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Author: Huang, En-Yu

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5.1 How Architectural *Do's & Taboos* Support Built Spaces to Represent Socio-Cosmic Realities

Comparing the *do's & taboos* of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra in the frames of the long-cycle traditions and the thereon based shorter-cycle themes of architectural representations, we have clearly seen how they reinforce and fix the meaning of built environment. These *do's & taboos* play a significant role in supporting various built spaces to represent various realities. It is worth noting that the 'cosmic realities' are by far the majority, and the 'social realities' come in second.

As we have seen in chapter 2, the *do's & taboos* concerning the configuration of built spaces as a representation of the cosmos stipulate the use of the auspicious square/rectangular shapes for sites and ground plans, since the *Axis Mundi & Cosmic Cross* that form the essential structure of the cosmos can only be well represented by such shapes. Surely, those thought to be inauspicious are usually the shapes that cannot well represent the *Axis Mundi & Cosmic Cross*.

In Chapter 3, we have analyzed the *do's & taboos* concerning the orientation of built spaces that support the representations of the connection to the cosmic structure. They stipulate that the built space should be oriented to an auspicious direction, and that this auspicious direction can be determined according to the 'cardinal points' or the 'natural/built objects dominating the external environment'. It is because the cardinal points and some dominant objects are usually perceived as the main coordinates of the cosmic structure, in which the built space is expected to be firmly established. Once the built space is oriented to one of these coordinates, its stable existence in the cosmic structure is guaranteed.

Chapter 4 has shown that the *do's & taboos* concerning the spatial hierarchy within built spaces support the representations of the cosmic order. These *do's & taboos* of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra, although being formulated on the basis of quite different principles, all highlight the supreme position of the center and focus on the strict hierarchical relationship between the four cosmic directions of the built space. In both traditions, the spatial hierarchy is a mental construct deeply rooted in the frame of the *Axis Mundi & Cosmic Cross*.

The comparison of the *do's & taboos* of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra

*Comparing the Do's & Taboos in Chinese Feng-Shui and
Indian Vāstu-Shāstra Architectural Traditions*

traditions also enable us to find out what cosmic realities are shared by Chinese and Indian peoples. By and large, the same or similar *do's & taboos* support the architectural representations of the same or similar cosmic realities. As mentioned before, the *do's & taboos* of both Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra stipulate that the square/rectangular site or ground plan is favorable, whilst the non-square/rectangular one should be avoided. This is because there is a great deal of common ground between the ancient Chinese and the ancient Indian cosmology, both of which postulate that the cosmos is structured by a vertical axis and two orthogonal horizontal axes, i.e. the *Axis Mundi & Cosmic Cross*. And given that both the Chinese as well as the Indian cultural spheres are located in the Northern Hemisphere, the regular clockwise, or sunwise, order is therefore perceived and mentally constructed by both Chinese and Indian people as the representation of the cosmic order. That is why many of the *do's & taboos* in both Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra traditions are formulated according to the clockwise order that represents the sun-focused cosmic reality.

The *do's & taboos* not only support the representation of cosmic realities, but also help control the 'quality' of such a representation. Therefore these *do's & taboos* stipulate that, in the built spaces for divine beings or members of the higher-caste/class, the representation of cosmic realities should be "perfect" or almost perfect, whereas in the built spaces for lower-caste/class humans, such a representation should be mostly "imperfect" or far from perfect. As a consequence, the perfect/imperfect representation of cosmic realities also highlights the representation of social realities with regard to one's social status and the hierarchical difference between divine beings and mortals, and between higher-caste/class and lower-caste/class people.

As mentioned in chapter 2, some Feng-Shui *do's & taboos* prescribe that the perfect square should not be used as a ground plan for the houses of ordinary people. The same goes for some Vāstu-Shāstra *do's & taboos*, which stipulate that the houses for the lower castes should have a rectangular ground plan, namely with its width-length ratio far from 1:1. However, the houses for the higher castes can be constructed on a ground plan with its width-length ratio approaching that of a square. Obviously, these Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra *do's & taboos* are meant to hamper the perfect representation of the *Cosmic Cross* in the houses of the commons. In Chapter 3, we have seen that some Feng-Shui *do's & taboos* exhibit the same tendency towards the dwellings of ordinary people. Such dwellings are not allowed to face due south, because they are said to not deserve to fully enjoy the beneficial *Qi* of *Yang* coming from this most auspicious cosmic direction. Likewise, some Vāstu-Shāstra *do's & taboos* stipulate that the entrance door of the houses for ordinary people should never be oriented to any of the cardinal points of east, north and west, but at best to

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one of the directions of east by north, north by west and west by south. These *do's & taboos* imply that the *Cosmic Cross* should never coincide with the two orthogonal horizontal axes of the built spaces for humble humans.

