. In particular, it needs to meet people’s most basic psychological demands, and should provide people a sense of security, belonging and identify to settle the lonely and unconscious hearts.
3.2. Ethical Needs
Karsten Harries pointed out that architecture is an interpretation of the desirable lifestyle for the contemporary era. The real architecture must meet two needs of people: to shelter from the wind and rain, and also enable people to have a spiritual inhabitation, which is also the ethical function of architecture. What kind of house can better explain our lives? Basselard pointed out that everyone has such a dream-like house in his heart, often haunting in dreams, from which we can dimly see the shadow of the true past. It is also to say goodbye to the feeling of being inseparable from modern life and wandering with no one to depend upon. It is looking forward to a harmonious and stable life, and also a real settlement. Everyone has the idea of returning home, because everyone who leaves the hometown has a nostalgia that he cannot get rid of. Heidegger believed that everyone should return home in the way that suits them.

Heidegger’s brilliant insight: “According to our human experience and history, at least as far as I have seen, I know that all essential and great things stem from the fact that everyone has a home and is rooted in a tradition”. It is impossible for a home to be completely divorced from the past. Life cannot be entirely without tradition, which is the foundation, the sense of belonging and security. When architecture completely deviates from tradition, it means farewell to life and tradition, and the spirit of drift. What we talked about the homecoming in architecture is not a road to return to the ancients, but an emotion, an awareness, a situational consciousness, and the origin that combines the tradition to return to architecture. Looking back by the way of “poetry” or “missing” in the architectural design creation makes it more adapt to the modern lifestyle. Heidegger believed that the original “homecoming” is included in all poetic creations, while he confirmed that “the natural duty of the poet is to return home”. Belonging to the homeland is concrete, and it is the pursuit of the original memory of each life entity for their lives, longing for the link with the past; it is also abstract, and reflects the individual’s ultimate thinking of the meaning of life, and seeks for poetic habitation.

Homecoming is the basic spiritual needs of people, and hopes to be expressed and satisfied with the help of architecture, which is the ethical function of architecture.

Therefore, we believe that in architectural design. No matter the creation method of using the thinking of literary description or philosophical speculation to find the homeland, or the architectural creation behavior of seeking the traditional culture in order to make our life not completely depart from the tradition and history, it is on the way to “return home”.

4. Homecoming of Architectural Design
Gustav Jung argued that the root cause for why great works of art are great lies in that they evoke common feelings and experience of human beings, and reexamine the common original experience of human beings in the reproduction of various prototypes. Therefore, we can often see the author’s original intention to seek a spiritual home with the impulse of nostalgia from those masterpieces with significant influence. In recent years, many outstanding architectural works have shown such characteristics: those emotions wandering in the space, the exceedingly sentimental feelings turned into a wall, a pool of water and a corner of space to start the memory that has been stored in the mind for a long time, reappearing the years that passed away, and evoking people’s initial memories. Architects expresses a kind of feelings through modern translation of the materials, structures and spatial intentions of traditional architectures: the longing for the remote homeland, the reappearance of the faded memory, and the resonance of the feeling of mundane return to the homeland to help people to achieve a poetic habitat. We can also catch a glimpse from the master’s work.

4.1. Luis Barragan’s Poetic Architecture
Luis Barragan House and Studio is Barragan’s best masterpiece. Louis Kahn said when visiting the Casa Barragan that: “his home is more than just a house. It is a kind of place where everyone can find the sense of belonging. The house uses traditional architectural materials, but the character expressed by the architecture is eternal”. In telling the source of architectural inspirations, the old Barragan
described the life of his childhood in Guadalajara farm: the walls whitewashed by lime water, the tranquility of the courtyards and orchards, the colorful streets and architectures, the silent and long time, by which Barragan was deeply fascinated and lingered, so he tried to express his homesickness with all his words. The pictures such as the farm, the roof, the sink, the colors were all engraved in the memories of his childhood, poetically reproduced in his house. Barragan’s acceptance speech for the Pritzker Prize that, “All my accomplishments, if they could be called accomplishments, run through my memories of my father’s ranch where I spent my childhood and adolescence there, I always try to adapt those long and nostalgic years to modern life in my design.” ⑨ Undoubtedly, the memory of his childhood is the source and endless resource of Barragan’s architectural creation. The village where he lived in his childhood, the forms of those humble architecture, like those beautiful years, brought him many inspirations. The nostalgic mood made Barragan poetically recall his past, and shaped a highly expressive abstract space through the translation of traditional architectural elements, creating a peaceful and pleasant atmosphere to resist the belonging of the hustle and bustle of the city.

