

Conclusion

As explored in this dissertation, the complex connotations of the concept of *shi* developed from philosophical debates during the Warring States Period provide a new perspective in understanding the form and meaning of traditional Chinese architecture, and in particular, of the architectural element of the door.

The various aspects of *shi* discussed in this dissertation do not oppose each other, but rather span different fields within the domain of architecture.

Advantageous *shi*, as advocated by the Military school of thought, represents a unique way of gaining knowledge in order to advance construction technology and the tectonic expression of doors. Authoritative ritual *shi*, as promoted by the Confucian schools of thought, and powerful cosmological *shi*, as described by Fengshui theories, exemplify how traditionally sculpted beliefs are didactically and adaptively encoded into the sizes and orientations of the household doors. Self-so-doing *shi* represents how the primitive and ancient functions of a door are preserved and skillfully crafted into building or garden arrangements to fulfill the persistent cultural longings to be “natural” and to produce a simple yet lingering sense of beauty. The effects of these various aspects of *shi*, simultaneously imprinted onto different traditional doors, make them crafty, powerful, and seemingly effortless yet elegant architectural constructions.

The main body of the dissertation reveals that the essence of *shi* is weak and amorphous in parallel with the concept of “weak ontology,” as proposed by the contemporary Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo. Weak ontology replaces the

classical “strong” notion of permanency and totality with the opposite “weak” notion of temporality and fragments. Similarly, the traditional Chinese concept of *shi*, as the potential born from a particular disposition, does not support any solitary or complete system. Rather, it upholds the manifold variety of undefined instances, each of which exists individually as well as concurrently with the other aspects of a given disposition and a moment in time. The generated *shi* from a disposition is not stable or lasting; instead, that *shi* adjusts dynamically with the transformation of the condition over time.

The deployment of advantageous *shi* in architecture (i.e., the clever advantages born out of each unique construction or design circumstance at a particular point in time) leads to clever tectonic solutions to the construction issue. Such advantageous *shi* defies the notion of permanency and stagnancy. Rather, it represents the cleverest efficacy that can be exploited in a given temporary moment. Hence, the five-inch-long door hinge allows one to use a small force to manipulate a massive entity at the moment of opening and closing the door. Also different door locations representing different instances of crossing a boundary lead to the diversified usages of door hinges. In addition to the aforementioned examples, amulet images engraved on a door hood are also investigated through the concept of advantageous *shi*. Today, these amulet images on Huizhou house doors are usually understood to be added-on ornaments, the significance of which is inconsequential. Yet, when the doors were constructed, their advantageous *shi* subtly superimposed a metaphysical disposition on the doors to offset aspects of their physical disposition. With the

aid of door amulets, an open door can be tightly closed to the intrusion of evil spirits, and a closed door can remain subtly open as an entrance for celestial and secular blessings. These door amulets are neither monumental nor permanent. Their temporality is reflected in their ability to capture the wishes, desires, fears, and taboos of a family at that given point in time. As architectonic circumstances change with the flow of time, advantageous *shi* likewise re-adjusts. This is obvious when contrasting the original YYT house located in Huizhou with the newly erected YYT house in Salem, Massachusetts. For example, in the newly re-assembled YYT house, many of the applications of the modern steel construction technologies are imposed on top of the original wooden structural system to generate the advantages of strengthening the original structure and supporting the new live load. As a result, the amorphous advantageous *shi* produces a variety of complex architectural forms responding to the construction circumstances.

Ritual and cosmological *shi* is embodied within the dispositions of the doors, including their orientation and size. This *shi* is also essentially amorphous because it conveys a power that did not exist a priori and intrinsically links with the cultural settings. Ritual and cosmological *shi* infused in the original orientation and dimension of the YYT house doors only existed at the moments of setting up the disposition of the doors within a feudalistic society filled with cosmological beliefs. Therefore, the *shi* outwardly is diminished as a result of the house's relocation to the Western society with modern scientific prowess. However, the disposition of the doors gains a new *shi*. Since the YYT house doors currently

takes a museum visitor from a Western contemporary environment into an early 19th century Far-Eastern Chinese home, the newly embodied *shi* of the YYT house doors is a architectural wonder that effectively transits one's mind from one culture to another one--from the modern contemporary to the traditional past.

Furthermore, the amorphous and weak essence of *shi* is even more clearly revealed in the self-so-doing *shi*. This aspect of *shi* is amorphous because it calls for an entity to be in complete and harmonious compliance with its intrinsic natural tendency in a self-so-doing manner unshaped by mundane customs. The self-so-doing *shi* of a door is analyzed in the dissertation as letting the door be natural so as to augment the capacity of the door in organizing space and directing movement. This self-so-doing *shi* of the door is prominently evident in many garden doors of the private house gardens in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The garden doors are made simple, minimal, or even barren in order to blend the doors perfectly into the garden scene and buildings to maximize the door's self-so-doing *shi* in relation to space and movements. Again, time is presented as a fragmented point that does not offer the opportunity to build a linear experience. Each door including their shape and size is treated uniquely in relationship to the scene each door unfolds. Also with the guidance of the transient self-so-doing *shi*, some of the garden doors are positioned to organize space so that paths promote free lingering excursions into nature that is persistently transformed from one scene to the next. Each moment thus presents itself as an aleatory instant unforeseeable from the prior moment. The only link between these moments is the fact that a previous one dramatizes a later one through a technique of

creating illusions by manipulating the form and position of the doors. Thus among the three aspects of *shi*, self-so-doing *shi* most prominently exemplifies its amorphous and weak essence.

Therefore, the fundamental nature of *shi* can be claimed to be amorphous and weak. None of the aspects of *shi* can be defined as stable, permanent, or capable of transcending time. Rather, all the aspects of *shi* have the ability to transform situations and serve to underscore the rich experiences of temporality. Although the amorphous and weak essence of *shi* conceals its constructive power, it is precisely the elusive nature of *shi* that yields the complexity, diversity, and richness of forms and meanings that characterize the architectural element of the door.

Appendix

Chinese Dynasties	Period
Prehistoric Times	1.7 million years - the 21st century BC
Xia dynasty	21st - 16th century BC
Shang dynasty	16th - 11th century BC
Zhou dynasty	Western Zhou (11th century BC - 771 BC) Eastern Zhou - Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC - 476 BC) - Warring States Period (476 BC - 221 BC)
Qin dynasty	221 BC - 206 BC
Han dynasty	Western Han (206 BC - 24 AD)
	Eastern Han (25 - 220)
Three Kingdoms Period	220 - 280
Jin dynasty	Western Jin (265 - 316)
	Eastern Jin (317 - 420)
Northern and Southern dynasties	Northern Dynasties (386 - 581)
	Southern Dynasties (420 - 589)
Sui dynasty	581 - 618
Tang dynasty	618 - 907
Five dynasties and Ten States	Five Dynasties - Later Liang (907 - 923) - Later Tang (923 - 936) - Later Jin (936 - 946) - Later Han (947 - 951) - Later Zhou (951 - 960)
	Ten States (902 - 979)
Song dynasty	Northern Song (960 - 1127)
	Southern Song (1127 - 1279)
Liao dynasty	916 - 1125
Jin dynasty	1115 - 1234
Yuan dynasty	1271 - 1368
Ming dynasty	1368 - 1644
Qing dynasty	1644 - 1911

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