SINO-IDENTITY: THE CONSIDERATION OF METHODS IN THE MODERNIZATION OF CHINA

By

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To my family who always support me, and to Hofer and Gundersen who never stopped educating me.
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Throughout recent decades, China has emerged as a leader in economic and capitalist reform. In a rapid response to these changes, Chinese culture has been exposed to influences of Western lifestyle and societies, as the West has become an image of success. In this exposure, the exchange of cultural perspectives and lifestyles has led to a surge in modern architecture within China’s urban centers. Impressive projects by world-renown architects are making their way to this country, as the architecture world observes with anticipation.

Although the developments of modern architecture in China are an image of their achievements, the question of its Chinese authenticity brings another question: what is Chinese design? In researching this question, Chinese methodologies, beliefs, and practices must be fully understood. Through this understanding, an architectural response to China as a context can be both imaginary and sensitive.

Through this paper, I will discuss the issues of modern China in its relationship to aesthetic, culture, politics, and architecture. In a more internalized perspective, I will also follow the research of Sinologist Francois Jullien, as I apply his research on Chinese lifestyle and process to the field of design and urban planning, to gain the perspective of a Chinese citizen.
Through this research, The Chinese lifestyle can be understood, allowing process and generation to become affective and applicable.

The implementation of technique is further pursued in the academic institution, where students are required to execute techniques specific to Chinese methodologies and spatial organization techniques. Through this application, strategies for approaching design in China can simultaneously be accurate and cross-cultural. The context that drives design expands beyond a physical realm and intersects issues of time, space, and perspective. These design strategies result in considerate, culturally charged projects that are generated from their context.
CHAPTER 1
AN INTRODUCTION

China Searching

There is no doubt that China is in pursuit of an identity. Throughout its history, this fragile country has oscillated between and evolved from internal and more recently through global conflict. With ethnic and technological juxtapositions, China is just beginning to define itself. Because of dramatic shifts in their political and social exposure, the Chinese people are left to question: What is Chinese? Identity determines how a society will function and contribute, especially within the context of globalization. Without this stability within identity, China endangers the preservation and dedication to a long history of tradition and community. (Fig. 1-1) During this time of physical development, the designer is then left to interpret and respond to this intangible concept. This challenge cannot be detached from the design process, as the designer becomes a participant of this social context.

China Responding

Everyone is trying to map out the affects of Western influences in China. Although being recently exposed to the West, China has implemented foreign cultural infrastructures within its own urban societies. Specifically, there are several design approaches that have been applied with their own reasoning and concerns. The authenticity of these adopted techniques must be identified and challenged; therefore it is crucial to examine these approaches critically and through several vantage points. Issues of time and space become variables within these methods of approach, as architects and urban planners take on the challenge of interpretation. What is Chinese versus non-Chinese begins to be understood, or misunderstood, as elements of culture are placed into specific perspectives. Methods of Chinese designers take on an internalized
understanding of Chinese culture, while contributions from the West must begin by questioning the very nature of identity and its manifestation into design.

**Architecture as Clothing**

I must begin with the quote from the architectural historian Liang Sicheng – “for my fellow-countrymen, architecture is like clothing.” The role of architecture is at a constant state of flux. Yung Ho Chang claims that architecture can determine the “potential for transformation and reinvention” of a city. It should be preserved and challenged, understood and transformed. The struggle to find a balance becomes more complex than the blossom style or the construction of pure replicas. It must first be accepted that the Chinese way of life is moving toward a more Westernized lifestyle. Since the 1980’s, the “functional and visual landscape” of Beijing has been transformed into a city of specialization. Urban form and organization reflects this revolution. Architecture can either catalyze this shift through the continued invitation of foreign architects to build, often at vast scales, an environment for the developing society. Or it might choose to hamper this progression, if even as a moment of reflection and self-awareness. Regardless of approach, architecture in Beijing has become a forefront in moving China into a thriving nation.

Recent construction has emphasized the object within the landscape. In the previous section, the discussion of Chinese spatial strategies applied conditions of Chinese perspectives and methodologies to determine inter-relationships within and around given environments. The challenge is to interpret current construction through the understanding these principles. Several works, including the Beijing National Stadium by Herzog and De Meuron, CCTV Headquarters by Rem Koolhaas and OMA, and the National Beijing Theater by Paul Andreau, are designed by prominent global architects. (Fig. 1-2, 1-3, 1-4) These projects become objects, iconic of national achievement or identity, which creates “a sublime landscape”, also becoming a
materialization of the success of China as a world power. China is the focus of architecture advancement, as these projects challenge contemporary technique and aesthetic. This method of design demonstrates a new occidental perception where architecture is the measure that separates China from western principles. Ironically, it is the intersection of these principles that creates the architecture that in turn stages the interaction of cultures.

Place now becomes defined by the architecture, not by the city. The object within the landscape exists as the object, not as an active relationship between objects. Architecture as an icon communicates an international language that responds to change of a nation. This change determines and defines a new technique or process. Traditional methods have now been abandoned, rippling into the application of design and the structure of society. The identity of place is in a state of flux, and change cannot be measured or predicted. The blandness that was once interpreted in the landscape of China has been challenged by global influences, pressuring China to form an identity that can be converse beyond one culture and into other modern societies.

**Chinese Education and Practice**

The development of design education within China provides a framework for understanding the theories and positions of the future Chinese architect. While architecture was once only developed through traditional methods of generational passing of information, the introduction of institutional structures allow more explicit translations and conversion of architecture as a practice. Chinese education in architecture now severs the link between historical Chinese architecture and modern and westernized construction. Historic architecture is only learned as a means for preservation that only responds to pre-existing architecture, voiding the important issue of the mass construction occurring within the country. In design education, architecture and construction now focuses on the development of style and technique. This
learning adjusts to the influences of global architecture, with emphasis on Western design practice. There is an importance in the education of architecture that has yet to be implemented. Szesny⁵ compares the mentality of the Chinese people that experienced the reign of Chairman Mao as an erased computer hard disk. Through recent history, the Chinese people have been stripped from their traditional roots, making way for a new defining on the functions of society. This incidental Tabula Rosa gives opportunity for evolution of culture, but also becomes a risk in the depreciation of cultural and historic depth. In response to recent globalization movements, China has been exposed to western lifestyle and values. The adaptation of foreign lifestyle becomes easier for the Chinese that have recently experienced such cultural erasure. The thought that to accept modernization is seen as movement forward and the clinging to traditionalist ideals is backward keeps developing China in constant pursuit of a new international culture.

**Hyper-Modernism**

Can there be a Chinese transformation of Western Modernism and Hyper-Modernism in a constructive manner in the following years and decades in Beijing and other cities in China? What are the forces in the Chinese tradition that are capable of delivering a cultural transformation of modern architecture and urbanism as originated from the West?

This is in fact not about transformation between cultures horizontally, but about transforming instrumental modernity through the use of tradition and locality as cultural resource, a universal problem encountered everywhere.⁶

There is a current rush to understand the possibilities for this transformation, although the bounds within working seem absent beyond localized constraints. Instead of a horizontal exchange, which encourages overlap or replacement, can there be this transformation that is evolutionary, symbiotic and progressive? Does this extend beyond finding a Chinese typology? There becomes a necessity on intersecting culture with urbanism, tradition with architecture. These intersections form a context that is constantly in flux, adjusting to the surge of change.
But the determination between native and foreign becomes fused. Through the concerns of cultural assimilation, Western lifestyles cannot replace what is Chinese. But as a proactive response to this understanding, we can ask: What is Chinese that can impact beyond its physical boundaries? The challenge of balancing appropriate application of tradition and scale with the insertions of intense modernism forces the designer to have a position on place, time and technology. Hyper-Modernism deviates from this balance, pulling towards establishing a new landscape, challenging and re-defining the concept of harmony between the old and the new.

Jianfei Zhu’s propositions for a Chinese transformation of Western modernism and hyper-Modernism include: Chinese think and develop large projects holistically; they are interrelated and collective. There is a coexistence of large and small scales; there are macro frames and micro spaces, xing and shi. The position of the human subjects and subjectivity become apparent without the subjective object. The city is about the space: courtyards, alleyways and streets, without buildings becoming objects.

The following composition intersects Chinese positions with Western positions of architecture. In these relationships, Zhu demonstrates an understanding of the condition and proposes a spatial consideration that responds directly to that condition. This begins to establish a Chinese interpretation of a Western approach, proposing a methodology specific to Chinese culture. Within this solution, the strength of architecture is contained in Chinese principles. The object within the landscape transforms into an interactive condition based on Chinese perspective. Although this proposition of Zhu’s understands the value of Chinese interpretation and application, it neglects process, as a means of working, ultimately focusing on the product—this becomes a transformation of Hyper-Modernism.
The Blossom Style

Some current Chinese architects and city planners choose to imitate traditional architecture, especially in the 1990’s, sometimes harshly juxtaposing these elements with modern design. This insensitivity leads to a jumbled identity with unintentional repercussions on society. The vocabulary of traditional architecture is haphazardly applied, as paint, onto buildings. China’s attempt to preserve or update traditional architecture is in direct response to the socialist and modern styles of architecture that were imported during the mid 1900’s. This response parallels the post-modernism that was simultaneously occurring in Western countries. Post-modernism, as a disillusioned reaction to the harshness of modernism, re-visits and re-interprets classical styles and superimposes these with modern elements.

Traditional architecture now becomes a material, applied in details as a façade. This strips away the meaning of historic architecture, as an awareness of architecture over time is falsified. This style has been labeled as “blossom-style architecture,” and refers to the utilization of historic features not as a response to function or belief, but to create a Chinese version of Modernism. The Dong-An Shopping Center, located a few blocks from the Forbidden City in Beijing, is an example of the blossom-style, with a traditional architectural identity in overall design and form, with modern detailing. This building promotes simultaneous unity of historic and modern architecture simply through its physical combination of styles. Yan believes that in Beijing, “contextual designs often refer to those that present a harmony with their context, never a contrast to it,” rather than using the contrasting of architectural characteristics as a means for observed preservation, or by relying on more subtle guidelines such as details, proportions, or rhythms within the immediate context. This is seen through buildings like the Palace of Nationals and the National Gallery of Arts. Today’s construction is pulling toward the latter, such as the Dong-An shopping center that was previously mentioned. Criticizing this method of
design, Zhan Wang, an artist in Beijing, built his Artificial Mountain Rock sculpture in front of Beijing’s West Train Station to mock the “face reconstruction of a traditional architectural idea.”9 Because of these direct intersections of cultural, social and design shifts, I will be using Beijing later on as a local study of the issues I will investigate.

**Critical Regionalism**

Western theories of new architecture often require a simultaneous and balanced co-existence between the old and the new. Critical regionalism is an approach that allows contemporary design to explore elements or concepts of historic context and to redefine those ideas into an architectural style that reflects current aesthetics and methods of construction. Although this approach is directed for areas with deep traditions as a method of participating in modernism, the push for modern architecture can seem to suggest the abandonment of traditional practices. Timber as a disposable material has historically allowed for demolition of buildings at points where there were shifts in history. This separated historic China from neighboring Europe that built with permanent mentalities. Also, the use of wood was “additionally reinforced by the interpretative framework of traditional Chinese thought, which saw cyclical change as the will of heaven.”10 Replacement is a method of rejuvenation and restoration. In contrast, timber construction in China today is extremely rare. In following modern architecture, glass, steel and concrete become materials of choice- all of which evoke a sense of permanence that blocks the ability to re-gather and cycle through. This permanence can be contrasted with traditional calligraphy that is used with water instead of ink as a temporal expression that can be replaced with other characters in a short period of time. (Fig. 1-5, 1-6) The disregard for cyclical change that Szesny mentions separates the Chinese citizen from traditional expression, narrowing architectural experience and interpretation into a more westernized channel of thought. The co-
existence of the old and the new requires that the new understands the principles and context of the old.

In addressing the idea of universalism, Kenneth Frampton argues:

we have the feeling that this single world civilization at the same time exerts a sort of attrition or wearing away at the expense of the cultural resources which have made the great civilization of the past. This threat is expressed, among other disturbing effects, by the spreading before our eyes of a mediocre civilization which is the absurd counterpart of what I was just calling elementary culture...It seems as if mankind, by approaching en masse a basic consumer culture, were also stopped in masse at a subcultural level. Thus we come to the crucial problem confronting nations just rising from underdevelopment. In order to get on to the road toward modernization, is it necessary to jettison the old cultural past which has been the raison d’etre of a nation?"

This argument is fascinating because it includes the impact of modernization in many fields and respects issues of time as well as place as considerations for defining culture. The challenge now becomes: how can a culture “sustain and absorb the shock of modern civilization” without abandoning the historic layers that define that culture? Modernization of science, technology and politics can be prescribed only to a blank society- cultural differences hinder this easy transition. There is an unfamiliar juxtaposition in countries like India or China where technological advancement has grafted itself on an unchanged people. What is the detriment to these scenarios? There is more to intersecting modern sources with cultures deeply involved in historic traditions.