In Chapter 4, it has been shown that, with the support of the *do's & taboos* concerning the cosmic-order-based spatial hierarchy, social realities are represented in a more direct way. According to Feng-Shui *do's & taboos*, the hierarchical relationships between the men and the women, between the more remote and the nearer ancestors, and between the higher-ranking and the lower-ranking deities, should all represent the cosmic order. This has been well exemplified by those *do's & taboos* based on the principles of 'the superiority of the front over the back' and 'the superiority of the left over the right'. In the same way, the Vāstu-Shāstra *do's & taboos* that support the representation of the cosmic hierarchical relationship between the higher and the lower castes, the deities and the deceased ancestors, and the higher-ranking and the lower-ranking deities, are formulated according to the cosmic-order-based principles of 'the superiority of the north and east over the south and west' and 'the clockwise order'.

5.2 How Changing Do's & Taboos Meet Changing Needs to Support Changing Representations of Changing Realities

In Chinese Feng-Shui and Indian Vāstu-Shāstra, as two ongoing architectural traditions, the *do's & taboos* are ceaselessly changing to cope with changing representations of changing realities. Over a long period of time, they are going through a cyclic process of 'birth', 'active life', 'transformation', 'dormancy' and 're-awakening'. Whilst worldviews and other realities have been changed, built spaces representing 'old' realities may become obsolete and are likely to be re-arranged to be able to properly represent those new realities. As we can easily find, the spatial arrangements of modern cities and houses are quite different from those of traditional ones. Surely, the *do's & taboos* which support the representations of realities have to change as well so that they can deal with their new corresponding content. The *do's & taboos* are utterly flexible in coping with their immense task to support the representation of still rooted realities in radically changing 'modern' built spaces, which are, in many cases, nothing else than 'copied' representations of other 'alien' realities, such as those from Western cultures. Despite such a sign of weakening representational traditions, the Chinese Feng-Shui and Indian Vāstu-Shāstra have turned out to be strong enough to be confronted with these ongoing cultural clashes.

Re-interpreting Old Do's & Taboos to Represent New Realities

In previous chapters we have seen and analyzed many examples of how people re-interpret 'old' *do's & taboos* in both Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra traditions to shape proper representations of 'new' realities.

As we have learned in Chapter 3, the reason why Feng-Shui *do's & taboos* suggest built spaces to be oriented to external dominant objects such as mountains is that the mountain is considered a representation of the *Axis Mundi*. In other words, these *do's & taboos* support the representation of the old reality of '*orienting the built space to the mountain as if letting it be connected to the cosmic center*'. However, given that the concept of *Qi*, developed in the ancient philosophy of the *Yin-Yang* School, was later incorporated into the theorization of Feng-Shui, the *Qi*-focused cosmic reality became increasingly dominant. So people gradually re-interpreted various old *do's & taboos* in this sense. In the *Luantou* School of Feng-Shui, the mountains are considered to be manifestations of the flowing *Qi*, and for this reason, the built space should be oriented to mountains to be connected to the source of the beneficial cosmic *Qi*.

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Nevertheless, the old reality of ‘*the mountain as being a representation of the Axis Mundi*’ did not die out. As shown in Chapter 3, while Buddhism spread into China, the ‘Indian’ reality of ‘*Mount Meru as being the Axis Mundi erected at the cosmic center*’ was at the same time introduced into Chinese religious tradition and later into Feng-Shui tradition. Some Feng-Shui theoreticians in the Ming Dynasty therefore began to explain that all chains of mountains in China can originate from the Mount Kunlun as the southern chain of Mount Meru. Thus the built space oriented to any mountain in China can be traced back to, and even connected to, Mount Meru as the cosmic center, the most stable point of the cosmos. Although ‘*Mount Meru being as a representation of the cosmic center*’ seemed to be a ‘new’ reality for the Feng-Shui tradition, it was at the same time somehow familiar because it just exemplified a much older and more general reality, namely ‘*every mountain as being a representation of the Axis Mundi*’.

