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I, Kuang Li, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture.

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Towards a Revival of Contemporary Chinese Countryside

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In the past quarter century, China has been developing at an explosive rate. However, social and economic inequity has become more and more severe issue, especially in the rural areas. Many villages and small townships are lacking the infrastructures, such as community center, educational and healthcare facilities, to support a healthy community. Even though the government has shifted a lot of their attentions towards these rural agriculture areas, these communities are still developing at much slower rate comparing to the urban eastern coastal regions.

Depopulation is a major problem that most rural areas are facing, the younger generations are seeking education and job opportunity in the metropolis and coming back to their hometown only to retire, the population left are mostly kids, teens and elderly people. Facilities for these age groups is a crucial part of this project. Also, traditions are much valued in rural areas, and each village has their unique customs and aesthetics. It is important to design something that fits these traditions but at the same time giving them updates with modern techniques and technologies, and should keep future developments in mind.

Rural communities in central northeastern China present a unique set of problem different from other parts of China. Farming season is much shorter due to weather, and many commercial crops are not suitable for the north. Also, there is heavier pollution in the air, water and land due to the heavy industrial factory that was developed in the past quarter century. Water scarcity is a major problem in these areas.
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How is rural population defined in China?

There are many ways. It may depend on where they live; it may be what they do; or it is how they appear on the outside. Maybe all of the above. But officially it is defined only one way, Hukou. What is Hukou? It is a state issued identification system enacted during Mao’s era for each family. In Hukou, you are labelled whether your whole family is rural population or urban population, and which jurisdiction you belongs. The Hukou policies define your rights towards land developing, healthcare, access to education. Because of these policies, many rural populations want to obtain urban Hukou to receive a better education for their next generations and other benefits such as better healthcare. Even though newer amendments were added to bridge this difference, but it has not solved this issues completely. Rural population still want to obtain urban Hukou, thus the depopulation of the rural China.

As China develops at a rapid pace, there are a few different rural conditions. Differentiating between the various rural conditions is important. Some of the rural parts are drawing population towards them. As Rural Urban Framework defined them into five types, urban village, factory village, suburban village, contested village and rural village.

**Urban Village:** when a city expands so fast that it starting to enclave its surrounding villages, happens a lot in southeastern China.

**Factory Village:** villages that grow around large factories. The workers spend their free time in these villages.

**Suburban Village:** these richer rural population developed into little island almost similar to the suburban United States, they communities are becoming new middle class Chinese.

**Contested Village:** these villages are in a state of rapid development, but as the policy and regulation from the different levels of

Figure 1.7 Da Bo Luo Village
A typical rural village in Northern China
government shifts so rapidly, some villagers are waiting out as others leased their land to developers.

**Rural Village:** Mostly unchanged, but most young people started working in the city and send most of their income home to build a better house as a symbol of status. The farmland holds no efficiency of production. These areas economically depend on the city, but still hold a symbolic meaning of home.²

This thesis focuses on the Rural Village.

Figure 1.8 Mythology, Pangu Parting Earth and Heaven
Architecture design is a service for the people. When designing, it is important to understand your client, especially on public projects. For a project in China, it is important to get to know its people. How would you describe a race? Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung use the collective unconscious to describe this unconscious mind shared among beings of the same species. Chinese writer Qiuyu Yu derived from this term and wrote “the ultimate achievement of the culture, is a personality. The ultimate achievement of the Chinese culture is the Chinese collective personality.”

As Jung points out, the collective unconscious is not formed in one lifetime. It started in the mythologies. These myths form dreams in our ancestors and together form archetype. These primordia images become the self-portrait of a culture and is reflected in their dreams. Yu continues in his essay, the Chinese collective personality is formed through mythical heroes such as Pangu, Nüwa, Kuafu and Chang’e, with Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism philosophy, finally the greatest common divisor of each and every individual forms this collective personality, Jun Zi. In China, Jun Zi is the most qualified and most ideal Chinese.

So who is Jun Zi? How is Jun Zi different from other collective unconscious, such as Gentleman, Saint, Samurai or Cowboy?