Global and Local Perspective

Other architects feel that in order to move forward, one cannot look back. Architecture should not involve the overemphasis or preservation of heritage and seek to incorporate historic architectural elements- these buildings are considered to lack a response to current culture. As reformers, these designers pursue unsympathetic buildings that require occupants to look toward an innovative way of living. Yan proposes that this change is to “appropriately express the ideas of contemporary philosophy, spirit, and culture.” This often includes the warm welcoming of
foreign offices to intervene and re-define the environment in which they are building, as mentioned with the constructions paralleling the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Foreign architectural influence is the beginning of what is hoped as a leap into modern lifestyle.

This method of zooming out can be applied in all directions of architecture- from the urban grid to the architectural floor plan, as well as to all dimensions of process. The impact of the gesture must be strong enough to carry the project through transformation, clear enough to affect all parts of development. The diagram becomes a reference as well as a generator- stagnancy is not an option. Although it is questionable whether to consider the diagram, being a Western perspective, in Chinese scenarios, there is extensive research and commitment to this idea in architecture and urbanism in the United States and Europe that can be translatable or applied. Andrew Boyd, in comparing town planning of China and Europe, understands that Chinese approach grew from few principles that were set from the beginning, or through tradition and culture. This holistic approach thus creates harmony and unity of the entire city.\textsuperscript{12} In viewing the city as a whole, which corresponds to Yung Ho Chang’s city as a body concept, overall composition begins to bring importance to the diagram as a scale-less element that can determine the functioning of the city. Formal composition is not reliant on individual structures, as Western cities allow, but through social and political influences that impact organization and interaction simultaneously at all scales.

Chinese modernization has demanded urban and architecture research using international channels. Often, these are through the hosting of international competitions, or to the direct commissioning of projects to architects outside of their own country. Therefore, the question is: does the integrity of holistic thought get transferred to these external influences? Through examination of recent proposals and built work, it is arguably true to think that this transfer is not
pursued or even required. The immediacy of modernization replaces these values set by a nation deep in tradition and theory. These issues are presented later on through the careful mapping of current development.

The rapid, the Generic: the Sinocity

Now, modernization is developing at a speed that makes the status of its end unpredictable. Anthropologists, sociologists, urban planners, and even artists are desperately struggling to record its movements, and follow its rippling effect within Chinese identity.

In efforts to understand this movement, architects are rushing ahead to catch development in its tracks. In 2006, a competition was launched that demanded the exploration of public space within a generic Chinese city, the Sinocity. The aim was to retrofit urban public space into the city, requiring participants to establish a position on the growth of urban China, and also create a design that responds to that position. The results of the competition become individual interpretations of the situation. In analyzing their responses, we can begin to understand the intentions of architects intervening within China.

The first place entry, submitted by a Chinese firm, was a social response, giving each family unit a one meter by one meter box that becomes the individual family’s ‘greenspace.’ This commentates on several issues: first, that Chinese life is pulling toward a life on individualism, in comparison to the communal nature of Chinese people. The shift from community to the individual suggests that the importance of the singular takes precedence in the establishing of a society. The modernization of this country allows a re-ordering of priorities. The object within a field becomes the focus, rather than the inter-relationships that pre-determine object or place. Second, this entry proposes that green space cannot be retrofitted into an urban plan. Instead, it is expected to adapt to physical and social constraints- constraints that have become more restricting with the speed of modernization. The greenspace becomes privatized,
similar to capitalistic principles, giving ownership of the idea, but not the physical making of the city. The Chinese people are forced to sit back and watch the cities get constructed right in front of them, with little consent, or time, to challenge. Perhaps this is in an attempt to keep up with development, as a progressive movement toward something perceivably better. Public space therefore cannot be planned: it is only by giving the people their city that they can take ownership. It strengthens Jianfei Zhu’s position where urban public space in Western cities occur as beginning markers that the city conforms around, while Chinese cities define “nodes” within the built environment, re-defining and challenging the identity and function of spaces within the city.  

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1 Yung Ho Chang/ Atelier FCJZ, A Chinese Practice. Pg 47. In his teaching process, Chang challenges his students to be highly flexible as a response to the intensity and speed of current lifestyles and demands. Instead of replacement of the historic elements of China, Chang attempts to intervention as a “voluntary action” where the architect must challenge conventional ideas of urban living.


3 Zhu. Beijing: A Dialogue. Pg 330

4 Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, China: Designing the Future, Venerating the Past, In The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 61, No. 4, Pp. 537-548, Society of Architectural Historians, 2002. Steinhardt compares education practices of China, noting its lack of incorporation of architectural history and a key component in an architect’s training, including historical trends, social movements or human experience. She addresses the difficulty of accessing historic information on Chinese architecture because of its inaccessibility of texts and documents, and the difficulty of performing fieldwork, both because of political tensions and the destruction of many historic buildings. She gives credit to Liang Sicheng for bringing China’s architecture and history to public attention after his studies at Harvard University in 1927.


8 Dr. Bert Bielefeld, Lars-Phillip Rusch. Bielefeld and Rush approach this issue sympathetically, noting that most intentions are to solve the issue of tradition vs. modernism. The application, however remains premature and inconsistently.

Beijing. She notices the massive transformation of Beijing, and investigates this impact on a local level. Site specificity of art becomes a challenge, as site is constantly being shifted.

10 Dr. Andreas Szesny 2006.

11 Kenneth Frampton, The Evolution of 20th Century Architecture. Pg 85. Frampton discusses this condition as Universal Civilization and National Cultures, from 1935 to 1998. He studies this idea of exchange of regionalism, challenging the very definition as it is only to be discovered elsewhere. He also warns of a “subtle destruction” of culture and tradition, which in turn can eliminate what he determines as the “ethical and mythical nucleus of mankind.”

12 Andrew Boyd, Chinese Architecture and Town Planning


14 Zhu. Pg 52. Zhu argues that the Chinese do not require a central space for gathering, and that “urban space in the Chinese tradition lacks such a space being defined, open and urban” as Western public space. This difference is a response to difference in lifestyles. The Chinese are more inclined to gather at spaces that are already conducive to congestion, such as street intersections, city gates, bridges, or river banks. This difference also demonstrates the lack of urban planning in historic Chinese cities, and also the structural breakdown of localized communities within the city.
Figure 1-1. Beijing: contrasting the old and the new (Photo by Adam Gayle)

Figure 1-2. The Olympic National Stadium by Architects Herzog & DeMeuron (Photo by Adam Gayle)
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Figure 1-6. Temporary calligraphy with water (Photo by Adam Gayle)
CHAPTER 2
ZOOM OUT: THE SITUATION

The Physical as Context

This section will lay out the situation through the writings of Jianfei Zhu and other Sinologists and designers that work specifically with China.

China is a country responding to the pressures of globalization and modernization. A country that was once focused internally on issues of cultural identity and tradition is now challenged- and has determined as a goal- to establish a national identity that reflects outward. Historic political, social and physical impacts have created a country fragile yet eager for this change. The attempt to ‘update’ must critically negotiate between cultures and methods of thinking. The contrast between the East and the West has never been clearer, and their intersection more applied.

Through zooming out, we will get the opportunity to view speculative issues of urbanism and the process of modernization. Through these issues, we can understand the problematic situation of modern China.

Understanding Modern China

Through theoretical formulas and studies, China as a nation has addressed, in various degrees, the impacts of Westernization and modernization, and has recently embraced it-politically, economically and socially. The definition of culture is now constantly being updated, and the importance of national identity is stronger than ever. Architecture and the development of urbanism become essential methods of establishing an iconic identity. Cities are being constructed and scattered as economic pockets within China, although their social and cultural identities have yet to be fully understood. China has developed into an aggressive country with desire to push modern principles into the development of cities. Shenzhen became an
experiment of modernism and economic development, labeled by Deng Xiaoping as the *xingxiang gongcheng*- or outward appearance project. The demand for visible skyscrapers surpassed the funding available, as many buildings remained unfinished. Although only partly successful, this project recognized the role of architecture as a marker and generator for a society. One of the advertisements states, “Just development is a consistent principle,” evoking an understanding of development as necessity for success.

After the communists took control in 1949, the City Planning Bureau was established as a group that would define the relationship between context and modern architecture. They understood that preservation was crucial in retaining the culture and heritage of Beijing. In 1958-1959, Chairman Mao Tse-tung restored Tiananmen Square as an iconic node within the city. He found importance in preserving the Tiananmen Rostrum and the Qian-Men Gate Tower, since socialist principles required the “utilization of national heritage within the framework of a new culture.” This awareness clearly recognizes the role of architecture and its importance within a society. The City Planning Bureau knew that the architectural styles of the city would serve as historic markers of the country’s culture. As a result, Beijing’s identity has, and continues to be only contextualized and preserved in concentrated fragments. More importantly, architectural style is valued. The Bureau formed a sub-committee in 1983 that would focus solely on monitoring the aesthetics of new buildings, and their relationship to its historic context with regard to height, scale, form, color, landscape, and environment.

Current trends of the building boom, following the Communist movement create a superficial awareness of value and tradition. As early as the 1950’s, influences within China pushed for a new attitude that argued for new design to be juxtaposed with the old. This applies beyond small-scaled elements of ornamentation and detail, but to spatial organizations that
structure a household. The traditional courtyard house, the *hutong*, is now replaced by cruciform towers. This inversion creates a new construct that severs the interaction between and within households. By removing the courtyard, there is no longer a smaller scale space for family or multi-family gatherings. The inward reflective organization of the *hutong* house is inverted in the cruciform plan that pushes views to the outside. If allowed, I might propose that this very organization that has been in place within China is largely responsible for the family-oriented culture that defines the values and beliefs of the Chinese people. By disrupting this with the cruciform or other dense housing structure, the strength of the family is severely altered. This will become the beginning of modern life within China, leaping away from the value of family structure and into the individualized drive of a modern society.

Szesny also compares the idea of transition within the Chinese culture. In ancient culture, change – *yi* – was understood as a phenomenon of shift and transformation. Current China refers also to development – *fazhan* – as a key element that drove the Cultural Revolution and the Chinese people into accepting external influences of lifestyle. Deng Xiaoping coined the motto “development is the absolute principle”, further emphasizing the need to move forward into change. This re-interpretation establishes the ability of a society ingrained in tradition to adjust to transformations in culture, politics, and national pursuits. After the Cultural Revolution, China was left stripped of a coherent understanding of history and its value. They were constantly being pushed forward into *fazhan*, creating a progressive nation. As a result, Chinese society, and Beijing at the head, is anticipating modernization, often keeping only a superficial focus on historic preservation.

Often, there were negative connotations of political and national turmoil that created indifference or protest against contextual-ism and preservation. The desire of the Chinese people
to sever themselves from their past allows for their rejection of symbolic architecture. Chang defines modernity for China as:

A modernity from without:
Modernity = opening-up = influences from outside, mainly the West
The most important Western theory imported: Marxism
The notion of architecture as a body of knowledge as well as profession was also introduced from the West. In other words, architecture is modern in China.
As a result, the issue of cultural identity has existed from the very beginning of modernity.

A split modernity:
On one hand, a modernity that is nothing but ideology – Marxism and Socialism
On the other, a modernity voided of- and sometimes avoided of- substance:
Modernist style vs. modernity: as discussed above in architecture.

Modernization vs. modernity: technology, in the form of a flushable toilet, automobile, and air conditioner, is valued above science and other forms of modern thinking.\

In this definition, Chang understands the parallels of modernity to the political structure of socialism. Concurrently, he sees architecture as a principle that becomes imported as part of modernization. Through the ultimate rejection of Marxism, there is a contrast between these acquired importations (the toilet, the automobile) and the void of identity.

**Urban Blending: Beijing**

Beijing was established through carefully considered layers of tradition and history. From the focus of inward traditional organization during Imperial China, construction of monumental Sino-Soviet architecture, and contemporary Westernized design and methods has brought great shifts in the city developments. (Fig. 2-1) These juxtapositions of style and organization create a patchwork of cultural identities, as the Chinese nation struggles to understand and preserve ethnicity and culture. My aim is to understand Chinese methodologies, and their execution into spatial configurations. The turbulence of China’s history requires that the city atmosphere be surveyed critically within these three eras, but also the transitions into each in attempts to understand internal and external influences and the reactions that resulted. The city is often
understood and defined as a plan. The city plan of Paris gives the city a specific identity that separates it from New York or Tokyo. The plan generates a holistic and often iconic image of the city, allowing the occupant to navigate and interact. This vantage point does not exist at the human scale, nor contains the layered qualities of city life. The city in perspective delves into the simultaneous atmospheric conditions that result in the definition of experience. In this perspective, the occupant is also constrained, masking out conditions that might be understood in plan, allowing movement, itinerary and scale to become the primary components that define the urban experience.