In modern days, influenced by the dominant natural science, many ‘new’ realities based on the so-called scientific insights are perceived and used to re-interpret certain old architectural *do’s & taboos*. For example, as regards the auspicious nature of the south-orientation, a large number of contemporary Feng-Shui practitioners and theoreticians tend to explain this by the newly invented cosmic reality of ‘*the earth as being a giant magnet*’. That is to say, orienting the house and the sleeping bed to the south is to harmonize the built space and the human body with the north-south magnetic field.

Likewise, in the ongoing Vāstu-Shāstra tradition, many new realities are mentally constructed to replace old ones and are used to re-interpret certain old *do’s & taboos*. As shown in Chapter 3, many old *do’s & taboos* favor the auspicious orientations to the north, the east and the northeast, and emphasize the superiority of the north, the east and the northeast over the south, the west and the southwest. These *do’s & taboos* support two major representations. First, Mount Meru representing the *Axis Mundi* is situated in the north. Second, the east is the direction where the sun, representing the greatest cosmic power, rises. However, many of today’s Vāstu-Shāstra practitioners and theoreticians tend to apply a newly invented reality regarding the cosmic energy to explain these old *do’s & taboos*. They claim that the northeast is the source of the positive cosmic energy, whilst the southwest is the source of the negative one. In this sense, the north, the east and the northeast are more auspicious and beneficial than, and therefore superior to, the south, the west and the southwest.

Transforming Old Do's & Taboos to Support the Representations of New Realities

Obviously, many old *do's & taboos* are insufficient to support the representations of the 'new' realities mentally constructed or experienced in new situations. Given that the representations of new realities are still in need of endorsement like before, these old *do's & taboos* should be transformed so as to keep undertaking their tasks. As we have seen, in both Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra, many newly formulated *do's & taboos* are transformed from, and can be traced back to, those practiced in old times.

A good example of this is the transformation of the old orientation-related Feng-Shui *do's & taboos* in order to support the rather recent representations of the *Qi*-focused cosmic reality. As we have learned, in the beginning, the *do's & taboos* that suggest built spaces to face mountains were meant to support the representation of the connection between the built space and the *Axis Mundi*. After the concept of *Qi* was applied to the Feng-Shui practice, mountains began to be regarded as manifestations of the flowing *Qi*, and consequently, these *do's & taboos* assumed a new role in confirming the connection between the built space and the source of cosmic *Qi*. As also mentioned before, in the *Luantou* School of Feng-Shui, owing to the new concept of *Qi*, not only mountains but also many other topographic features and natural phenomena are believed to have something to do with *Qi*. From this point of view, people thought that the water can help conduct, stop and gather the ever-flowing *Qi*, preventing it from being dispersed by wind. In order to support representations of this new *Qi*-focused cosmic reality, the old *do's & taboos* that tell people to orient the built space to the mountain were then transformed in such a way that prescribe people to let the built space face the water and turn its back to the mountain.

In today's Vāstu-Shāstra practice, we can also find many interesting examples of how old *do's & taboos* are transformed to accommodate newly 'invented' realities. As we have seen in previous chapters, the system of the so-called *Panchamahabhuta* (i.e. the essential Five Elements) developed in the ancient Samkhya School of Hinduism is of great importance for the Vāstu-Shāstra tradition, as it provides the basis for the development of many *do's & taboos* in this tradition. The Five Elements are respectively associated with five points of the compass. According to different classical texts, such association comes into two types. One stipulates that the element of Earth represents the center, Water stands for the northeast, Fire is connected with the southeast, Ether with the southwest, and finally Wind with the northwest (Fig. 64). The other is that the element Ether represents the center, Water the northeast, Fire the southeast, Earth the southwest and Wind the northwest (Fig. 65). Both types

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show that the establishment of the association between the Five Elements and the five points of compass is undoubtedly based on the pre-modern cosmic reality of ‘*the world as being a flat plane*’.

