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Conceptual and Pragmatic

The Dual Approach in Architectural Design,
and Contemporary Chinese Resonances



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CONCEPTUAL AND PRAGMATIC

The Dual Approach in Architectural Design, and Contemporary Chinese Resonances

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For Ping and Changqing

Preface

This book is developed mainly from my PhD thesis, which was accomplished at Newcastle University in 2018. My concern with design concepts can be dated back to the second year of my undergraduate studies in architecture, when I started to query why we need a concept in architectural design. We were often taught about aspects of how to develop a design concept, and all student works ended with visual and linguistic presentations as expressions of the works' concepts. The design concept could be shaped with a focus on various aspects – contextual, functional, formal, material and so on. If a student had good design ideas and presented them well, it was very likely that they would achieve a higher grade. This architectural learning experience led me to keep asking if the concept is that important to architecture, if the skill of concept-making is that important to a designer and if it is the only way in which architecture can gain meaning.

My thoughts have developed greatly since I moved to the UK for my master in urban design. As a Chinese student in the British academic system, I have always struggled

Preface

to understand the value of design that was intended to be conveyed to students. My struggle was partly attributable to my jump from architecture to urban design, since the two are supposed to embody different design values and approaches. Urban designers cope with more complicated relationships among all urban factors and their internal mechanisms. They are not like architects, who more commonly favour single authorship, personal preference and creativity. Urban designers prefer cooperation, not only with professional and public authorities but also with ordinary people, which is often undertaken in the projects where the community or the wider public is involved.

I felt the urban designer's loss of individual power at that time, and I labelled myself a "tender architect", moving away from the more dominant, authoritative approach and considering that the shaping of a design concept involved engaging all sorts of pragmatic issues, including everyday life, users' perceptions and creativity, and spatial and programme changes in the future. Even though the concept is fixed and single authored in some cases, it can have temporary, changeable and unpredictable matters built in at the design stage.

A visit to Centre Pompidou during my master's degree was influential on my

understanding of architectural meaning. Before the visit, I had known the design concept, its emphasis on cultural accessibility, information exchange and high-tech architectural forms, through images, conceptual diagrams and discursive interpretations of the design. But when I visited, what impressed me most was not seeing for myself the aspects of the building that I had read about beforehand but the sense of liveliness of the space. I could understand the association between the design concept I had learnt and the actual perceptions I had, but I also found a gap between the two. The gap came from the two different ways meaning can exist in architecture, one attached to the building through the architect's creation, the other emerging from actual experience.

My PhD thesis was developed upon these thoughts. It aimed to explain these two ways of meaning in architecture and their association by looking at architectural examples across the UK, France and China, analysed in the light of both Western and Chinese aesthetics. In developing the present book, I have narrowed down my focus to the architect's design approach, and I have gone further by looking at design trends after modernism that take pragmatic thinking as their approach to concept-making. The dual approach of architectural design can be identified with these trends, as each of them demonstrates a particular way in which prag-

matic aspects of architecture engage with the design concept. However, my argument lies not in these design trends in a general sense but in the study of Chinese practice in response to the trends. More importantly, I argue that although Chinese design thinking seems to connect to the lineage of Western architecture, it grows out of its own cultural traditions and social conditions. The design ideas of the Chinese examples examined in the book are then analysed in specific social, cultural and economic contexts, or traced back to traditional aesthetics.

Nearly four years of working in Macau has turned my attention to my native land, and in particular to re-identifying the distinctiveness of China from the rest of the world. The book is, then, constructed for this purpose. Modern and postmodern ideas of architecture from the West indeed have had great influence on Chinese architecture since the mid-20th century. But Chinese architecture also has its own trajectory based on Chinese history, tradition and social circumstances, which design ideas reference and from which they are generated. China has seen huge changes in terms

of economic reform since the late 1970s – rapid economic growth and urbanisation, the rise of creative industries, along with the decline of cultural traditions. Some Chinese architectural practice in recent decades has tended to follow and reinforce these trends, while some have tended to reflect on, question and resist such changes. It is interesting and necessary to look at Chinese architectural practice in recent decades, and through this to gain a better understanding of China's distinctiveness.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my main supervisor, Professor Andrew Ballantyne, for his support throughout my PhD study. His guidance not only helped me in writing up the thesis but has had considerable influence on my later research. Moreover, my sincere thanks go to book proposal reviewers, both those who accepted and those who rejected it. Their comments were helpful to me in restructuring the book. I am also grateful to my colleagues and students, who have inspired my thoughts. Finally, my particular gratitude is owed to my family, who have supported me financially and spiritually throughout my research career.