While a plan represents intentions of designers and authority, that is, ideology, a spatial field reveals a domain of embodied, day-to-day social practice, which includes naturally political practice. In other words, space contains a field of power relations.

-Jianfei Zhu, Chinese Spatial Strategies

What becomes the perception of space? Can it be generalized or stereotyped? Can its definition cross cultural borders? Within these questions, Beijing can be analyzed in how it can define an urban identity. Through conditions of culture and history, Beijing- being representative of China as a country- contains immaterial factors that push the bounds of the physical plan of the city. It now involves spatial perspectives and cultural lifestyles, requiring the designer to consider issues beyond what can be generalized. These conditions must become specific to China and the Chinese culture, furthering the pursuit for identity.

Jianfei Zhu, in trying to discover spatial strategies, determined that his research should not “restrict itself to the confines of Chinese architectural history or the history of Chinese city planning… (nor) follow a chronological or descriptive approach” as these methods result in restricted or shallow research. Instead, there must be an analysis of history, subjecting “historical material to social and synchronic analysis, and critical debate and theorization.”
challenge, therefore, is to look at historic and contemporary environments- geographic and cultural/ cross-cultural. There needs to be a full understanding of cultural perspectives as well as influences, pushing beyond issues of architecture. Due to limitations in which my research is pursued, I will agree with Zhu and zoom in on the local condition of Beijing.

Because of the depth of its history, Beijing’s architecture is, according to X. Winston Yan “a comprehensive expression of the meanings and beliefs of traditional Chinese culture”. The city becomes a palimpsest of history, consisting of layers of infrastructure for living for several centuries. The contrast of densely placed one-story houses and colorful imperial buildings create an interesting balance within the city, both sharing architectural elements that create a close relationship between the two.

Beijing’s role of being the most important city in China has shifted over centuries of China’s history. After its establishment around 2400 B.C., it became the capital during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. It re-assumed the role when Chairman Mao Zedong established the People’s Republic of China in 1949. It is considered by the Chinese to be the center of the cosmos, referred to spatially as the “axis mundi.” (This concept of location as place is challenged later on.) Monumental architecture was aligned with these cosmic axes. These buildings demonstrated physical and aesthetic quality, but also communicated beyond into spiritual compositions, connecting the emperor to the heaven and the earth. Zhu discusses two sites: the celestial and the terrestrial. Each type corresponds to the ritual performed, and the role of that ritual as a connector between two sides. Celestial sites are distributed to the periphery of the city, possibly in attempt to connect back to the natural and harmonious landscape of China. The implementation of distance becomes a method of detaching oneself from the constraints of the city. Terrestrial sites accumulate within the center, as a means to allow access to the city and
all classes of the citizens. Through cultural application, these sites are activated through two conditions: lines of movement and points of interface. This activation is precise and spatially considered through the organization of the sites, their relationships to each other and the city, and their importance within national identity, belief and tradition.

Massive stone walls established barriers for the imperial city and the houses and temples of the city’s elite. (Fig. 2-3) This barrier system severs the Chinese people, and hierarchy between classes became more apparent. Internalized neighborhoods developed their own cultures that specialized in crafts and trades specific to the needs of other groups. Through specialization and trade, cultural exchange was frequent. The wall as a barrier becomes as powerful as space itself by determining access and communication between and within the city. The concept of figure-ground relationships is challenged as mass, void, positive and negative space is visible in the city map, and understood through the physical occupation of the city.

During the rise and occupation of Communism, from the 1950’s through the 1970’s, Chairman Mao destroyed all but one of the historic gates of the city, possibly as a rejection of historic conditions of the city, or as an effort to “cling on to local manifestations of the idea of centralized power through Tiananmen Square and the surrounding area.” The destruction of the urban structural element was a means to open the society, allowing interaction physically with the city; symbolically it opened Beijing to the world. Beyond this change in historic Beijing, new significant constructions were placed accordingly to respect the traditional approach of placement on the north-south axis. Large multi-function buildings re-structured the social layers of the city, almost eliminating the need to venture beyond a small neighborhood. The city of Beijing becomes a city layered in section as well as plan. This concept is visible through comparison of the plan and elevations of the city. Although there are harsh north-south routes
running through the city, this permeability is only conceived in plan, as the section of the city de-
constructs the city as a whole, but as a series of contained areas. The scale of the city’s
architecture undermines the strength of these axes. Though compacted spatially through scale
the section of the city, boundaries tend to overlap and slip past the other, allowing breath-ability,
access and movement between parts. And ultimately, the attempt to over-structure Beijing into
self-sustaining compartments failed, as concentrations of “functional specialization” developed
in pockets within and on the outskirts of the city.

As cultural erasure became a national process, the Chinese attached to Soviet principles,
relying on Socialist outlooks to define their lifestyles. Education was strictly limited, as readings
of the Red Book were required. Monumental architecture became crucial in establishing Beijing
as a business and administrative center for the newly established People’s Republic of China.9
Tiananmen Square and the Great Hall of the People were just a few of the 10 Key Architectures
constructed to establish Beijing as an industrial and business hub. Through the Cultural
Revolution (1966-1976), the people of Beijing over-ran the city with illegal construction,
disregarding tradition and ancient buildings. Ancient Chinese architecture became fragmented
between densely constructed housing units as a result of the growth of the city, and the nation, as
a business power.

The Great Hall of the People, one of the 10 Key Architectures celebrating the PRC, reflects
the monumental scale and proportion of fascist architecture. The flattened traditional roof cannot
emphasize the horizon, as large vertical columns bring attention to height, possibly to represent
the growth and expansion of China. The National Museum of China, also built in 1959, anchors
the east side of Tiananmen Square. Massive pilasters anchor the corners of the building façade,
with the traditional style roof wedged between, as mere ornamentation. The Chairman Mao
Memorial Hall disregards the height of the historic city, pushing up 110 feet tall, with thick columns creating a shell around the building core. This building resembles buildings constructed in neighboring Socialist and Fascist nations, rather than the traditional architectural style of Beijing. This juxtaposition between two styles marks the Chinese nation at a junction of political and cultural structures. In 1962, the China National Museum of Fine Arts was constructed in traditional Chinese style in a new attempt to reflect the purpose and function of the building and to preserve the nation’s traditional architecture.

Post 1979 urban development of Beijing aimed at establishing zones within the city that were divided by the city’s axes. Since 1979, the city has accepted Western principles in urban planning, and citizen input was disregarded in the overall scheme. This contrast to the internalized and localized development of historic China shifts Chinese society into a more structured and sterile environment. The city becomes a field that requires adjustment and adaptation by the citizen, instead of the reactionary role of the city to Chinese lifestyle and heritage. Preservation of historic courtyard houses occurred in clumps as an effort to keep hold of traditional Chinese architecture through “stylistic references.” Other, often dilapidated, housing neighborhoods were either redeveloped or planned for redevelopment, taking over six million square meters of urban Beijing and its immediate vicinities. The large amount of remaining poorly constructed courtyard houses is a result of the Chinese people refusing to abandon the traditional architecture. Instead of adjusting during turbulent times, they fled to the countryside, but when the re-occupied the structures, they often converted the courtyards to infill for subdivided dwelling. This re-defining of the function of a courtyard house emphasized a change in social structure and Chinese culture. Severing itself from tradition, Beijing citizens
began to pursue development and occupation of the city that maximized function. This marks the conforming to modernist principles and the focus on functionality and productivity.

With the contrast of frantic building and rich historic context, the city of Beijing is becoming a focus of attention for Modern architects. Beijing has been established as a testing ground for architects from the West to experiment beyond what their home countries would tolerate. Through its reconstruction, Beijing has become a great opportunity to many of these architects, as a city that is in need of and desires updating. Chinese architect Wang Yun states that with the highly publicized World Olympics campaign, Beijing can be described as “Po-Jiu-Li-Xin”, or destroying the old and establishing the new.11 The architecture world observes the progress of the CCTV tower by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, looking at the building as a branding of an architect rather than a piece that fits perfectly in its Asian context. The National Stadium by Swiss firm of Herzog & de Meuron is a self-contained disk that refuses to reference the environment it has landed in. And the National Swimming Center by PTW Architect, including Chinese architects, is a scale-less illuminated box that only communicates internal program of the building. (Fig. 2-4) The National Grand Theater by French Architect Paul Andreu is a blank white egg-shaped building, indifferent to its close proximity to the Great Hall of the People and Tiananmen Square. As a new urban culture is developed, understanding and respect for the old is challenged; these constructions reject the insertion of Chinese architectural style and are perceived as icons in a faceless landscape.

Action and Reaction

Historical events (from Imperial China through the Great Chinese Cultural Revolution, CCP and execution of Marxist principles) have forced a development of the city that becomes a generator for cultural identity, as in most cities with historical context. Due to the specific nature of China, the typical understanding of developing architecture as a reflection of culture cannot be
applied accurately. Instead, current insertions of modern architecture reverse the role of architecture as being responsive to changes in culture, as architecture is now placed in a culture that has yet to be identified. Architecture is now used to focus identities, instead of being a direct byproduct of environmental changes. The void of identity pushes China into the pursuit of global recognition, although the methodologies are not quite aligned. The current status of Chinese modern architecture, and its force within the redefining of this developing nation, greatly contrasts, through westernized methods, the role and aesthetics of historic architecture. This change in cultural environment in Beijing indicates the beginning of an assimilation process of cultures into a generalized China, redefining the identity of China as a nation, especially through the perspective of the citizen. In this process, the connection to cultural renewal is lost, as there is an uncommitted acceptance of superficiality. This merger contrasts traditional definitions and understandings of Chinese architecture, as identity adjusts to modernization. Architecture now becomes popularly injected with characteristics of western architectural elements as a method of cultural re-defining, taking out issues of preservation and cultural individuality. Social and ethnic identity and consciousness is challenged and redefined as the Chinese citizen adjusts to this environmental change.

Modern China has committed itself to economic growth, since its exposure by Deng Xiaoping. The push toward modern lifestyle has forced development to accommodate desired urbanism. Gaubatz even argues that economic change influences urban planning which then influences the functioning of a society. Abandonment of “outdated” concepts becomes necessary in the struggle to keep up with this demand. He summarizes the development of Beijing as: “reflect(ing) both shifts in planning philosophy and policy and external influences and capitalization.” Architecture evolves from economy, derailing itself from culture-driven
forces and principles. Matthias Wehrlin predicts that the next movement within China’s societies will call for a “period of self-confident reflection” on own traditions and values. This will result in construction that will rely on specific place, people, and need instead of mass building of “faceless cities” that are occurring today in China.

The introduction of Western lifestyle into Chinese culture has impacted the growth of China as an emerging world power. Westernization, as a strong contrast to this typically traditional environment serves as a catalyst for economic and socio-political growth, in both positive and negative directions. Mass invasion of these influences have created a fragile definition of modern Chinese society, and its often awkward relationship to the tradition and history of China.

Perhaps the current issues of architecture and its role in Chinese society is a necessity, and will become as significant in Chinese history as Imperial China in its role in establishing a rich and dynamic Chinese culture. The consequences of the Communist movement leave a blank cultural slate. Modernization imposes learning in multiple dimensions, strictly contrasting the education experienced by the generation during the Communist era. China must adapt to this new mentality. Architecture, as a physical structure for society is taking the first steps toward a new era. Through intervention of Western practice, often by foreign architects, China’s cities are experiencing uprooting at large densities of traditions and heritage. Preservation as a strategy might be the solution for the scale of a building, such as the Tiananmen Square complex or other monumental constructions, but the way of life of the Chinese people will constantly adjust to new architecture and urban development

Movement as Context

In addressing issues of context, one must question the dimension of its definition. With consideration of culture and history, time sets up another context in which people occupy. It is
within this context where lives are formed and developed, communities emerge, and society evolves. This moving context requires its occupants to recognize change and adjust appropriate to its application to physical place.

**Linking Modernization to Culture**

To begin the investigation of the relationship of modernism and contemporary process in design to Chinese society, I must first preface with explaining the role of modernism within culture. The definition of modernism is controversial and contradictory, and the influences of modernization are blurred. With consideration of these challenges, I will attempt to describe this concept that will help structure its unique application within China, as well as its effect to Chinese culture.

**Defining Modernization and Modernism**

Initial assumptions on modernism focus mainly on science and technology, in large part to the surge of scientific advancements beginning from the Industrial Revolution. The progression of a society follows these issues, but only as a response. In this light, modernism expands far beyond technology, and forces these responsive interactions between cultures, politics, and social movements. It characterizes development toward higher and better living, compared to non-progressive lifestyles of traditions and working. It creates a social field that revolves around specific trends on social infrastructures, i.e. politics, consumerism, religion.

