

From Viewpoint of Meaning Structure to Debate
New Morphology for Old Xi'an in Rapid Mutation*

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With the issue discussion real wealth, this paper will describe the fact that in China now an old city having 3,000 years of history has accepted the reality of having no alternative but to continue seeking its wishful dream of happy life--modern life.

The sign of Chinese modernization is just as its slogan states, "Reformation and Openness." The strong blast wave of foreign culture destroyed most of the old structure and values of this traditional society before few new ones existed.

The ancient city of Xi'an, the capital of twelve dynasties from 9 B.C., spanning 1062 years, having a population of 2,800,000, has been subjected to these same pressures, as should be expected. When a chaotic and strong desire is mixed with the all-powerful modern technology it is certain to result in the morphology, built together by the mountains, the rivers, the fields, the forest surrounding the city, the history, the customs, the literary works, the arts and so on over the 3,000 year history of this city, being intensely mutated.

A vacant lot, having been the park ascending to a viewpoint dating from the Tang Dynasty, 618 A.D., and now being only one of several spaces opening into nature, is presently blocked up unfeelingly by new ugly flats. A Bell Tower, being located in the center and built in 1348 A.D., a symbol of Xi'an, now looks tiny next to the container several times as large. A new highway cuts the city at its own will.

All seem to have their own logic: the market's logic, traffic's logic, and area's logic! According to this kind of logic, the more problems we solve, the more the city will rise!

We have to ask: What is the logic of humankind's nature and future?

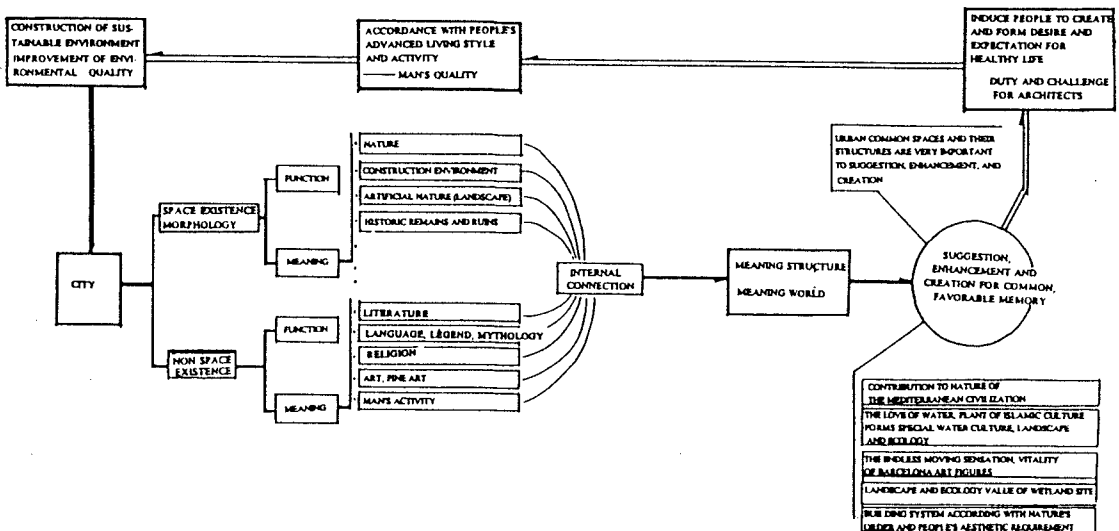


Fig. 1, Pattern of Relationship between Morphology and Meaning Structure
(Process Design of Space Meaning)

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For humankind's nature, people live not only in the material world and social environment but in the meaning world built by themselves. Meaning is a symbol being transmitted by some mediums depending on objects, events, behaviours, characters, and relationships. The meaning of this symbol is distinct from the character and function of the medium-self. Every meaning is not isolated and separated from each other, but connected essentially and intrinsically. The form of this relation is the meaning structure. So, the meaning structure is the soul of the local culture, and the morphology is the most important physical carrier of it, as Fig. 1.

According to the points listed above, that some superficial new development of the old city is in reality causing the loss the city's inherent values and vitalities-----its meaning structure. Therefore, the contents of Xi'an City Planning are not only the general history protection planning, landscape planning and the other functional plannings, meanwhile, it is important to adjust them to the Xi'an's meaning structure (condensation of its history and environment) and to co-construct the morphology existing the inherent relations between the various spaces and meanings.

In this paper, three principles are as follows:

- 1). Keeping the purity of the nature is a very important means to embody the mountains and rivers as before and feel the eternity of nature. The system planning of the cities, towns, and villages surrounded Xi'an city, can point out the historic order with the surrounding environment and themselves.
- 2). The new morphology must embody the living traces at various historical periods of the city, i.e. the time flowing and space overlaps. This kind of morphology planning has a lot of potentialities in the city public spaces system planning, as Fig. 2.
- 3). The incorporate and reinterpret of the relationship between the present day requirements and the positive components of the traditional way of life is the moment for solving the current crises.

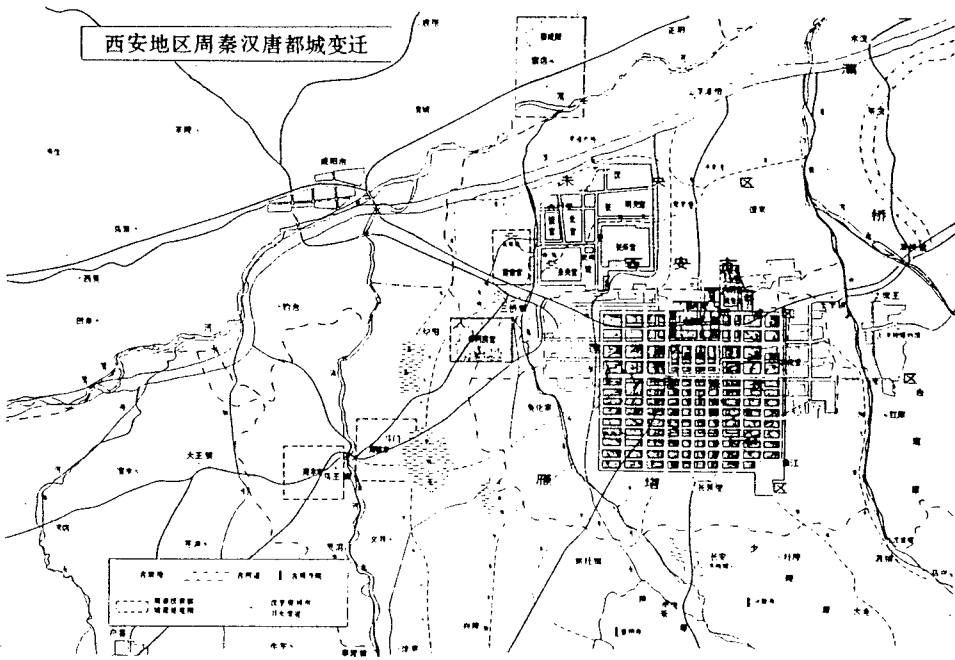


Fig.2 Vicissitudes of Xi'an City from Zhou Dynasty (9 B.C.) to Now