Sun Yat-sen in his 1942 speech talked about the fundamental difference, Asian culture is based on “kingly way” which is about humaneness, conquering with righteousness and benevolence, whereas western culture is more about the “mighty way” or arbitrariness, conquering with force. Qiuyu Yu continued the
Even himself does not meet all the requirement for Jun Zi
discussion and wrote about other characters of Jun Zi.¹⁸

Other than benevolence and righteousness, Jun Zi creates unity. Also, Jun Zi is like wind and effects everyone. Jun Zi is poised and balanced. Jun Zi follows etiquette. And most important, Jun Zi seeks the golden mean. Should not to be confused with being mediocre. The best way to explain the term is a passage from the Book of Li Ki, the golden mean is to learn and control the extreme ends, and find the pivot point and then can benefit the people.⁹ Confucius even said in the Analects this is the highest virtue.¹⁰ The gold mean is the guidance in every aspect of daily Chinese live.¹¹

9. Ibid.
Figure 1.10 Da Bo Luo Village Government
Da Bo Luo is a small village about two hours away from Beijing. Not very far. My father is from here, so is my grandfather and his father, and many generations before that. Similar to many other villages in northern China, the 114 household village does not have any specialties produce and does not have a majestic landscape or historic heritage. The village just sits quietly from year to year.

We often visited my father’s hometown when I was younger, and when my grandparents were still there. I would play with my cousins, men were talking, and women would be cooking. When the food was ready, everyone gathers around the table on the Kang (a mud brick bed built in with the house, in the winter it is heat with fire, very common feature in Northeastern and Central North China) and turn on the television and eat as one big family. Back then, they still used water from the well. As a city boy used to tap water, drink this directly would make me very ill. I remember the bathroom was a hole in the ground. When one is full, just dug

Even when I visited 2012, other than tap water and cell phone, everything else stayed the same for all this year. There was not much new development. Still that same dirt road that leads to the small village in the middle of the fields. Older houses are made of mud brick and roofed with straw and tile, and newer houses were built of bricks and metal or tile roofing. My cousins all left to work or study in bigger towns or the cities, and only my aunts still lived the same farm live, farming when the sun is up, and rest when the sun goes down. There is nothing much to do.
Figure 1.11 Artist Rendering of Village Development Plan
Introduction

New Possibilities, How a Single Party System Pushes Projects Forward

As we all know, in China, the Communist Party controls everything. As when they put their mind to something, the machine is unstoppable. They can speed up the process in a fracture of the natural process. It is unmatchable how cities such as Shenzhen developed from a fishing village in 1979 to the size it is today. Once convinced something is good, they conquer any obstacles to make it happened.

This government lead by Jinping Xi is dedicated to correct the many wrong turns we took along the way we developed. Gapping the difference between the rural and urban areas is one of many focuses. In the next ten years, trillions of Yuan (Chinese currency unit) is going towards the development of the rural communities. Over 50 million yuan, is going towards rural development in Zhao Qiang County in 2016. However, despite the amount of money and energy spent towards these project, many of them do not make as much of impact as they should because of the poor design and execution. This project is my reaction towards this phenomenon. This project is targeted to provide a better life for the local community and maybe served as a prototype for other communities nearby, at the same time explore the many orders of Chinese architecture in the contemporary environment.

Figure 1.12 The China Pavilion for Expo Milan 2015 by Tsinghua University + Studio Link-Arc
Contemporary Chinese architecture is often the target of mockery. The lack of basic arts education is probably the one of the most important factors. And when you give the under-educated decision maker a lot of money to build what they want, you end up with a lot of indecent public buildings. Fu Lu Shou Hotel, Guizhou Tea Cultural Museum are all examples of this.

Another issue we are facing, decision makers like to pay for a foreign designer. Some foreign firms do a decent job providing a decent design, others not so much. A great example is the Zaha Hadid’s Galaxy Soho in Beijing. We love to call the building “white linked eggs” which in literal translation means white bullshits. Together with the big dome-shaped national performance center, they destroy the historic skyline in central Beijing. The mix-use Galaxy Soho is such a waste that since finished in 2013, the building still sits mostly empty today.

The countryside in China is this still unbuilt place in China. They are often associated with the gesture of modesty and honesty. We, especially the designers, still have a romantic connection with the country life. This untouched land is the place we can still make it right. From the recent readings, a lot of projects have proposed to wipe out whole villages and build new houses in their place. But, this is an opportunity for us. Proposing something to help revitalize the countryside without destroying anything, preserving what is old and updating to contemporary standard is vital. The goal is while retaining the texture of the rural-scape but at the same time giving them the modern amenities.13

Introduction

Critical Regionalist or Not?