**Westernization and Modernization**

In beginning this section, I must first disclose the differences between Westernization and modernization. The interstitial separation between Westernization and Modernization can be an opportunity for China to transform methods based on internal principles. Westernization limits the perspective based on cultural constraints; which China cannot mimic. The adoption of
Western theologies would require long lengths of exposure and an inevitable abandonment of what can be defined as Chinese culture.

Within China, modernism has been tightly linked with Westernization, and movement away from traditional philosophies. The Chinese regard modernization as “signifying mainly national wealth and power as well as a vision of a better society and human existence.” Chinese scholars, as advocators for the modernization of China, defined modernization as the “development of natural sciences, industry, the cultivation of scientific thinking and the rationalization of ideas, attitudes and social behavior.” This perceived awareness of inferiority to Western culture challenges China to re-discover their traditional values within the context of modernity. Interpretations of Confucian teachings stress the importance of human development as a continual process, allowing the individual to adjust to accommodate progression forward. Therefore, Chinese culture is now being challenged through newly impressed values of modernization. Conservative reformers invented the ‘zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong’ formula that calls for Chinese learning for the fundamental principles of social life and Western learning for practical application. The preservation of values allows culture to transform while maintaining its critical role within a society. Raymond Williams described it as:

Culture emerges as an abstraction and an absolute; an emergence which, in a very complex way, merges two responses- first, the recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society; second, the emphasis of these activities as a court of human appeal, to be set over the processes of practical social judgment and yet to offer itself as a mitigating and rallying alternative.

It must be emphasized that modernization steps beyond material and physical measurements- it shifts the mind of a society. Governmental impositions on society have a huge impact on how the nation adapts to change. The Cultural Revolution severely encouraged the updating of lifestyles and investing in Westernized societies. The national identity within China becomes shaped through politics, war and social movements. National identity theory prioritizes
“domestic societal factors” as more critical in the defining of identity than are external causes that formulate a physical country- this search for identity within China becomes “situation specific.” Modernism strictly forbids complete replicas of the past; it must generate from history into a progressive culture that intersects with technology and innovation.

**Intersections of East and West**

Within this context of time, the contact between different cultures gives opportunity for interpretation. Often translation and status can challenge the effectiveness of interpretation, as the perspective of an individual begins to understand a society and culture. Through intersections of Asian and Western cultures, the need for appropriate and accurate interpretation has never been more in demand. Through interpretation, a culture can learn and respond to issues of lifestyle and approach.

**Occidentalism and Form**

The perspective on Western culture as The Occidental Other has given China an opportunity to identify through comparison. The Italian missionary Matteo Ricci was the first westerner to be accepted by the Chinese in 1582, and was able to inform the Chinese that they were not at the center of the universe, but only located in the northern hemisphere of the earth. This geographic categorization contrasted Chinese method of thinking, where placement was determined not by the physical, but through the movement and balance of energy. Through the awareness of western thinking, China has been challenged to develop a Chinese approach, and to understand it through labeling, a western methodology. This idea of label and form contrasts traditional thought of *shi*, yet occurs only as a result of interaction with western culture.

“At the heart of the search for Chinese modernity in Chinese thinking and in some of China’s most important intellectuals stands a huge paradox.”

_Wang Hui, “Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity”_
The attempt to modernize China while rejecting Western ideals has formed an internalized controversy that requires intense filtration and criticism. While trying to avoid conformity to Western lifestyle, Eastern cultures have pushed toward modernization as a means to establish achievement globally. Through the Cultural Revolution, China made efforts to determine a modern society without the adoptions of Westernism. This denial was to preserve a national identity, which was crucial during Mao and post-Mao rule. The paradox that Wang Hui presents states that although there is a strong attempt to push toward a modern China technologically while rejecting socio-political or capitalistic mindsets, the Chinese cannot deny the awareness of these issues, therefore allowing their existence to effect the process of modernization. The lifestyle is criticized yet unavoidable.

The perspective of the individual also determines the effect of modernization. The claim that the Chinese individual does not internalize Western influences suggests that there is an attempt to preserve Chinese values while pushing toward a more modern society as a whole. Although this infiltration of modern perspective can quickly present Western values and trends as acceptable. The sensitive balance of this filter cannot be controlled or adjusted to accommodate the attempts to preserve the Chinese culture. Instead, focus on what is modern incidentally pushes China to follow all components of a modern society that can result in contrasting and overlapping cultural positions.

The City as a Body

Yung Ho Chang refuses to move into a site without warning, instead he finds a discreet means of infiltration. This is not classical medicine or surgery, but intervention by an acupuncturist who considers the body as a whole and makes an overall diagnosis of the problem. Unlike Western medicine, which isolates the problem and works solely on the affected area, Chinese medicine treats the body as a system in its own right. If the city is such a system, each building, each piece of architecture is an essential part of the totality.

-Project for the 21st Century- Laurent Gutierrez and Valerie Portefaix
In comparing the city to the body, the architect becomes the acupuncturist, fully aware of the whole while focusing the close relationships between points. The vitality of the body, qi, moves within the channels or meridians, jīngmài. There is an interplay of relationships- a chicken vs. egg argument- that gives urban-ists confidence that their role as master planners of these channels is crucial to the functioning of the city. But this analogy that Guttierrez and Portefaix construct provides a different mentality to addressing urban issues through the application of Chinese thought. It explores a more crucial issue: the impact of one point should resonate something beyond its local context. Perhaps it becomes the stimulus for something beyond its physical extremities, or the solution to the inner workings of the city. The systems within the city are required to submit to this underlay, the qi of the city, and not contrast the city’s importance and identity. Transportation, zoning, even the installation of a stop sign or a traffic light must inevitably consider its effect to the city as a living form.

Distance and Viewing the Whole

There is a perceived understanding in viewing the whole. The scales of things begin to avoid detail, as seams between zones become simplified into lines. This distance allows one to understand the gesture of the idea; to see the city as a body. It can be argued wither this scale is relatable to human occupation, that perhaps it does not affect the actual experience of the person. I would choose to disagree. François Jullien claims that distance “makes it possible to take in a vaster landscape (and) also renders it more accessible to contemplation, for distance, as it were, rids the landscape of all the weight of inessentials and restores it to the simple movement that gives it form and existence.”20 There is a method of functioning, of circulating and engaging that is determined by configurations- the organization of the city. This structure determines a different- seemingly non-Western- approach on viewing the detail and the whole simultaneously.
This method also allows for the integration of the intangible and immeasurable influences of culture and society. (Fig. 2-5)

Active participation within the city cannot exist solely on localized issues, but should address the city holistically. This approach allows the architect to intervene neutrally, integrating their building into the fabric of the city. Although this neutrality should be a reflection of an understanding of the city, it does not restrain the architect, as they should challenge the function of the site locally while juxtaposing it with the urban strata. Through this perspective, the control is self-determined without compromising the awareness of the city as context. How can an architect respond to a local project with this attitude?

Historically, China has disengaged urban planning from social conditions. Although there is a severe lack of research regarding these issues, as stated by Jianfei Zhu, China is now undergoing massive transformations through globalization and modernization that require analysis of urban growth and cultural development. “Today, the question about a Chinese approach to spatial design acquires a new significance. In the past two decades, amidst the forces of globalization, China has managed to regenerate itself, and is transforming itself into a modern, industrial and mercantile power.” So the challenge becomes: what are Chinese spatial and architectural strategies? Can the identification of these issues be determined through examination of precedents or current analysis of Chinese lifestyle? The next question becomes: does today’s development of China abide by such principles? Western perspective has a large influence on the modernizing of China, but is it possible that this foreign lens is becoming principle in the design of modern China? To determine this first requires extensive mapping of current and past design and the relationship of design to process and methodology. The
transformation of this country in response to modernization can be analyzed in their relationship to culture and to architecture.

1 Luna, Ian, Structural Contradictions, In On the Edge: Ten Architects from China edited by Ian Luna and Thomas Tsang. Pp. 27-34, New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc, 2006. Luna states that architecture becomes an expression that results from a very unique series of events, especially focusing on the last three decades where politics and economic stabilities have generated a re-defining of culture.

2 X. Winston Yan, 1996. The Great Hall of People and the Museum of History were designed to fit the historic context, as a rejection of Western modernism architectural style. This built a large amount of nationalism within the country, as they placed more value on historic Chinese architecture over current external architectural trends.


5 X. Winston Yan, 1984.

6 Zhu, pg. 209. Zhu discusses in great detail the five different religious rites: Auspicious, Commending, Military, Guest and Inauspicious (ji li, jia li, jun li, bin li, xiong li). Each of these scenarios are defined and categorized through three structures: Semantic differentiation, Spatial location within the city, and temporal fixation on the calendar. He uses this categorization to understand the effects of the ritual on spatial organization, orientation, and location. The intense analysis of these events further structures China as a place, but also a culture with order, tradition, and persistence.

7 Dr. Andreas Szesny, 2006.

8 Piper Gaubatz, Changing Beijing, In Geographical Review, Vol. 85, No. 1, Pp. 79-96, American Geographical Society, Jan 1995. Socialist China established a structure that stratified cities into degrees of occupation. This reconstruction only occurred in fragments, as the historic hutongs and maze-like organization of courtyard housing constrained development.

9 Fang Yong, Beijing- History and Historical Architecture, in Beijing, Shanghai Architecture Guide, A+U, May 2005, A+U Publishing Co, Tokyo 2005. Yong states that Chinese experts debated on the importance of protecting the ancient city, but issues of preservation were halted to pursue more important political projects.


12 Eduard Kögel, The Last 100 Years: Architecture in China. Pg326-327. In this synopsis of Chinese architectural history, Kögel runs through movements that often shadow Western trends. The Postmodern concept is paralleled to “Symbolic Form”, where “simplified forms and metaphors established themselves as references in order to ensure a sense of continuity and identity.” Unfortunately, this resulted in a simplification of cultural response and a heightened commitment to the commercial industry.

13 Gaubatz, Piper, Changing Beijing, In Geographical Review, Vol. 85, No. 1. Pp. 79-96, American Geographical Society, 1995. The new form of Beijing is stated: “In a remarkably short time Beijing has experienced proliferation of high-rise architecture and its incorporation as a main feature of the expanding central business district; separation of residential and industrial areas, the development of mixed residential and commercial neighborhoods, economic differentiation of neighborhoods, creation of enclaves for foreigners, industrial-development zones, adjustments to accommodate additional vehicular traffic, and beginnings of a subway system.”
Ping states that it is through this perception that a cultural discourse for modernity was developed and pursued. According to the Chinese, culture evolved from the meaning ‘to tattoo’ and to ‘transform.’ This definition transfers from historic application into the modernization process. Ping also argues that culture is “a constant, unchangeable parameter of history, as the mode of thought and pattern of behavior underlying the political structure, economy, science and technology of society [that comes] to the fore of intellectual discourse.” (pg 74.) This in parallel to the meanings of ‘to tattoo’ and to ‘transform’ understands culture as a moving body that can adjust to its context, while simultaneously affecting its context. This interplay can be challenged in the Zoom In section of this paper that investigates the relationships of culture and architecture.

Ping. Pg 13.

This cautious modernization allowed for a “practical separation” that gave alternatives to adopting full principles of Westernization. One Chinese philosopher, Zhang Zhidong established the term guocui (national essence) as a way to describe aspects of Chinese lifestyles that were significant to national identity, and which departed from the realities of the modern West.


François Jullien, The Propensity of Things. Pg. 95

Jianfei Zhu, Chinese Spatial Strategies: Imperial Beijing 1420-1911. pg 1. Jianfei Zhu presents Beijing as an indicator for understanding order within the city through geography, the city as a whole, palaces as political systems, ceremonial events, and the aesthetic and composition of space.
Figure 2-1. Juxtaposing contemporary architecture in Beijing (Photo by Adam Gayle)
Figure 2-2. Tiananmen Square and the axis to the heavens  (Photo by Adam Gayle)
Figure 2-3. Boundary and Scale, Tiananmen Square (Photo by Adam Gayle)
Figure 2-4. National Swimming Center by PTW Architects (Photo by Adam Gayle)
Figure 2-5. Human scale within an urban field (Photo by Adam Gayle)
Introduction

This section will discover a set of spatial principles at work in Chinese culture through the work of French Sinologist, Francois Jullien.

Francois Jullien is a French Sinologist who, in pursuing his own historic theological roots, has questioned the nature of Western—namely Greek and Roman—principles and methodologies. In the beginnings of his research, Jullien pushed toward understanding these cultures by contrasting them to what can be considered as Western, opening his research to China. Jullien has since invested his scholarship in taking and understanding Chinese methodologies as a Westerner. His work becomes a translation of what is Chinese, opening the mind of this enclosed nation and presenting his discoveries in contrast to typically Western values.