Barragan constructed a beautiful poem full of nostalgia with poetic architectural language, combining his past with his present life and realizing poetic dwelling. It is easy to find a sense of belonging and pleasant quiet atmosphere, and infatuated and fascinated unconsciously. Barragan believed that everything in the world would return to the parent body of the earth, and architecture was no exception. With architecture as the carrier and memory as the content, he wrote his own autobiography elaborately, walking on the road to return home poetically to overcome this homeless era.

4.2. Hall’s Architecture Phenomenology
Hall absorbed Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, and believed that architectural design must include people’s experience, perception and consciousness and other spiritual categories, and also argued that only by relying on the body’s perception, motion and experience, the essence of architecture can be comprehended and the nature of life can be understood thoroughly.

Berkowitz House, located between the coast and the wilderness, was inspired by the novel Moby Dick with local area as the setting. As described in the novel, the Indians used the whale’s skeleton as a house, covered with leather and branches, so Hall drew inspiration from it, and used the wooden keel in the shape of a whale as the skeleton and exposed, so as to make people reminiscent of a whale shack on the beach, like a boat or a whale stranded on the shore, through the exposed frame structure. It was a primitive idea of a combination of a hut and a whale. Hall connected the artistic conception in the novel and the realistic environment by paying enough attention to the perceptual world in the novel and by translating the spatial intention and materials. In addition, by the reflection on the body, he restored the primitive intimacy between people and the world, and revealed the eternal and real things

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Figure 2. Luis Barragan House and Studio

Figure 3. Luis Barragan House and Studio
behind the phenomenon. According to Hall, architecture is the fusion of the “order” of external perception and the “phenomenon” of internal perception. The elements such as architecture, coast and wilderness have achieved the fusion of phenomena, thus awakening the underlying connotation in the place. With the novel as the background, the architecture is given a mysterious theme and soul, so that the architecture also has a different vitality, and at the same time, it awakens the profound and essential connection between people, architectures and the living world.

The imagination and memory of the people who come here will be fully mobilized. They cannot help but be brought to the era in the novel, returning from the novel to the world that they had ever sighed and aftertasted. They cannot help but have a cross-space dialogue and communication with the character in the novel to experience the cultural environment and social conditions at that time, naturally entering the world in the novel. Such “phenomenological reduction” or “returning to the matter itself” is to embody the essential grasp of people, architectures, places and consciousness with architectural elements such as space, structure and materials. Hall connected a direct connections between architecture and the individual consciousness, helping people to realize a spiritual journey, which is the spiritual “homecoming”.

4.3. Wang Shu’s Architecture World
There is no doubt that due to the excessive pursuit of modernity, the traditional peaceful lifestyle has been completely disintegrated, and the long idyllic life no longer exists. In the fast-paced life of modern society, the environment around people is rough and barren, and people are impetuous and alienated, so it is extremely difficult to reconstruct the traditional civilization or restore the way of life. In response to this phenomenon, Wang Shu, with the “lament for a broken country and the worse present”, expressed his strong homesickness in this architecture works. With the sorrow and empathy of the literati, he walked on the road of returning home, expressing his distress and nostalgia for the disappearance of the traditional culture.