When working in a particular region, it is hard not to talk about regionalism, “critical” or not. One reason that it is hard to see what I am working on can manifestation as Critical Regionalism is that the formal architectural language of Western Modernism is greatly accepted in China to the extent that the line between local and global is blurred.\textsuperscript{14} Regionalism is no longer only about the formal and contextual conditions, it is also about the availability of localized materials, technology and construction methods. Also, it is about investigating the lifestyle changes, government agendas, social and economic advances, as well as traditions and cultural values. Today, we are facing with more and more complicated challenges today than the when Critical Regionalists were conceived.\textsuperscript{15}

Another reason for the lack of interesting in critical regionalism is the interest in individuality and personal identity both clients and architects. Also, the current state of Chinese architecture is still struggling to find voices and has many questions.\textsuperscript{16} We are in the age of exploring and experimenting. So I hope some result could come from my exploration.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
Figure 1.13 Lion Dancing at a Spring Festival Fair

Figure 1.13 A Monthly Large Trading Fair
Introduction

Traditions, Traditions and Traditions

Spring Festive is the largest holiday in China. The celebrations always start a few days before the Lunar New Year, and this is when the pre-holiday market takes place. Everyone is here to trade with either money or goods, to get everything they need to celebrate the festival. This fair will last a few days up to a week before the Lunar New Year.

Then, on the eve of the Lunar New Year, it is significant to have a family dinner together. In tradition, everyone in the household helps prepare the dinner. Nowadays, some people eat out, but one thing never changes, the family will always be together. There is always a fish dish which meaning that the next year will be abundant. In the North, the dumplings are always part of the meal, symbolizing the family will bring plenty wealth in the following year.

Firework is another major event on the New Year’s Eve, the legend has it, the sound of firework will scare off the Nian monster, which eats people, and the whole family will have a happy new year.

One of my favorite part of the Spring Festivals is going to festival fairs. At the fair, there is games, snacks, and performances. It is a celebration for everyone. The new year celebration lasts up to fifteen days.

There are twenty-four lunar holidays based on the season, and there are a few other festivals such as mid-autumn and double nine. Each of these festivals has its customs. Most of them involving eating something special and seasonal.

How I miss these traditions.
If you learn something, you want to learn from the best, and it does not get any better than the Forbidden City when talking about traditional Chinese architecture. It is the largest library of Traditional Chinese Architecture, Garden, and Planning. Looking at them, you really can learn about most elements of the architectural traditions in Northern China.

Gou Xin Dou Jiao
Refers to the shape of roofs, that each go into each others negative spaces.

Dang Sha
Refers a piece of a wall inside the courtyard behind the main gate to keep the bad luck out.

Figure 2.3 Rural Urban Framework Project in Qinmo Village
Rural Urban Framework is a studio formed at the University of Hong Kong. The studio designs a lot of project in rural southern communities in China. Though these communities do have different sets of problems comparing to the northern villages, they serve as excellent precedents for community projects in rural China with a limited budget. Materials, organization, and programming are well organized within these projects. They also experiment with contemporary form and organization in traditional sites.  

Figure 2.4 The Handmade Paper Museum By TAO

Figure 2.5 The Handmade Paper Museum Ground Level Plan By TAO
Precedents

TAO

TAO is another studio that designs projects in rural China. The project is organized more parallel with traditional form and organization. However, they use modern material, structures, and construction method on these projects. The Handmade Paper Museum is a well-documented project from the studio. The poetic relationship between the architecture and the surrounding site; the use of traditional form courtyard house to organize different programs, makes this a good precedent for my design. 

Figure 2.6 Munich Jewish Community Center Site Model
This office design many projects related to the Jewish faith throughout Europe by developing a modern architectural language for a race that does not have an architectural tradition. These projects resolve issues with site material and how to create spaces for a culture that does not have an architectural tradition through the use contemporary architectural language. Also, they build many of their projects in old city centers, the relationship with surrounding building is crucial for these projects.\textsuperscript{20}

**Precedents**

**Wandel Hoefer Lorch**

Figure 3.1 Current Conditions of Da Bo Luo Village
Like many rural counter villages, Da Bo Luo lacks many of the modern infrastructures. Many the house do not have water closets, they still use restrooms that are holes in the ground. There is only a small store in the village that sells life’s necessities; getting a haircut is about an hour away in a larger township. There is no place for basic medical care, and there is no place for these to happen. There is not a place for gathering, learning, and recreational use.

This project is intended to appropriate an open lot in the village and create a space for these to happen and encourage things to happen. Also creating an architecture that updates the infrastructure of the village, and using it as an opportunity to bring modern sewage to the village. Give the villagers a place to learn and exchange information. The design should inform the modest cultural of the rural China, but at the same time have a timelessness aesthetic.
Figure 3.2 Current Conditions of the Chosen Site
A Community Center

Site, Towards a Future

There are several site choices around and within the village premise. Three sites were considered initially. After examining them, one was chosen as the site of the community center. As the figure shows, the highlighted land on the east side of Da Bo Luo.

There were many factors in choosing this site. The proximity to the whole village and nearby villages, relationship between the site and major traffic ways, and the developments of the community in the future.