Chinese Principles

Chinese methods and positions are deeply engrained through centuries of understanding identity. Principles that are strictly cultural contrast methods applied by Western societies. This sever is crucial to recognize. Though China pushes toward a modernized society, positions on tradition and cultural belief determine principles that are applied—especially in literature and art.

Through zooming in, we can analyze these techniques, allowing us to gain a clearer understanding on what is Chinese compared to what can be determined as typical or typically Western.

The Static

Western perspective has assumed architecture as being a reflection of a society—how they live and function within urban and domestic scales. It is often reactionary to the programs of the city that it contains. Nieuwenhuys Constant describes a theoretical city, titled New Babylon, and
its flexibility. “It follows that New Babylon could not be structured to a determined plan. On the contrary, every element would be left undetermined, mobile and flexible. For the people circulating in this enormous social space is expected to give it its ever-changing shape; to divide it, to vary it, to create its different atmospheres and to play out their lives in a variety of surroundings.”¹ The malleable city should conform to a society’s needs and methods. At the same time, the city changes the way people find identity and ultimately define themselves as a culture or group. Stevan Harrell focuses on the “negotiated nature of ethnic identity,” and how identity is determined through the individual and their role within the group. These definitions disappear and reappear within groups of people, and ownership emerges. Imagined boundaries also give identity, while political unity of a nation becomes juxtaposed within the structure of local communities.² The materialized boundaries and the structure of the community give architecture its role in influencing the identity of a group. (Fig. 3-1)

The dynamic

Effects of time and occupation wear away and constantly re-define context. Fragments and their boundaries shift and overlap, reacting to the function and programming that the fragments of society contain. Therefore, the city is constantly in a state of change- the Chinese people are constantly changing. It transforms beyond the diagram as a whole, becoming a dissection, a comparison of contrasting of rather different and changing cultural conditions. The instability provides a rhythm that is responsive and real. Society is expected to exist within this context. Culture becomes defined and refined. There is a dynamic dichotomy between architecture and culture that questions the very nature of action and reaction. In most situations, culture reflects itself within the architecture- design follows the cultural trends of a society. China however, has experienced a cultural erasure within the past 40 years through the rise and fall of the Communist reign, the implementation of the Cultural Revolution, and the opening of
the nation to the world. Chinese designers today have a convoluted history of de-emphasized traditionalism and progressive thinking. This specific impact will be discussed later on.

The city is a body. It is a center of population, commerce, and culture—a reaction to multi-dimensional demands, productions, and needs. Transportation systems are the accommodations needed to allow these elements to move. Interactions between people establish a society, and with time, a culture. The city must learn to preserve that culture while pursuing worthwhile advancements. Architecture is the framework, or infrastructure that contains these interactions. It must allow for public gathering and personal identity, for exploration and personalized certainties. Space "develops through the tensions and interrelationships between figures." Public space must be identified and functional. It must be approachable and understand the demands for flexibility and utility.

The object

Within and throughout the city, landmarks are established. Within the Chinese model, place becomes relative, as identity is reflected and contrasted to ones surroundings. (Fig. 3-2) “In effect one can suggest that the organization of the environment is a mental act before it is a physical one.” Transition spaces are those that situate between; space that passes and recorded in memory as a texture. The landmark defines the scale of the urban fabric beyond size; the understanding of the city extends into other dimensions of time and space. Tendencies to walk through the familiar develop understanding and ownership—of a street, an area, a neighborhood. The landmark in Western methods is designed with intention of being a point of reference: a statue in a plaza can define and distinguish that plaza as a specific place. Juxtapositions between objects, architecture, and space can begin to form personalized landmarks, almost as an icon, and with time, can become the means of existing within a city. This interstitial between creates the qi movement through channels that structure Chinese city.
China has historically focused on traditional architecture to characterize heritage and ethnicity. Understanding and practice overlaps and carries through dynasties and revolutions, shifting to adjust to changes within culture. Currently, China is transforming to accommodate contemporary lifestyle. Liang Sicheng claims: “For my fellow countrymen, architecture is like clothing”—architecture must adjust to these transformations, becoming the framework for all interactions and relationships. The scale of this agility is constantly getting smaller and smaller, as architecture movements and trends shift quickly and leave harsher conditions of living within freshly defined urbanism. Clay Lancaster states—“in architecture, as in painting, the Chinese always have taken scrupulous care to conform to ancient models.” Unfortunately, this statement is challenged by this newly occurring method of construction within the city. The Chinese people are now forced to conform to uncertainty, relying only on faint memories of tradition and the overbearing fashions of the West.

**Shi and Xing**

The structure of all space is determined by *shi*. It impacts and gives vitality to a landscape. It is compared to as the vein, or channel, as well as the skeleton, or structure. This dynamic condition “is crucial…because the reality of things only exists- and thus only manifests itself- in a totality, through the force of propensity that links its various elements as a whole.” In viewing the whole, blandness is re-discovered through the configurations of objects.

Xing relates to form. It is specific and is visible locally.

Shi is propensity and force. It is dynamic, unfolding through and over. It is observed at a distance.

Through *xing*, there is an understanding of human scale and form. *Shi* becomes the connection to the unattainable, the distant, and the sublime. By balancing between *xing* and *shi*, the architect can be sensible and flexible. The intervention becomes intertwined in its site,
beyond its physical placement and form. As the blurred areas of a traditional Chinese landscape painting, the architecture can simultaneously define and suggest, speed up and slow down. The active role of the architecture is its propensity and form. The interactive nature of these elements can be defined and regulated, becoming design. “Compose a set of forms against a distant backdrop of a propensity, or gather forms carefully to unfold a propensity.” The interplay of the form and the propensity further emphasizes flexibility, yet recognizes the importance of intention. In this scenario, although geometrically these forms and their organization can be the same, their purpose is determined and specific. The propensity remains active, working around the forms to establish a context.

**Spatial Suggestion**

Methods of representation have historically developed through narrative and descriptive texts in Western culture, as opposed to the lyrical content in Chinese literature. The use of poetry as representation evolved into the allegory, becoming “based on a metaphysical split between the perceptive and the intelligible, with one reflecting the other.” The direct interpretation is seen as imitation, or mimesis. This difference highly impacts the interpretation of the reader. In Chinese texts, the *xing*, or ‘allusive incitement’, in combination with a bland context, allows a juxtaposition of interactions. The reader can involve the image with emotion, while pushing further into propensity. “Unlike the cartographic reduction of space, which is proportioned in a pedestrian manner, the aesthetic perception strives to apprehend space, whether pictoral or poetic, through the tensions expressed by its lifelines.” The cartographic reduction mentioned refers to Western rational thought that, in its representation, eliminates the possibility of interpretation. In this situation, suggestions are maximized, guaranteeing a sense of authenticity. Understanding moves past speculation and allegorical situations, becoming a shifting experience constantly pursuing meaning.
In interpreting *xing* and *shi* into architecture, the object is now challenged to transcend its own physical bounds.

“The world is not an object for consciousness but a partner with consciousness in a process of interaction”\(^{11}\) The active role of the object separates it from a stagnant Western definition. In the organization of objects, a “succession of varied space in a related sequence [avoids] no one climax, but rather a series of architectural events.”\(^{12}\) Movement between architecture can then interact, creating space between, emphasizing the importance of propensity within the city.

**Mimesis vs. Actualization**

After the removal of empiric rule, China has sought an independent mindset, developing critical measures of aesthetics- a severe contrast from the political logic established during centuries of dynasties. This shift has pushed China away from Western thought, as Jullien relates to *mimesis*, or the imitation of nature or the real. Instead, the Chinese focused on *actualization* as understanding the dynamics within and between things.\(^{13}\) As the setup or configuration, the gesture being the equivalent in art, determines form, the form must also be convertible to the gesture. This interplay of contradictions defines the artistic ideology of shi.

Through shi, the relationship of the city to the body takes on massive transformation in response to modernization. As the environment changes, so does its movement and the body adapts. Movement within the city happens both vertically and horizontally, building tall and expanding out. Through this movement, “the city dictates the spatial structure, and thus organizes the process of a body’s movement within the space and time in which it is located.”\(^{14}\) This act of actualization deters from relying on imitating the past. It is fully responsive to current conditions, and expects a response that pushes a movement forward and within.
Poetry and Calligraphy as Lens

The writing of *gu-shi*, translated “old poetry” does not rely or formal structures. This narrative approach allows the writer to pursue relaxed and imaginative styles. *Jinti-shi*, translated “modern-style poetry”, is more regulated by tonal inflections to create a rhythm. Through this structure, the poem becomes dynamic and animated. Composition extends beyond form and into gesture. The object becomes the skeleton and the mind, able to shift from gesture to form, back into gesture and into form again. This flexibility separates process and product relationship in Chinese thought, bonding their two identities. The ancient Chinese scholar Yang Xin states, “Aesthetic phenomena are expressed more through a series of polarities than through concepts!”15 The contrast between the two poem styles, the modern style of *Jinti-shi* promoting a rigid structure- demonstrates the developing push to control process as a means of emphasizing the unique qualities and dynamics. This individuality preserves an underlying tradition while integrating the innovation of independent expression.

The traditional art of calligraphy is also making adjustments in response to given modern lifestyles. In comparison to traditional calligraphy, modern calligraphy allows the artist flexibility in individual expression. In contrast to modern poetry techniques, modern calligraphy de-structures the rigidity of its traditional form, which extends this opportunity for expression. Although this allows more variety, it devalues the importance of technique, and the artist is often criticized as exploiting a traditional and cultural artifact to take advantage of economic profit. Shi, a critical element of traditional calligraphy is demonstrated through the requirement of completing the work in one attempt. Modern calligraphy does not hold this requirement, pushing the focus on the product, further confirming a cultural adaptation of modernization. (Fig. 3-3)
Blandness

As a harmonious relationship between diverse qualities or capabilities, blandness expresses an optimal and discreet equilibrium in which no one quality manifests itself in such a way to exclude another- and so where all qualities may coexist simultaneously and manifest themselves appropriately according to the diversity of the circumstances.

-François Jullien, Graham Parks, The Chinese Notion of “Blandness” as a Virtue

In its application to Chinese methodologies, blandness must first be redefined, requiring the removal of preconceptions. In the above description, Jullien detaches from blandness being the absence of something, but rather the harmonious co-existence of everything. This balance does not result in neutrality- blandness becomes activated only through circumstance. This concept is fascinating in that it deviates from Western connotations of the term, allowing it to transform and serve as an environment.

Jullien also discusses blandness as something that has shifted in connotation through history in China. This evolution is evident in the development of literature, where it became a “flavor” that made the subject intangible and inexhaustible. This allowed the subject to hold integrity, while allowing it to move, to diffuse and envelop. The ability of something bland to have action gives authenticity that is based on the individual’s perception. Participation determines the context without physically changing the context. The environment therefore remains bland in definition becoming active only within the individual.

Landscape Scrolls as a Lens

The object is only as important as its surroundings, both in front and behind the object. This is understood in traditional Chinese landscape painting, where perspective is understood as a series of layers. In Western thought and representation, depth is translated through gradual fading of detail, convergence or diminishing of scale, line weight or boldness of the line. In Chinese painting, these progressive depth cues are eliminated. Instead, the layers fade into each
other, establishing an understanding of depth, activating the mind of the viewer as they attempt
to connect the layers. The harmonious co-existence between the object and a mountain far away
relies on the observer’s ability to interpret space between the two. Jianfei Zhu categorizes these
approaches as:

1. folding and unfolding- with the physical folding of a horizontally rolled painting,
   “there is always another point of view absent at any one moment”, de-centralizing the
   focus and creating active viewing
2. moment and temporality- with many centers and viewpoints, the movement becomes
   an experience
3. dispersion and fragmentation- “diverse and localized areas and points” allow attention
   to detail at varied dispositions
4. largeness and infinity- spaces becomes fragmented, yet represents large scales

In these categories, blandness results from the de-centralization, as the viewer activates the
painting. Through the movement of the viewer, each element holds a temporary focus, giving
value to different parts individually within a certain itinerary. This parallels the importance of
blandness being the co-existence of all parts. Also presented in Zhu’s categories is the capability
of capturing scale. In contrast to Western perspective techniques, the layered sections of the
Chinese landscape can push infinitely into the paper, instead of to a defined vanishing point. The
scales and distance within the painting are also open to interpretation through this method. The
viewer controls movement, pace, and scale- elements critical in urban and architectural design.
Through this application, blandness remains the context, while the viewer determines experience.