Following rather than Altering: A Tectonic Method of Creation from Art to Architecture ¹⁹¹

A principle commonly applied in traditional Chinese arts, notably in handcrafts, painting and gardening, is that to make a new object based on old materials, one ought to follow rather than alter the original features of the old materials. It refers to the creation of new things based on existing circumstances with minimal alteration. Red Brick Art Museum, a rebuilt project based on an abandoned factory in Beijing, adopts this principle as its design concept. The idea of tectonics and building process are highlighted in the design concept. The concept is thus rooted in a design method that provides

¹⁹¹ Part of the content in this chapter was published in "To match and to generate: the way in which creation is born", *International Journal of Architecture, Arts and Applications*, 2017, 3(1), pp. 1-10.

a way of creating new things by exploiting what is already there. The principle is considered to have an origin in the Yin–Yang concept. The features of the existing circumstances and the imagery of the ideal space together make up a Yin–Yang unit. When Yin and Yang balance, a new space will be created.

Pragmatic aesthetics emphasises a sort of dynamic aesthetic experience – art exists not only in static artefacts displayed in galleries but also in the dynamic way in which it is created. Red Brick Art Museum is a good example of this idea in practice. The beauty does not lie in the form but comes from the generative process through which the built environment is given form. The purpose of this scenario is to examine the way in which the architect approaches the consequence (the built form) by applying this principle of art creation. The design concept can be understood to have been borrowed from traditional Chinese aesthetics and at the same time to respond to the notion of pragmatic aesthetics. The design concept suggests a method of making, a practical process of approaching a consequence, and thus tends to link conceptual meaning with pragmatic meaning.

The principle of art creation

Following the object's original features does not mean treating its form as unchangeable. The essence of "following" is about generating new things according to the current circumstances of an object. Circumstance both restricts and inspires new creation, and that new creation might be the outcome that is most suitable for that particular circumstance. If the circumstance is Yin, the imagery conceived in the artist's mind is Yang. Having Yin and Yang brought into interaction, the artistic creation tears down the boundary between concept and practice. No abstract architectural form is preconceived before reaching actual practice. Concept should be established as a means of making the best use of existing situations. Once the imagery and particular circumstances are in balance, a new creation will come into being. A painting depends on the painting materials and what the artist wants to express; a poem depends on language and the poet's emotions; and gardening depends on the existing conditions of the site and what the function of the garden will be. When painting materials match the artist's anticipated expression, when the words match the poet's emotion, when the conditions of the site match the anticipated function of the garden, new creations will be born.

A particular way of painting in the Song dynasty (AD 960–1279) involved beginning not with drawing materials but from the making of broken walls. An artist would first ask a workman to make uneven broken walls by throwing mud randomly onto the wall. After the wall was completely dry, a sheet of silk paper would be laid on the wall surface and the painting would be ready to begin. The artist would use paintbrush and ink to make a rubbing onto the silk paper of the random and irregular patterns that had been produced. Once the ink was dry, more detailed images would be created on the basis of these random, irregular patterns. The rubbing from the broken wall would make the drawing look more organic.¹⁹² Parts of the pattern might look like mountain peaks, and the artist would add a pavilion on the top; parts might look like streams, and the artist would draw small boats; and other parts might look like large tree trunks and the artist would draw in the treetops.

The random, irregular ink patterns on silk paper were pre-circumstances. What artists needed to do was to conceive images in their mind based on these pre-circumstances and use them as the basis for their drawings on the paper.

When the conceived images matched the pre-circumstances, the painting would be complete, just as when Yin interacts with Yang new things are born. Therefore, in this special method of painting, artists' creations followed the patterns randomly produced by the broken wall. Artists aimed to find the best ways to make use of these patterns. There was no idea of the final creation before the preparation of the wall. Ideas were inspired by unexpected and disordered patterns. The original features of the ink patterns were not altered – the painting was completed in the process of balancing the original patterns and the imagery.

One artist of the Song dynasty, Song Di, summarised three steps for this method of painting.¹⁹³ First, the artist needs to observe the wall carefully. Observing the broken wall, one could discover mountains and streams, similar to mountains and streams in the natural landscape. Second, the artist has to imagine what the drawing could be like. This is the step of matching original conditions and imagery – artists conceive ideal images in their minds according to the images on the broken wall. The last step is to produce a painting based on these ideal images that the artist has conceived.

192 Dong (2012), *Broken Walls and Ruins* (in Chinese), p. 13.

193 Ibid., p. 14.

In the book *Yuanye*, Ji Cheng introduces some simple key points for gardening.¹⁹⁴ The main steps of gardening echo Song Di's method of painting. The first step is to examine the basic conditions of the site – terrain, trees and plants, existing stones and water. The second step is, again, to picture possible images. Some areas may have to be raised to represent a hill, while some may have to be lowered to reveal a valley; some areas may require a rock to be added, and some may require a pavilion. The last step is the construction of the garden according to the imagery the gardener has in mind. Once this imagery is completely matched with the conditions of the existing site, a new garden will take shape.