The village has one main avenue that runs through. The dirt road is connected to a concrete plank road that connects to the state highway in the south. There is a larger township along the state highway with some retail stores and restaurants. The farmland surrounding the village, which grows mostly rice, cotton, and some vegetables. At the west end of the village is a boarding elementary school completely fenced off. Further east, about 20 minutes walking is a cattle farm.

The site is within ten minutes walking range of the whole village and within thirty minutes walking range for five nearby villages. The site is also near the major street that connects the village to the main state highway in the south, thus a good location for the transportation hub that is part of the program. One of the most important aspects of choosing this site at the east end of the village, I hope the community center could become the new center of the village and the village could develop further east in the future. Also, this site has the potential for expansion area for future growth.
A Community Center

Program, a Little Bit More Than What the Villagers Wanted

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, of the project’s intent is to create a modestly designed community center for the village, to meet their needs. The program is mainly based on the interview I did with three aunts who live in the village and nearby villages with similar conditions, also, the precedent studies I did before the design processes. The square footage of each space is based on the population of the village now and in near future.

The program consists several parts, the reading room, the gym, the grand hall (interior and exterior), the bus stop, the teaching fields, and the storages.

The Reading Room

The reading room is 1000 square foot with some additional public utilities spaces and offices for the whole complex. It provides a space for the villagers in Da Bo Luo to read, use the internet, and exchange information from the outside world. It is the quietest space, but it is the most used on daily basis, thus, it is closest to the village. It is also the front entrance of the community center. The reception area is within this building, giving the visitor to the community center an overview of the campus. The entrance experience from the village is also an important part of the overall design statement, providing a basis for future development.

The Gym

The gym is the second space in the sequence. It is an active space. However, it is not a loud space. The building houses an open floor plan for gym equipment, two showers, and small utility room. The whole space has padded flooring to prevent injury and noise canceling. The building is east facing, proving the user a view of the courtyard and the acres of fields across the road to the east of the site.
The Grand Hall (Interior)

The Grand Hall is the largest built area and most versatile spaces in the community center. The building could be subdivided with mobile partitions to create different configurations that is suited for various situations, such as, classrooms and meeting rooms of different sizes, and large gathering for the entire village, or spaces for events such as weddings or funerals. These events could be from very active to classes for organic farming.

The Grand Hall (Exterior)

A stadium-style exterior gathering space for the villagers that can host different types of events, such as spring festival parades and markets or moon festival star gazing. Also, this open space could be used as a basketball court and track fields or hosting sports events. Below the stadium seating is storage spaces for the villages for their offseason tools or crops and vegetables.

The Education Fields

The education fields in the courtyard is an additional part of the facility but one of the most valuable assets. The teaching fields aim to provide a better future for the Da Bo Luo Village. Working closely with the villagers, the educator will introduce the villagers to new methods, different crop types, and organic farming techniques. With many of the major cities such as Beijing and Tianjin in close range, this would significantly improve the value of their labor and their products.
A solution proposed for the village of DaBoLuo is a community center that could act as a prototype for future developments in the same area. There is much consideration for designing the center. First, the usage of material, modern and old-fashioned. Second, the organizing of spaces, international and regional. Lastly, the design and details, connections that revisit the traditions. The setup of the community center buildings is organized with the gardens tradition, but using up to date material. Each building has unique features that remind people of the Chinese architectural language but with a modern interpretation and fit today and future needs of the village.

The community center also services as the entrance to the village from the state highway. So it is an important part of the project is to create a postcard for the village, a signature piece of architecture.

### A Community Center

#### Modern Material, Modern Design, and Traditional Values

A solution proposed for the village of DaBoLuo is a community center that could act as a prototype for future developments in the same area. There is much consideration for designing the center. First, the usage of material, modern and old-fashioned. Second, the organizing of spaces, international and regional. Lastly, the design and details, connections that revisit the traditions. The setup of the community center buildings is organized with the gardens tradition, but using up to date material. Each building has unique features that remind people of the Chinese architectural language but with a modern interpretation and fit today and future needs of the village.

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#### Steel Structure Framing

All three building uses steel frame system but organized in the order of Chinese wood frame structure. With an accent of red and gray bricks which are traditional and regional materials. Adding different shades of transparencies, giving these building a modern aesthetics.

One of the interesting facts about traditional Chinese architecture is the separation of structural elements and architectural elements, and thus, an opening can be put anywhere on the wall. This is more closely aligned with Modern architecture. Taking advantage of this idea and experiment with it in the community center is a crucial part of the design.


Bibliography

Appendix

Final Posters