**Harmony**

Harmony is achieved through this neutrality of context, and guarantees an authenticity of
perspective. Interestingly, Jullien argues that harmony should not exist at the apex, but rather to
either side, to prevent stagnancy and monotony. “If harmony reaches an extreme, it culminates
in total indifference, and, by virtue of the element of blandness, it could become monotonous and
boring, which would then naturally lead to the next poetic mode in which delicacy and luxuriance attract the eye...far from being a concept, blandness represents a balance, an intermediate moment, a transitory stage constantly threatened with obliteration.” The challenge of offsetting harmony further emphasizes its importance as a process, rather than a result. The application to spatial design and aesthetic allows movement of the subject or focus, instead of placing importance on the object. The object becomes secondary to the conditions around it, and only exists as a part of this ‘process’. Assume that composition moves. In plan, the dynamics of the composition allow movement, separating itself from rational or analytic thought. What is lost in the physical presence is understood metaphysically. The flexibility of this composition gives multi-valence of roles with each component. This is understood in the discussion of the layout of Beijing’s ritual sites discussed later on. Though each individual building is within itself an object with a specific function, the meaning or interpretation of each object can only be determined with thoughtful awareness of its relationship to Beijing and Chinese culture as context.

Hierarchies

In describing blandness, there is an underlying flatness of hierarchy. This flatness does not suggest or oppose, but rather allows the individual to suggest and determine potential. This gives the individual the role of being the activator for transformation. Blandness is not a lack of, but rather a harmonious co-existence of elements. Without the individual to experience a context, hierarchy detaches from all objects, and the context remains bland. The movement of discovery is a process established by the individual, as they push through and negotiate within this co-existence. Once the individual occupies context, whether through viewing a painting or walking through a city, hierarchies are assigned and become specific to the individual. The translation into an aesthetic requires attachment of integrity to the process, rather than disjoining
the roles of aesthetics and morality that Jullien recognizes as Western principles. This emphasizes the role of the individual, appropriate to the search for and response of Chinese identity.

**Translating into Space**

Let us return to the landscape scroll example. These issues resonate within conditions of architecture. In folding and unfolding, there must be a movement that pushes out of the constraints of the physical canvas. Literally, the unrolling of a scroll incites movement of the body. In the revealing of the scroll, the movement of the eye forms itinerary, allowing an occupant to engage- physically and visually- within the architecture. As a viewer is simultaneously scanning and moving within the painting, the occupant becomes aware of space through de-centralized configurations. Through movement and temporality, time is introduced as an element of experience. The landscape painting can jump between and through spaces at different depths and interest, as space and architecture can conform to or challenge boundaries, juxtapose scales, simultaneously understanding the detail and the context. “Distance thus not only makes it possible to take in a vaster landscape but also renders it more accessible to contemplation, for distance, as it were, rids the landscape of all the weight of inessentials and restores it to the simple movement that gives it form and existence.”

This issue activates the blandness that is required to create movement.

**Blandness in Society**

The term *bland* covers a large range of connotations. While Western culture discerns blandness as a negatively neutral quality, i.e. bland food, bland film- the term bland can be interpreted as favorably neutral. Through the omission of harshness or taste, suggestion cannot persuade the observer’s opinion one way or another. “There is little question that this interpretation of blandness appears to us in the West as the least appealing, accustomed as we are
In a capitalistic society, this lack is unacceptable, as information must be presented to assist in decision-making. The demand for advertisements and campaigns encourages a dependence on external influences to determine our perspective on issues, whether it is brand loyalty or political party registration. There is a reliance on these influences’ validity, as specialization in these issues is expected and considered advantageous as a skill.

Perhaps we can consider a distinct approach- to imagine a place where specialization and opinions are not a concern and neutrality is crucial in keeping balanced socio-political and economic societies. Within this neutral environment, decisions must be made, and lifestyles established. The method of decision-making is developed only within this culture, and exists within contextual- physical, cultural, and historic- constraints. The “allusive incitement” of xing pushes toward a stimulation, rather than the suggestive bounds of inspiration that is principle to Western culture. These constraints are characterized as responses to an existential condition that determines energy and form. Shi “follows no rigid route or pre-established model…however, it structures all space, permeating it with its dynamic power.” The activity of shi, while neutral in connotation charges and determines the configuration of objects in space, which become environment.

**Architectural Application**

Although my research extends beyond limitations of the built environment, I feel it necessary to indulge in understanding the role of traditional Chinese architecture and its impact on China as a culture. From this understanding, organization and spatial positioning can be interpreted from specific examples, and can be directly juxtaposed to the current construction of architecture in China.
Historically, Chinese architecture was formed to envelop the object within the landscape. Form reflects local and distant conditions of an environment. Large roofs often emphasized a connection to the horizon and landscape. Vertical beams and walls were less emphasized to create an effect of a highly ornamented roof floating above the ground. Lancaster argues that the swooping roofs of traditional Chinese architecture elegantly mimic the sagging of wood beams from old roofs, as a “refinement, giving a certain buoyancy to the one heavy element of the Chinese building, and being both beautiful in itself and harmonious with the pines and hills of the Chinese landscape.” Through this argument, Lancaster credits the Chinese people with a value for elements of history and context and simultaneously current architecture.

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3 Dr. Andreas Szesny, A2: Changing Chinese Architectural and Building Traditions, In Building Projects in China: A Manual For Architects and Engineers, edited by Bert Bielefeld and Lars-Phillip Rusch, Pp. 14-24, Basel: Birkhauser-Publishers for Architecture, 2006. Szesny maps out the generation that was affected as Red Guards or enemies, stating that they were the generation to be directly involved with Deng Xiaoping’s project- xingxiang gongcheng.

4 Wolf Prix, "Space is no longer predetermined but rather develops through the tensions and interrelationships between figures. This is the basis for a vigorous new model of urbanism." b5 2 c6: Public Space, The State of Architecture at the Beginning of the 21st Century, edited by Bernard Tschumi and Irene Cheng, Pp. 11-24, New York: The Monacelli Press, 2003. Prix highlights the necessity of urban planning as fundamental in creating the framework in which interactions occur. The dynamic use and accessibility of public space can create a successful urban model.

5 Human Aspects of Urban Form, pg. 15


7 Jullien. The Propensity of Things. Pg. 99.

8 Wang Qiheng (quoted by Jullien in Praise of Blandness)

9 Ibid. 163

10 Ibid. 103.
Mara Kurotschka. Beijing Moves. Kurotschka defines the important movements of group to individual and vice versa. There is an awareness of affects, as pieces respond to one another. This dynamic keeps the city moving and developing.

Yang Xin. 3rd and 4th Century, AD

Jianfei Zhu, Chinese Spatial Strategies, pg 231. Zhu convincingly yet simplistically compares these categories to the layout of Beijing, understanding the dynamics of the historic city. Although this comparison is noteworthy in my research, I will refrain from discussing Beijing until later on, and hopefully in a more thorough approach.

François Jullien. The Propensity of Things. Pg 95. Jullien states that through aesthetic reduction, one can understand immensity despite the limited perspective of the individual. By standing at a distance, “even the most imposing [mountain] will retreat by one inch.” The impact and awareness of scale maximizes the content of the painting.

Juillien. In Praise of Blandness. Pg 96. It is because of our heritage of Romanticism that is embedded in our culture that we feel obliged to sway in response to inspiration or other external influences.

François Jullien. The Propensity of Things. Pg 93

Clay Lancaster, 1950.
Figure 3-1. Beijing city walls (Photo by Adam Gayle)
Figure 3-2. Beijing’s landmarks (Photo by Adam Gayle)
Figure 3-3. Modern calligraphy (Photo by Adam Gayle)
CHAPTER 4
1 TO 1: RESPONDING THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

Introduction

This section will respond to the situation through the lens of architecture.

Although modernization has been strictly attached to Western values, the adoption of development is flexible. The approach should move parallel to current conditions of culture instead of clashing or replacing those conditions. The focus moves toward the importance of process- how do contextual understandings determine the way we work as architects? This is not the solution to the architectural modernization of China, but an attempt to determine various methods that apply issues of modernization within Chinese perspective.

Through the measure of 1:1, we can begin to gauge these applications as possibilities, in hopes to charge the architect to dream responsibly.

The Diagram

Since the mid 1900’s, implementation of the diagram within the realm of architecture developed a validity in the methods of Western design. Its active role in design gives the diagram clarity in the concept and the process. In understanding to the previous section, the diagram becomes an anti-mimetic element of communication. Instead of replicating what has previously been given, typical of methods that are implemented in the development of Western architecture, the diagram creates a new simultaneous understanding of approach and process. The graphic value is superseded by its capability to communicate the idea of the project.

The critical role of the diagram influences decisions within the process, giving the diagram its movement. Peter Eisenman described the diagram as “historically understood in two ways: as an explanatory or analytic device and as a generative device”1 This concept that a diagram is active proposes a shi that can be understood in Western perspectives, as well as the pedagogic
positioning of the University of Florida School of Architecture. Interestingly, the development of the diagram parallels the expansion of globalized industrialization, where communication is challenged by translations. Through the diagram, understanding is unconstrained by these limits. It is then utilized as an international communicator, and in response to globalization, has become crucial for cross-cultural projects, especially between the East and the West. Diagrams communicate universal systems, understood at different extents. In addition to clarity within the process of design, the diagram also certifies concepts and their architectural translation. Through the diagram, one can understand the intentions of the architect, and directly see the manifestation of the diagram into a physical form.

**Pedagogic Alternatives**

Through the School of Architecture at the University of Florida, I was given the opportunity to teach a second year design studio of nine students. Though the program, I was able to use the studio as an experimental environment to execute positions of design processes. The role of process became critical in determining the success of the project in addition to its product and presentation. As such, the assignment structure will define the approach and process, and will be supplemented by student response. The structure of the course is then intended to determine appropriate alternatives to designing within China.

**Introduce Education as Method**

With considerations of blandness and the interactive roles of the individual, the context of a field can determine the point. The challenge is to define and understand that field, and then discover the role of the point within the context. Through two projects, each assigned to second year students at the school of architecture at the University of Florida, the field was defined as: 1. the city (Shanghai), and 2. the desert (Taklimakan desert). Each context must be first understood in several of its conditions, and then activated and enhanced by the intervention, or point. The
intervention then relies on its context as the container of the point. The application of these two projects will appropriately be presented in two modes: the positioning of the product (zoom out), and the development or process (zoom in). Through their analyses, a direct intersection and technique of approach can be mapped and evaluated.

**Tower Project**

The curriculum required the investigation of a vertical structure within an urban context, defined by each studio instructor. The course syllabus states the aim of the project:

> Design will be responsive to issues and analysis of a given context. This project will engage a large scale urban context and resolve issues of program and its positioning within the city, understanding importances of density, movement, and formal development.²

The challenge of the project is to understand and design juxtaposed scales of program, establish sophisticated and speculative languages of tectonics and construction, and position the project within its given context. Through the project, the student is capable of bringing personal understanding of urbanism and occupation within the city, while researching specifically one place and site, as given within the studio.

**Context: existing urban places**

In understanding the idea of place within China, there is the opportunity for reflection of non-place. The Sinocities project called for a redefining of public space within a generic Chinese city. The winning project proposed a simple, programmatic idea of giving every citizen a small cube- a “scube”- filled with soil, onto which he or she can project stories or dreams. The choosing of the project emphasizes the trend in individualist ideas replacing the communal base of defined public space.

More fascinating than the actual submittals, this competition brought on an interesting question: What is a Chinese city, and what kind of impact does their rapid development have on Chinese culture? The Sinocity accepts the speed of development, but also brings into
conversation the necessity to respond by providing theoretical cultural infrastructures. This method however, questions the nature of a city as being an accumulation of history and life over a physical place. The concept of a Sinocity envelops China as a field, although the ‘point’ does not take an individual form. This context relies on a theoretical base at the scale of a country, while the winning entry attempted to define the context of the invididual. Therefore, the application of the Sinocity requests an attention that is zoomed out and generalized. The detail is not addressed in these generalizations, and can limit the extent of investigation within an academic setting.

Although the Sinocity proposes an interesting framework for architectural intervention, the contextual information was inadequate for a lower level studio given time restraints within the project. Instead, the students were required to analyze and occupy Shanghai because of its physical manifestation of historic and economic containment. The architecture within the city becomes layered and intersected, with urban planning applied in the 1990’s. Through the urban plan, the question of a city identity has already been proposed with several responses. In addition to Shanghai having covered specific planning credentials, the restraints on intense information that have already been translated limited the city to being one that is highly researched and published by both Asian and Western authors.

**Issues: zoom out**

The challenge becomes as follows:

This project will be a speculative and theoretical positioning within the urban context. The city of Shanghai is a constant and active juxtaposition of traditional and modern architecture. Although historically significant, Shanghai’s identity has become increasingly in a state of flux as China adjusts to modern lifestyles. The economic, social and cultural development of China is responding to modernization, as China rises as a world power. The perspective of the citizen- in addition to the scale of the city- becomes crucial in responding thoughtfully and appropriately.³
Mapping of the city extends beyond a picturesque exercise in aerial graphics, but rather, pushes into the dense strata of the city. Shanghai, being similar to Chinese ancient cities, is a stacked palimpsest as well as a city expanding concentrically. There is an awareness and requirement to first determine multiple issues within the city beyond the physical environment, and then to understand their intersections and relationships. Scale is then implemented to speculate and criticize.

