

# Preface

There is a close relationship between architecture and its geographic environment. In the context of reevaluating cultural globalization and increased focus on the geographic nature of architecture, architectural research from a geographic perspective has become increasingly significant. Of the forces that shape architecture, world-renowned Indian architect Charles Correa once said:

At the deep structural level, climate conditions culture and its expression, its rites and rituals. In itself, climate is the source of myth: thus the metaphysical quantities attributed to open-to-sky space in the cultures of India and Mexico are concomitants of the warm climate in which they exist: just as the films of Ingmar Bergman would be inconceivable without the dark brooding Swedish winter.<sup>1</sup>

Climate is only one of several geographic factors, but from Correa's comments, we gain a glimpse of the impact that geography can have upon architecture. Further, we can extrapolate from our understanding of the relationship between geography and architecture a new perspective on the connotations for humanity itself.

## 1 Geo-Architecture Is not a Label for a Certain Form of Architecture

In related research both in China and elsewhere, a number of concepts draw close to geo-architecture, including regional architecture, vernacular architecture, and local architecture, to name only a few. It is not necessary here to compare all such notions in detail; for an illustrative example, compare geo-architecture with regional architecture: these two areas of study represent different viewpoints—those of geography and architecture, respectively—from which one might approach the built environment. The historical background, basic theories and analytical methods that

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<sup>1</sup>Correa, C. Regionalism in Architecture. *Journal of the University of New Mexico*, 1992, Vol. IX, Spring: 4–5.

underlie and characterize them are, for the most part, fundamentally different. Just as architecture scholars are often unfamiliar with geo-architecture studies, geography scholars are often equally unfamiliar with regional architecture concepts. However, while geography is a highly developed field with roots in antiquity, “regional study” has not yet to receive formal recognition as a scholarly discipline. To the extent that there arises a need to relate or differentiate the two approaches, “scale” provides us with a useful perspective. From a geographical perspective, different influences on architecture can be categorized according to the scale on which said influences act. In general, influences are considered to act on zone (macro), region (middle), and site (micro) scales. Regional architectural studies focus largely on the influence of a regional culture and a region’s natural features upon architecture. Geo-architecture studies, by contrast, are primarily concerned with the differences that arise between entire geological zones—for example, the appearance of differing architecture across different latitudes. Site characteristics, in turn, are the most basic of geographical factors (e.g., micro-landforms), which cause the architectural differences.

It is particularly important to assert that geo-architecture is neither a particular architecture type nor a label for a certain group of architecture forms. At some level, all buildings express geographic characteristics. Thus, the notion of geo-architecture includes all architecture to some degree.

## **2 Geo-Architecture Is a Research Thinking**

Geo-architecture borrows perspectives, concepts, and methodology from the study of geography to investigate architectural phenomena and the processes that produce such phenomena. Geo-architecture is concerned not only with understanding the past, present, and, to whatever extent possible, the future of the physical architectural landscape but also with the human or social features of architecture. As such, geo-architecture draws particularly on theory and methodology from natural geography, human geography, and historical geography. Natural geography involves the study of geology, landforms, climate, hydrology, and vegetation, as well as the Gobi desert, Tibetan Plateau, loess landform, and other such typical physiognomy types. Human geography examines the intersection between geography and religion, nationality, custom, belief, economics, and politics. Historical geography deals primarily with population migration, regime change, foreign influence, etc.

Geo-architecture, within itself, is inherently a cross-disciplinary pursuit. The study aims to appraise the myriad influences of natural, human, and historical factors upon architecture. These influences are considered in three categories, namely the interaction between architecture and nature, the interaction between architecture and its human users, and the change in architecture over time; each category serves as a lens. Augmenting these lenses is the research factor of the Time–Person–Place concept, which is applied on three geographic scales in order of

decreasing magnitude: zone, region, and site. The analysis ultimately focuses on two aspects: geographic influence on architecture and architectural response to geography. Architecture research to date has dealt primarily with the regional scale and factors related to technology and the arts. From an architectural studies perspective, the research presented here is creative and unique in its consideration of multiple scales, multiple timelines, and multiple cognitive agents. Similarly, geography research to date has been predominately concerned with macro-scale phenomena. This research reflects new interest in micro-scale phenomena.

### 3 The Research Object Selection for Geo-Architecture

The term “architecture,” as used in geo-architecture, refers to more than individual buildings or groups of buildings and includes a wide range of subject matter not often touched upon in traditional studies of architecture. Sites such as the Mani field, the ancient postal road, and the tree-embracing pagoda—rarely, if at all, dealt within the predominant body of architecture research—are considered in great depth here. Some works that are especially representative of individual geographic locations, for example, the Lingqu Canal, which connects the Xiang and Li Rivers, and the Gaocheng Astronomical Observatory, which marks the earth’s core, are included as well. Each case is no less than an exquisite expression of human wisdom.

It is the authors’ hope that this work also spreads to some of China’s academic knowledge in the fields of the humanities and geography. Violent geological activity has made China, located at the intersection between several tectonic plates, home to a stunning variety of natural landforms: there are towering snow-capped mountains, extensive prairies, and rivers that surge through deep, winding gorges. Against this backdrop, Chinese civilization has, over a period of several thousand years, produced colorful cultures. Thus, selected cases are chosen to reflect as many landforms, geology, and culture types as possible.

This series *Geo-Architecture and Landscape* covers 103 cases distributed throughout 30 provinces, including autonomous regions, municipalities, and special administrative regions, all over China. To obtain first-hand materials, the research team for this work made great efforts to travel to the architectural sites in question for the investigation. Thus, over 95 % of the cases featured in this series were visited, experienced, and scrutinized by the research team members in person.

Each case study in these books investigates the interaction between architecture and geography from the aspects of climate, geology, vegetation, culture, and history. The beautiful pictures presented within the books strive to illustrate how architectural works exercise compliance, echo, and change to exist amongst mountains, water, stones, vegetation, and human society. This work seeks to analyze the Chinese natural and cultural identity; thus, all of the architectural works chosen for analysis are located in China. However, the theory presented here in the series is universally viable and thus can be valuably applied to architecture in other

countries as well. Architecture is the treasured heritage of human civilization in that it reflects the profound ways in which people of different skin colors and localities understood the geographical world around them.

Upon finishing this series, I could not help asking myself: what new thinking regarding the relationship between architecture and geography will the next sight of some mysterious or familiar geo-architecture lead to? This process of discovery has, if anything, made me all the more aware of my ignorance and enamored by the breadth and depth of the field; it is from these that I draw the strength and encouragement to press on without hesitation.

July 2015

Fang Wang

Geo-Architecture and Landscape in China's Geographic  
and Historic Context

Volume 1 Geo-Architecture Wandering in the  
Landscape

Wang, F.

2016, XXXI, 297 p. 338 illus., 260 illus. in color.,

Hardcover

ISBN: 978-981-10-0481-0