Wang Shu’s road of architectural homecoming began with a few inadvertent details. He tried to discover the spatial intention that is able to reflect Chinese people’s traditional life and aesthetic characteristics, and gathered the life in a series of event scenes through the modern translation of
materials and space to tell a here-and-now story. In the design of Xiangshan Campus, Wang Shu actually wanted to restore the university campus with the atmosphere of a traditional Chinese academy, hoping that people could experience the stretch of *The Vast Land*. However, in the design of Ningbo Museum, he tried to tell people what life was like here. He wanted to evoke the vitality in the past era and give life to the architecture by designing a rockery-like building. As the lofty mountains are part of the tradition, he hoped to use the design to retrieve lost memories, so he used the old brick and wood and other simple materials to put a literati-stylized coat on the vulgar architectural modeling, shaping the peculiarity and straightness of *Pine In Valleys*. Therefore, the architecture, which looks lumbering, can make people feel the warm and fragile silence. Wang Shu connected a subtle connection between the past and the present through the modern translation of building materials with words of a literati. As what the judges said during the presentation of Pritzker Architecture Prize, Wang Shu resonated directly with the scene and memories when opening the horizon for us. His architectures are ingenious, evocative of the past, but do not use historical elements directly. Yes, he created a kind of mental fullness that the user entrusts with the architectural entity, the fullness of feeling, experience and memory.

Figure 7. Xiangshan Campus  
Figure 8. Ningbo Museum

Maybe Wang Shu has been trying to save the traditional civilization under the iron hooves of urbanization, and explore the possibility of salvation. Maybe the fact has not always been exactly as he wished. After all, the city disease in the modernization process was not something that could be turned only by architectures. However, Wang Shu’s homecoming complex for architectures could make the feast more coarse and harsh, making the people who are hurrying on with their journey stop to cherish the memory.

This is Wang Shu’s world: with warm nostalgia and sorrowful sadness, he found a way to modern homecoming with the peculiar sadness of the literati.

5. Conclusion

At present, traditional Chinese architecture is in a danger of total collapse, the indigenous way of life is being radically changed, and the culture and language are also taken at the outside. We are losing the wisdom and ancient traditions slowly accumulated from generation to generation. And excellent architects have precipitated the worries that should be in this era through careful refinement of tradition and modern translation of traditional architectural elements, to help people to “return home” spiritually, and take people to touch, wipe and go to feel the existence of the past, so as to connect the past annihilated in the history with today, making it take root and sprout and become luxuriant. Architectural “homecoming” enable the fragments of traditional life into the present life, allowing people to constantly look back in the journey to find the driving force. Homecoming is the compensation and redemption of modernization. It is the inevitable result of the conflict between traditional culture and modern civilization, and also the inevitable exploration and reflection in the process of urbanization. The space is limited to cover the many ways of returning home in architectural design, and it is impossible to point out exactly where to return. However, in any case, the matter of homecoming is always worth discussing and tracing.

Wang Shu pointed out that once the tradition dies, we have no future.
We must be vigilant. Today, the spirit garden lost in reverie is still very far away. Therefore, we are all on the road to “return home”, which is the original and destination of Chinese architectural design.

Source of Chart
Figure one is sourced from http://www.sohu.com/a/214839644_761731.
Figure 2 and Figure 3 come from Louis Barragan’s Works and Thoughts, Editorial Department of Series Books of Masters, China Electric Power Press, 46-54.
Figure 4, Figure 5 and Figure 6 come from Anchor, edited by Stanley Hall, translated by Fu Jixiang, Tianjin University Press, 95-101.
Figure 7 and Figure 8 come from Wang Shu Architecture, edited by City Walk Editorial Board, Tongji University Press, 26-30.

Note
①② refer to http://www.sohu.com/a/214839644_761731
③④ refer to Yu Jiejun: The Person in the Cave Metaphor – Talking from “The Fool”. Bookstore, June 2017, P24.
⑤ refers to Wang Shu. View of the Profile, Time + Architecture, No.2 in 2010, P114-121.
⑥⑦ refer to [American] Carsten Harris, translated by Shen Jia and Chen Zhaohui. The Ethical Function of Architecture. Huaxia Publishing House, First edition in April 2001, P79.
⑧ refers to Louis I. Kahn, Silence and Light, Zurich, Switzerland, 1969, p. 223.
⑨ refers to https://xw.qq.com/cmsid/20180618A0DP5Q00
⑩ refers to http://www.ciid.com.cn/news/news_info?article_id=2488

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