The method of representation determines each approach. The plane of vision rotates, as perspective creates a new way to view the analysis of the city. (Fig. 4-1) This technique serves to generate and contain additional layers of information, and the construction becomes more understood, revealing the intentions and position of the designer. Its application views the city in an interesting state of flux, allowing the occupant to view the diagram as a whole, and simultaneously, its critical moments.

Issues of time at different scales become as crucial as physical space in determining the function of the city. The city becomes the body and the intervention is only one point that is contained within.

Diagram: Zoom In

The structure of the assignments required the students to exist within an architectural void. Formal compositions and aesthetics become crucially avoided in attempts to focus on the energy between. This becomes the structure for the project, as each design is required to understand architecture as a reaction to culture. This oblique approach allows the object to be responsive to the physical as well as social and cultural context of Shanghai. (Fig. 4-2)

The main issue that is recognized is the recognition of the historic city. Although students are often encouraged to re-define the context, Shanghai required careful understanding of the city as a collage of eras.
The tower becomes the city.

places to Live – the unit, repeated

places for Work & Play – internal and external

places for Movement – itinerary, horizontal and vertical

places to Gather – eventspace

places of Exhibition – the gallery, pause

places for Study – scaled elements

The program for the tower is categorized in a way that generalizes the city, primarily due to the fragile vantage point of a second year studio. Although this innocence is deceiving as students are able to bring individualized perspectives and positions on the project. The challenge automatically steps away from overformal interventions, but into a critical organization of components. (Fig. 4-3) These components within themselves are challenged, as well as their relationship to the whole- similar to the viewing of a part and its role to the city. This approach gives control over main components, but also requires a re-assessment of their intersections, as students are challenged to consider or predict outcomes from human occupation. (Fig. 4-4)

Desert Project

Within the second project, students were required to exit a project driven by contextual charges. The environment determined the program, which in turn, generated the diagram and form. The desert project was proposed in opposition to this setting. The project is introduced as follows:

The program will be one that utilizes the extreme conditions of the desert over seasons and times of the day, and engages the cultural history of the desert. Handling environmental conditions such as sun direction and intensity, temperature changes, direction and handling of water will be important. The designs will reflect these assumptions.
Although the project has a large impact in the school’s curriculum that creates anticipation and excitement by the students, the immense shift in context from the desert project emphasized its challenge.

**Context: void, nothingness**

The desert as a landscape is an interesting contrast to the urban environment discussed thus far. In looking at the desert, there is the provocative challenge to make a mark within emptiness. In viewing the desert, blandness as described by Jullien becomes interestingly appropriate: “Nothing here strives to incite or seduce; nothing aims to fix the gaze or compel the attention.”

The object within the landscape should attempt to understand and record this condition, and then establish a relationship with the context. (Fig. 4-5, Fig. 4-6) This challenge can reflect issues of scale within the Chinese landscape painting, where simultaneity of scales and objects allow balance and movement.

**Issues- zoom out**

The relationship between the intervention and the landscape must become symbiotic and harmonious. Students are challenged to first define their context, and then understand the impact of the intervention with respect to that definition. The program then synchronizes the desert occupant and the landscape, as it negotiates between person and place. Within this design process, the students are given several organizing tools to assist in alternative approaches to designing within a given context.

**Balance: intervention and landscape**

The students were given three categories: place, ritual, and container. In these categories, the location, the person, and the architecture become realized and intertwined through issues of scale, program, and aesthetic.

Place: relative place, scale: genius loci
Ritual: component, action; culture, native and foreigner
Container: form, appearance, and detail; architecture and materiality

Through the challenge of intersecting these categories, the students understand the generative significance of the context. The desert becomes unavoidable, as there is responsibility to place.

**Blandness**

The existential blandness of the landscape should be transferable into any context, assuming that its foundation is purely of a Chinese mindset (Fig. 4-7). Through the analysis of nothing, there is an appreciation of everything. Monochromatic studies emphasize the emptiness of the desert, yet are worked in parallel to reflections of the city. Focus is constantly moving, adjusting to subject changes and climatic dispositions. Time is the mechanism of measure, where the movement of the sun and the severity of the environment require a method that structures design. Design can only evolve in response to these issues. Personal observation and research creates an understanding the formless, allowing the designer to simultaneously express conformity and innovation.

**Programming**

A non-formula was contrasted with a standard organization, typical of a given program at the school and also in the profession. The categories for a standard organization were

Prayer- Oratory, chapel
Dining- refectory
Work / Study- library, reading rooms
Leisure- garden, landscape

Through the application of context- the desert- alternative categorizations were established and assigned in the consideration of each student’s design:
Environment- light / shadow, materiality
Quantity- singular / communal
Time- hour / day / month
Movement- circulation / approach

Through the non-formula, the context became the generator for the project, allowing the project to adjust and form in response to the demands and qualities of its context (Fig. 4-8).

The Desert, zoom in

The image of the landscape is a powerful perspective for the Chinese. The flexibility of the observer to move within the landscape painting communicates the very workings of the landscape. Although the physical techniques of painting are specific to art, its principles can be applied to observation and analysis of the landscape. Through this observation, design as a process can engage effectively within its site.

Students were given the following principles of traditional Chinese painting. Through this as a resource, one can step away from architecture and focus on the energies that structure space. These principles detach the student from the design, as they work on the non-object: what can exist as a response of what is already there.

Six Principles of Chinese Painting, Xie He, 5th Century

1. "Spirit Resonance", or vitality, and seems to translate to the nervous energy transmitted from the artist into the work. The overall energy of a work of art. Xie He said that without Spirit Resonance, there was no need to look further.

2. "Bone Method", or the way of using the brush. This refers not only to texture and brush stroke, but to the close link between handwriting and personality. In his day, the art of calligraphy was inseparable from painting.

3. "Correspondence to the Object", or the depicting of form, which would include shape and line.

4. "Suitability to Type", or the application of color, including layers, value and tone.
5. "Division and Planning", or placing and arrangement, corresponding to composition, space and depth.

6. "Transmission by Copying", or the copying of models, not only from life but also the works of antiquity. \(^{10}\)

Paralleling the process of Chinese painting with making architecture allows for understanding of Chinese methodologies and principles. The result is a detachment from product, as the process of making becomes primary.

**Diagramming the desert**

The students are given an outline that gives 3 conditions in which to occupy the desert. The diagram that allowed options on how they were to intervene within the desert. The categories above, on, and below are physical organizers, while the cloud, shifting plane, and well are spatial strategies that can generate placement and programmatic organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABOVE</th>
<th>ON</th>
<th>BELOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[]</td>
<td>[-]-[-]-[-]</td>
<td>- - - - -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shifting</td>
<td>plane</td>
<td>well</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The occupation becomes a theoretical position, not a concern of the object or aesthetic (Fig. 4-9). The intervention relies on contextual understanding of the desert as a primary condition for design.

**Call for Recollection**

Ultimately, China is in the crucial state of tension between tradition and modernity. Somewhere between is an identity that gives China confidence and pride. The negotiation between conformity and continuity challenges the very nature of identity, as the China becomes a place of contradictions. \(^{11}\) Modern architecture is objectified, yet bleeds into the inner workings of alleyways and ancient tea rooms. Through the oscillation of these contradictions, the city becomes an active body, communicating within itself and responding to the needs of society.
This simultaneous existence forms a continuous dialogue between the old and new, forming and re-defining the *shi* that makes China (Fig. 4-10).

This final section is only intended to investigate opportunities for making that can approach the ideas of development of China. These theoretical exercises were meant to challenge issues of design and architecture, and to equip students to consider alternative approaches that are appropriate to space and time (Fig. 4-11). Contextual understanding will result in sensible and creative design, as the designer can be involved in the layers that exist within that context.

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1 Peter Eisenman “Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing”
2 See Appendix for Second year design 4 course syllabus
3 This is an excerpt from an introductory assignment given to a second year design studio at the UF school of architecture. Although research on the city was individually pursued, the human scale to the whole was highly emphasized, as the students were constantly challenged to demonstrate flexibility within the scale of the city.
4 Categories taken from Building a New Millennium: Architecture Today and Tomorrow
5 See Appendix for Second year design 4 course syllabus
7 See Appendix
8 See Appendix
9 See Appendix
10 Xie He, 5th Century
11 Totalstadt: Beijing case. Pg. 307
Figure 4-1. Shanghai Mapping (Model by Rudy Dieudonne)
Figure 4-2. Programmed Section (Drawing by Takuya Saeki)
Figure 4-3. Programmatic Diagram (Drawing by Igor Kobyzev)
Figure 4-4. Diagram negotiations (Drawings by Igor Kobyzev)

Figure 4-5. Desert context study 1 (Plaster casts by Jerrell Pittman)

Figure 4-6. Desert context study 2 (Plaster casts by Jerrell Pittman)
Figure 4-7. Desert mapping (Drawing by Takuya Saeki)
Figure 4-8. Intervention within landscape (Model by Christopher Saunders)
Figure 4-9. Sections of intervention in landscape  (Drawing by Rudy Dieudonne)

Figure 4-10. Beijing haze  (Photo by Adam Gayle)
APPENDIX
TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS

Tower

Project 2: The Urban Box: Vertical Occupation

Location: Shanghai, China

This project will be a speculative and theoretical positioning within the urban context. The city of Shanghai is a constant and active juxtaposition of traditional and modern architecture. Although historically significant, Shanghai’s identity has become increasingly in a state of flux as China adjusts to modern lifestyles. The economic, social and cultural development of China is responding to modernization, as China rises as a world power. The perspective of the citizen-in addition to the scale of the city- becomes crucial in responding thoughtfully and appropriately.

Assignment 2.1: Due MONDAY, January 28th

1. Construct 1 mapping relief model of Shanghai, contrasting the old and the new. This should begin an understanding of systems within the city and how the city functions and is perceived. This model should be not exceed beyond a 10” x 20” x 2” boundary, and should have concentrated details in addition to larger scale infrastructural systems.

2. Construct 1 section drawing at 1:30 scale of a typical tower (min. 60 floors). This should explore multiple techniques and media that capture the cultural and physical conditions of Shanghai.

The following must be included*:

- places to Live – the unit, repeated
- places for Work & Play – internal and external
- places for Movement – itinerary, horizontal and vertical
- places to Gather – eventspace
- places of Exhibition – the gallery, pause
- places for Study – scaled elements

*categories taken from Building a New Millennium: Architecture Today and Tomorrow

Both parts of the assignment must display qualities and intensities of your own response to Shanghai. Consider bringing in other resources that might give cues on how to intervene within the city.

Project 2: The Urban Box: Vertical Occupation

Location: Shanghai, China
The impossibility to understand Shanghai in all its complexity gives us a narrow (individualized) viewpoint in which to continue this project. Because of the focused nature of the project, there must be a lucid position of its role within the city as well as ideas of internal and external relationships. Program should be determined—both general and specific—and space accurately proportioned to each programmatic element.

**Assignment 2.2: Due FRIDAY, February 1st**

1. Scan and super-impose your mapping relief model of Shanghai into the section drawing of your tower. RE-WORK the drawing studying the following:

   **FIGURE / GROUND relationships:** Negotiate between masked and empty zones. What becomes void in the drawing? Does this translate into space, or something else? How might this characterize programmed spaces even further?

   **SEAMED languages:** Work between your drawing and the ‘foreign’ scan. How do the two pieces start to communicate? What parts are implied and others explicitly understood?

   **ENVELOPE methods:** Understand this new generated edge, and its impact on interior and exterior program. How can these forced overlaps interlock into the drawing? Can a new and improved system of enclosure be implied?

   **(NEW) PROGRAM development:** Strengthen the program by injecting the tower with programmatic elements that challenge and re-define scale and human experience. What does a city need to function or be entertained? Think outside of the box here, as it can be the driving component to your project. Suggest this program through techniques specific to your process.

   **PROCESS investment:** Look critically at your process through this project. Reflection on past work can be a valid generator. Understand all aspects of this project, and challenge the perspective in which they are interpreted. What are the critical ideas to your project, and how can they be preserved and strengthened? Remember, it is more than what is required, but what is beneficial for you to develop your project.

   This drawing is expected to be intensely worked, actively combining all aspects of your process. Remember that although this is still investigative, precision and sensitivity to 1:30 scale is extremely important. Although you determine the method of combining the two, you might want to consider scanning your drawing and digitally super-imposing the two and then work—either digitally or by hand—over the drawing.

**Project 2 - The Urban Box: Vertical Occupation**

**Assignment 2.3: Due MONDAY, February 4th**

Graphically and textually construct a proposal of a program for your tower. This should include cohesive understandings of scale, access/movement, architectural intent, and an overall
sophistication of program complexity. A clear and well-thought position of the tower’s relationship to Shanghai as context should be fully integrated within the program.