However, this cosmic reality, albeit influential worldwide in the past, is no longer accepted these days, because it has been replaced by the ‘new’ reality of ‘*the earth as being a spherical body*’. Hence, some contemporary Vāstu-Shāstra practitioners feel obligated to re-establish the association between the Five Elements and the respective points of the compass that should be projected onto the spherical earth. They argue that the two types of traditional association between the Five Elements and the five cosmic directions were developed in India, which is located in the Northern Hemisphere, and therefore, they are not suitable to be used in the Southern Hemisphere. These Vāstu-Shāstra practitioners emphasize that, in practicing Vāstu-Shāstra in the areas of Southern Hemisphere such as Australia and New Zealand, the arrangement of the Five Elements in the spatial framework should be ‘mirrored’. When it comes to the first type of traditional association (i.e. Earth-center, Water-NE, Fire-SE, Ether-SW and Wind-NW), its arrangement should be changed as follows: Earth-center, Fire-NE, Water-SE, Wind-SW and Ether-NW (Fig. 115). As regards the second type (i.e. Ether-center, Water-NE, Fire-SE, Earth-SW and Wind-NW), it should be like this: Ether-center, Fire-NE, Water-SE, Wind-SW and Earth-NW (Fig. 115).¹ Consequently, as we can easily find in contemporary Vāstu-Shāstra manuals, many new *do's & taboos* are developed on basis of the ‘redressed’ spatial framework of the Five Elements, and they can better support the cosmic representation of the earth, which is viewed as a spherical body.

Transforming Old Do's & Taboos to Support the Representations of Old Realities in New Built Spaces

In this book, we have seen how old *do's & taboos* are transformed to more adequately support the representations of some ‘old’ realities in ‘new’ built spaces. As we have also learned, ‘new’ built spaces are usually the containers designed for certain ‘new’ realities. In modern days, these new realities roughly denote the modern social and housing conditions which, for the most part, have originated in the so-called Western world. As mentioned earlier, this condition mercilessly puts tradition in an almost fatal high-pressure cooker. To put it mildly, in the eyes of Chinese or Indian traditionalists, a Western-made representation of life is often far from ideal. We have already named this a kind of cultural clash. However, for most Chinese and Indian people, living in a

¹ Cox, 2002, pp. 56, 105-106.

modern house generally designed to represent the modern Western realities is usually unavoidable, whilst at the same time some old or traditional realities are often still too strong to be thrown away. As a result, many old Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra *do's & taboos* cannot but be deliberately modified when faced with such an embarrassing situation.

This has already been demonstrated by a handful of examples of the *do's & taboos* regarding the auspicious/inauspicious location of the toilet that are followed in today's practice of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra. As shown in Chapter 4, there are many old *do's & taboos* of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra which prescribe that the center of a house should be carefully protected. Natural or man-made objects thought to be evil, unclean or unpleasant, such as stones, plants, balustrades, poles and doors, should never be placed in the center of a house. These *do's & taboos* highlight that this center is the crucial place where the *Axis Mundi* should be represented. For this reason, the center of a house should never be jeopardized. As we have also found in old texts, there are many *do's & taboos* stipulating that the toilet should never be placed in front of a house or its entrance door, because traditionally, the toilet is seen as a source of unclean and evil forces. However, we cannot find in any old text the *taboos* that forbid people to place the toilet in the center of the house, due to the fact that in old times the toilet was usually located outside the house. Because today's urban dwellings, like apartments, are usually designed to have the so-called modernist functional 'free plans', the toilet, theoretically, can be set in any place of such kind of plans. It poses a serious threat to the cosmic center of a modern house. Therefore, in today's practice of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra, many 'new' *do's & taboos* are developed to support the built representation that prevents such an unacceptable situation, prescribing that the toilet should never be set in the 'geometric center' of the house plan. It is important to note that all of these old and new *do's & taboos* do support the representation of the *Axis Mundi* by the center of a built space, be it a 'conceptual' center or a 'geometric' one.

It is clear now that, according to the paradigm of 'architecture as a representation of realities', the relationship between architectural *do's & taboos*, built spaces and realities is very dynamic. Nonetheless, no matter how they are transformed, their roles remain the same: Architectural *do's & taboos* always support built spaces to represent realities. Whilst architectural representation are always associated with the past, old *do's* and *taboos* cannot always be sufficiently adapted to validate the representations of new realities. If that is the case, these old *do's & taboos* are likely to be abandoned, forgotten or dormant. As we have seen, the ancient Feng-Shui *do's & taboos* that tell people to determine the house's orientation according to the seasons and their surnames

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are no longer practiced, because they are not helpful anymore in supporting the representations of today's complicated and high-density urban environment.