Construct a relief model of your drawing, 2” thick max., using Bristol, acetate, museum board, and printed media as the structure. The following must be addressed:

Suggest conditions transversal to your section cut, and begin to understand relationships of the connections between programmed spaces. Develop critical moments within your drawing and spatial-ize their conditions in more volumetric nodes within the drawing. These moments can extend beyond the 2” dimension to emphasize certain hierarchies and spatial complexities. Understand the delicacy of the scale, and be able to successfully communicate a comprehension of systems and detail.

Models must be capable of standing and be read on both sides. ONE transverse section can be implied for structure as well as to clarify specific moments within your tower, and their layered relationships. This is a tool to push the depth of your project through the more direct exploration of layered and complex space. Wire can also be used as structural and graphic support.

Preliminary programs should be e-mailed to me no later than Saturday at 8:00pm. I will review all proposals and reply with comments and suggestions. Program is crucial to the success of this tower, so clarity and specificity is necessary. The city should be developed further as we approach placement of the tower within a site.

**Project 2: The Urban Box: Vertical Occupation**

**Assignment 2.4: Due MONDAY, February 11th**

The next assignment will explore your tower in two parts. The juxtaposition of two extremes should amplify the clarity of your project while surfacing specific issues that need further investigation. There must be a flexibility to work between the two, as ideas should be precisely communicated in both parts.

1. the LARGE SCALE

Construct 1 section at 1/16” scale that intensely investigates the tower as an itinerarial mapping. When drawing, consider the following:

- the diagram – understand programmatically how the tower functions, and its relationship to the city
- the transversal – speculate on what is in front and behind the section cut- spatially and programmatically
- the detail – moments should be understood at 1/16” scale, with sensitivity to methods of construction and materiality
- the language – consider synthetic techniques that are informative to your ideas and methodologies

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Re-evaluation and proportioning of your tower is imperative at the point in the process. Understand that this project’s aim is to understanding vertical occupation and movement.

2. the SMALL SCALE

Construct two models at 1:100 scale that re-assesses the diagram of your project.

Mass model: diagrams public and private spaces through use of a solid mass (i.e. wood, foam, chipboard) and transparent mass (i.e. plexi, resin, wire framing). Challenge how these materials can be detailed, imply scale, and how the two systems connect to each other.

Sensory model: maps out the experience of the building- considering light, exposure, materiality, program, scale, density, relationship to Shanghai- through intentional use of specific materials.

These models must communicate clearly the positions of your tower, the sequencing of program, and implied internal / external relationships. They will also explore the tower beyond a single section cut, pushing through multiple axes to understand volumes of space and their proportions within the tower. They should be well crafted and articulated to display as much information clearly and accurately.

Both parts must be completed by Monday, February 11th at the beginning of class.

Project 2 - The Urban Box: Vertical Occupation

Final Model parameters:

Scale: 1:30
Materials: any or all of the following: wire – plexi – metal – museum board – poured material (resin, plaster, concrete)

Must be sectional, allowing viewing within the model
Must specifically address ground
Must communicate intensity of Shanghai urbanism
Must suggest circulation, structure and programmatic sequencing

In addition to the above requirements, include elements crucial to your project. Practice good craft, as this will be the final product for this project.

Desert

Project 3: The Desert Landscape: Horizontal Occupation

Location: Taklamakan Desert, China

This project will study the physical and phenomenological extremes of the desert environment. The beginning part of the project will focus on the analysis and understanding of the desert as
place, specifically the Taklamakan Desert. The juxtaposition of the desert landscape to the urban context requires critical generators and cultural boundaries. Especially important will be the cultural understanding of the practice of Chinese art and culture, as well as the concept of the city, as studied in the previous project.

**Assignment 3.1: Due MONDAY, February 25th**

1. Research the conditions of the Taklamakan Desert, understanding its scale, material, weather, occupation, climate, availability of water, etc. Be prepared to present information and hold a discussion for Monday.

2. Read the article given as a contrast to the desert.

3. Construct one section drawing of the desert at 1”=50km scale (approx. 20” in length, 8” in height). Explore the section in both ground and sky, understanding the research of the desert and intertwining themes of the article. Technique is critical in the exploration of this drawing. Consider all parts of the drawing to communicate ideas of the desert and city.

**Project 3: The Desert Landscape: Horizontal Occupation**

Location: Taklamakan Desert, China

国画 – guó huà
水墨畫 - shuì-mo huà

Six Principles of Chinese Painting, Xie He, 5th Century

"Spirit Resonance", or vitality, and seems to translate to the nervous energy transmitted from the artist into the work. The overall energy of a work of art. Xie He said that without Spirit Resonance, there was no need to look further.

"Bone Method", or the way of using the brush. This refers not only to texture and brush stroke, but to the close link between handwriting and personality. In his day, the art of calligraphy was inseparable from painting.

"Correspondence to the Object", or the depicting of form, which would include shape and line.

"Suitability to Type", or the application of color, including layers, value and tone.

"Division and Planning", or placing and arrangement, corresponding to composition, space and depth.

"Transmission by Copying", or the copying of models, not only from life but also the works of antiquity.

**Assignment 3.3: Due MONDAY, February 25th**

You now have 4 drawings that understand the relationships during the day and year within a certain area of the desert. In furthering the investigation of site, we will now zoom in on the site by 200% (approx 1:25m). In doing so, detail must be lucid and refined.
1. Construct 2 plaster molds, constructed from wood and textured surfaces that can accommodate for a 1” pour. The two molds will be a combination of the following:

1 Day + 1 Year
1 Day + 1 Year

Remember, the monochromatic nature of the plaster will require that you interpret your ideas into a language that can be readable and precise within this material constraint. Careful awareness of craft is crucial in the success of the pour. There will be discussion of the molds before plaster is poured, covering both theoretical and pragmatic issues.

Project 3 - The Desert Landscape: Horizontal Occupation
Location: Taklamakan Desert, China

There are 3 conditions in which to occupy the desert:

ABOVE      ON  BELOW

[] [] []  []-[]-[]-[]-[]  --------
--------  [] [] [] []

cloud    shifting    well
plane

Assignment 3.4: Due MONDAY, February 25th

PROGRAM: Monastery Complex

standard ORGANIZATION

Prayer…………….. oratory, chapel
Dining…………….. refectory
Work / Study……… library, reading rooms
Leisure…………….. garden, landscape

OTHER CATEGORIZATIONS

Environment……….. light / shadow, materiality
Quantity…………….. singular / communal
Time………………… hour / day / month
Movement………….. circulation / approach

Scale: individually scaled to fit on 12” x 18” (scale must be stated)
Construct a set of layered drawings with 3 separate layers, each exploring the conditions stated above of cloud, plane, and well. Techniques of collage must be combined with line and tone to begin organizing programmatic components within the landscape. Use several methods of interpreting and grouping program. The drawings must relate specifically as well as indirectly to each other. Consider the occupants of this construct: who is staying? Who is visiting? How many can stay or visit? When is the monastery occupied? How does one get there?

Have your drawings completed by class on Friday and be prepared to present your work.

**Day 1**
The PLACE  
Location: Taklamakan Desert, China

As the art which creates, architecture both shapes it and leaves it free. It not only embraces all the decorative aspects of the shaping of space, including ornament, but is itself decorative in nature. The nature of decoration consists in performing a two-sided mediation; namely to draw the attention of the viewer to itself, to satisfy his taste, and then to redirect it away from itself to the greater whole of the context of life which it accompanies.

Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

Think and record through narrative the approach of the monastery in the desert.  
technique- the diagram, collage

**Day 2**  
The RITUAL  
Location: Culturally defined

There is an important difference between two kinds of actions, actions done by man and actions done by man in the belief that their efficacy is not human in any reducible sense, but proceeds from elsewhere. Only the second kind of action can be called ritual.

Roger Grainger, *The Language of the Rite*

Construct a narrative on the co-existence of native and the foreign occupant.  
technique- text, image

**Day 3**  
The CONTAINER

The breath of a house is the sound of voices within.  
The house gains immortality when it becomes only a thought that ceases to exist.  
When a woman smiles in a house, Death tries to imitate her.  
John Hejduk, “Sentences on the House and Other Sentences”
On the Theory of calligraphy: “When shi comes, do not stop it; when it departs, do not hinder it,” on the one hand there is the “configuration”, on the other, the “potential”…one “considers” the “form” of the character from the perspective of its appearance, on the other one “pursues” the shi through the lines traced, appreciating the effects of tension produced by the alteration of different strokes. The body of the character is seen as evolving.

Francois Jullien, The Propensity of Things

Attempt a “dialogue” between architecture and person.

technique- sketch, freehand

**Project 3: The Desert Landscape: Horizontal Occupation**

Location: Taklamakan Desert, China

There are 3 conditions in which to occupy the desert:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABOVE</th>
<th>ON</th>
<th>BELOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- cloud
- shifting
- plane
- well

There are three dimensions of the project

PLACE | RITUAL | CONTAINER
--- | --- | ---
relative place | component | form/appearance
scale | action | detail

genius loci | culture | architecture
native & | materiality |
foreigner |

**Assignment 3.7: Due Wednesday, March 18th**

Construct a relief model using three sheets of material

1 thin transparent (acetate)
1 thick opaque (museum) or 1 thick transparent (plexi, plexitate)
1 thin opaque (Bristol)

Each layer must be assigned to one of the 3 conditions of the desert- above, on, and below. The relief model should explore the three issues of place ritual and container; meaning scale, program, diagram, and detail must all be included in addition to conceptual or speculative
qualities. Treatment of the materials (scoring, spraying, drawing) as well as excavation should fuse the three layers physically and/or conceptually. Separate small scale pieces can be added to connect the layers and explore issues of occupation and architecture. All models must be constructed at 1” = 30’. The precision of this step is critical in understanding the scale and design of the project, so be meticulous in craft and content.

Project 3: The Desert Landscape: Horizontal Occupation

Location: Taklamakan Desert, China

The desert is now understood as two hemispheres: one of ground, one of sky. The design of the monastery is a device that connects and negotiates between the two. Concepts of phenomenology, temporality, movement, and position have been driving the project forward as atypical strategies of establishing design. Now we will look at fragments as cues into understanding the whole. This will further compose systems within your design, as the requirement of the detail affecting the whole will give intention to all scales addressed. Programmatic conditions should still be pursued, and are required to influence the internal and external conditions of space.

Assignment 3.9: Due Monday, March 24th

Part 1

Construct one map that fuses the three sections together through architecture, landscape, itinerary, or other phenomenological reasoning. The mapping should investigate these issues holistically, as well as through fragments and detail. This process should be completed through strategically staggering and locating the sections within the map, and selectively drawing conceptual tangencies between each- through plan, section, perspective, or other controlled/measured technique. Consider influences in Chinese painting and analyze technique of using layered elevations and monochromatic materials. Materiality will be self-determined.

Part 2

Make three fragments of the monastery at 1/8” scale, being sensitive to human proportion and issues of materiality, program, and context. These three will become the generators to assist in completing the project. Therefore, these fragments should be carefully and thoughtfully chosen and crafted, with possibility to communicate and organize ideas beyond its own content. The size and amount to include in each fragment should be intentional in every dimension.

Remember to continue developing positions on program- their organization and inter-relationships- as well as conditions of ground and sky. Maps and models will be discussed thoroughly on Monday as a project midterm, so please be on time and ready to present with completed work.

Location: Taklamakan Desert, China
The experience of parallax—the change in the arrangement of surfaces defining space due to the change in position of a viewer—is transformed when movement axes leave the horizontal dimension. Vertical or oblique directions of movement through urban space multiply its experience. Spatial definition is ordered by angles of perception.

Steven Holl, Parallax

Due Friday, April 11th

Perspective Constructs

Construct 3 perspectives that explore internal conditions of the intervention. Conditions of light, proportion, materiality, program, and connection to context should all be investigated critically and clearly. Technique should further analyze these conditions, considering the drawing as collage. All perspectives will start with an internal photo of the model, and layered with drawing and other media. They should be printed and/or worked on 3 separate 11x17 sheets of paper. The drawing should not cover more than 60% of the paper, and its position within the sheet should be carefully considered.


Fei, Xiaotong. "Plurality and Unity in the Configuration of the Chinese People." Tanner Lecture, Chinese University of Hong Kong. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1988.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer Daniels graduated from the University of Florida School of Architecture with a Master of Architecture in 2007, and graduated with a bachelor of design in 2005. While studying at the University of Florida, Jennifer focused her research on the cultural stresses of Asia, and completed her master’s research project on the cities of Dandong and Sinuiju, located on the border of the DPRK and China. She has spent the past year researching the developments of China economically, culturally and architecturally. She also has participated in projects that focus on urban development in Korea. She is now residing in New York City and is employed with Belmont Freeman Architects.