To some extent, the same goes for the ancient Vāstu-Shāstra *do's & taboos* prescribing that the orientation and the width-length ratio of a house should be determined according to the caste of the house residents, which are rarely mentioned in contemporary Vāstu-Shāstra manuals. This is because the traditional social reality regarding the strict hierarchical relationship between different castes and outcasts is officially no longer approved in modern Indian society.

5.3 Towards an Analysis of Worldwide Architectural Do's & Taboos Based on the Paradigm of 'Architecture as a Representation of Realities'

The comparison of architectural *do's & taboos*, as based on the paradigm of 'architecture as a representation of realities' enables us, for the first time, to understand how and why the built spaces in Chinese Feng-Shui and Indian Vāstu-Shāstra as two different architectural traditions represent a variety of parallel cosmic and social realities. These *do's & taboos* always remind Chinese and Indian people how to settle themselves in auspicious built environments that represent cosmic and social orders in a proper way. We have also seen that, in the two ongoing architectural traditions, *do's & taboos* are constantly re-interpreted, re-activated and de-activated in order to support the shaping of ever-changing built spaces as representations of unstable and shifting realities.

It is important to note that Chinese Feng-Shui and Indian Vāstu-Shāstra are not the only two age-old architectural traditions in the world that contain a wide range of architectural *do's & taboos*. In many other cultures, such as in the Indian-American, Ancient Roman, and those dominated by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, people also follow a variety of *do's & taboos* which belong to certain traditional building rules and customs. Noticeably, they also support the built representations of all kinds of realities as being experienced, perceived or mentally constructed in their own social, cultural and religious contexts. Interestingly enough, these *do's & taboos* found among the building rules and customs practiced in different cultural spheres, just like those of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra, also focus on the concern about the configuration, the orientation and the spatial hierarchy of the various spaces to be planned and built.

The determination of the orientation of religious and holy spaces is always of great importance and concern to the people of different cultures. For example, as mentioned in *The Book of Exodus* of the Hebrew Torah, the Tabernacle where the High Priest meets the God should be oriented to the east.² And according to *De architectura*, or the *Ten Books on Architecture* of the Roman architect Vitruvius, a temple should face the west, so that devotees, who approach the altar with offerings, can look in the direction of the sunrise, while facing the divine statue in the cella or sanctuary which, for this reason, should be oriented to the east.³ Similarly, churches in Medieval Europe should be built

² The Holy Bible Online, accessed on 05/108/2011, http://www.holybibleonline.net/exodus/bible_exodus_26.shtml.

³ Morgan 1960, pp. 116-117.

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in line with the east-west axis so that the altar can be oriented to the east—the direction of Jerusalem—and thus the main façade/entrance faces the west.⁴ Another well-known example is that the *qiblah* wall of the mosque should point to the direction of Mecca.⁵ In addition to these instances of religious architecture, the vernacular/traditional dwellings of different regions and cultures are also usually built according to a variety of prescriptions supporting their auspicious and correct directions of orientation. As mentioned by Paul Oliver in his *Dwellings: The Vernacular House Worldwide*, Kabylis in North Africa, Navajos in North America and Tukanoans in South America all build their houses to have an east-west orientation.⁶

Undoubtedly, these *do's & taboos*, or the building rules and customs governing the orientation of built spaces, which highlight the east-west cosmic axis, just like many *do's & taboos* of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra, all play important roles in supporting the representations of the sun-focused cosmic reality in the frame of the *Axis Mundi & Cosmic Cross* representational theme. Unfortunately, it is disappointing that these *do's & taboos* of worldwide architectural traditions are usually discussed and explained within their own social, cultural and religious contexts. For people to have an in-depth understanding of their purposes and meanings, they should be properly analyzed from a comparative perspective, just like how the *do's & taboos* of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra are analyzed in this book.

Based on the outcome of our research into the practice and meaning of the *do's & taboos* of Feng-Shui and Vāstu-Shāstra, it is reasonable to assume that the architectural *do's & taboos* found among the building rules and customs from different cultures all over the world also support built spaces to represent parallel socio-cosmic realities in the same or similar ways. It is hoped that the paradigm of 'architecture as a representation of realities', along with the long-cycle traditions and the shorter-cycle themes of architectural representations, will serve as effective tools and then put to good use by scholars interested in the origin and meanings of traditional building rules and customs as well as the corresponding architectural *do's & taboos* of global architectural traditions.

⁴ Eliade 1981, pp. 61-62.

⁵ Mekking 2004, p. 81.

⁶ Oliver 2003, pp. 174-179.