The making of utensils also conforms to this principle. Poet Bai Juyi described this method in one of his poems, "Genius Seems Like Clumsiness": "by making the vessel follow the shape of the material, the genius will be found inside".¹⁹⁵ In Bai's view, skilled creation ought not to be an absolute concept arising out of nothing; rather, it ought to take the existing conditions of materials as a reference point. This

seems plain and clumsy, he suggested, but following the original features does not equate simply to yielding completely to existing circumstances. Rather, it aims to achieve "twice the yield, half the work" – the "genius" in creation. According to Bai's poem, there are also three steps for making utensils, corresponding to those for painting and gardening. Analogous to Song Di's wall observation and Ji Cheng's site examination, the first step in making utensils is material investigation. Following analysis of the existing circumstances of the material, the second step is, again, to conceive ideal imagery based on the requirements of the utensil and then to match these with the material conditions. For example, when the carpenter finds a piece of timber that is straight on one side and curved on the other, he might find that the straight part is probably suitable for making a beam for a building, and the curved part could be used as a wheel for a carriage.¹⁹⁶ The last step, again, is to work on the utensil and bring the imagery to life in it. Beam and wheel are made by following the character of the timber instead of changing the existing features. According to Bai Juyi, the gist of image

194 Cheng Ji was a Chinese landscape garden artist in the 17th century. His book *Yuanye* 園冶 was the first scholarly work dealing with landscape gardening in Chinese history, and it still acts as a manual for those who are interested in classical Chinese gardens and the study of the art of Chinese landscape gardening.

195 Ibid., p. 17.

196 Dong (2013a), "Designing According to Circumstances – Design for the Red Brick Contemporary Art Museum" (in Chinese), p. 50.

matching is “following rather than altering the object’s original features”, while the ideal result of this matching is “twice the yield, half the work”.¹⁹⁷ The carpenter does not change any feature of the timber but makes best use of both characteristics of it, straight and curving. At the same time, he matches the existing features of the timber with the required qualities of a beam and a wheel, which achieves “twice the yield, half the work”.

If we bring this principle into architectural design, we might have a building that will similarly take into consideration the original conditions and result in “twice the yield, half the work”. Red Brick Art Museum is an attempt to incorporate this idea. It is a rebuilt project based on an old abandoned factory located in the north-eastern suburbs of Beijing. The rebuilt building is about 4,000 square metres and the project was accomplished in 2011.¹⁹⁸ Most of the exterior walls were built by piling up the red bricks, and there was no cutting or reshaping of any single brick. The designer, Dong Yugan, described the state of the factory building at the outset of the project as “simple, crude, and huge”.¹⁹⁹ There were almost no interior partition walls. Exterior walls were

exposed to the air with 6×6-metre openings arrayed in a line along two long walls; one of the walls faced the main street, the other facing an empty open space. These large openings meant that existing conditions were far from what is required for an exhibition building, which needs an adequate amount of interior wall space on which its art works can be hung. Above the simple steel-frame ceiling, there was a sunroof with strip-shaped skylights, running from south to north. Although the sunroof provided good natural light, direct sunlight coming into the building could present a problem, potentially damaging some exhibits.

Transforming exterior walls

Transforming exterior walls was a major difficulty of the project. How to make ingenious use of the existing walls was the key to applying the concepts of “following rather than altering the object’s original features” and “twice the yield, half the work”. Successive openings in the wall were the major problem, as art museums need closed exhibition walls and diffused light. In order to create continuous exte-

197 Ibid.

198 Dong (2015), *Heaven and Paradise* (in Chinese), p. 96.

199 Dong (2012), *Broken Walls and Ruins* (in Chinese), p. 22.

rior walls, the designer did not want to simply fill in the old openings or build new walls to straightforwardly replace the old structure.²⁰⁰ Since the designer had decided to have a large exhibition hall in the middle of the old steel structure, there would have been a 5-metre-wide corridor between the old exterior wall and the hall. However, 5 metres' width is not enough to display art works that are more than 5 metres high: the ideal distance for viewing an art work is 1.2 to 2 times as far away as the height of the work. Therefore, a contradiction arose. If the designer had simply compressed the middle exhibition hall to make enough room for the corridor, it would reduce the space available to it. The corridor and the main hall were fighting for space. Finally, the designer came to a solution without altering any exterior walls.

A series of right-angled triangles were created, zigzagging through the old openings. The legs of the triangles meet both outside and inside the old walls. As the legs of all triangles leaned against the edges of the walls between the large openings, they formed triangular chambers in the corridor enclosed by the legs and the old walls, which perfectly enclosed steel columns and water pipes next to those

walls. Triangular spaces were also formed among the legs and old openings, which would serve as display spaces (Figure 14, Figure 15). However, these were not the only advantages offered by the zigzag triangular walls; more benefits were generated unexpectedly.

First, the display space in each old open area was doubled by adding the triangles, compared with simply adding flat walls to fill in the openings. This benefit was especially important for an exhibition building. Second, the triangular spaces appear along the corridor repetitively, providing a better interior spatial experience than flat walls. Triangular spaces help both to maintain the visual continuity of the corridor and to keep individual triangular spaces semi-independent. Third, the triangular walls expanded the sight distance of the corridor from 5 metres to nearly 7 metres, which meets the standard for a good exhibition space and generates a comfortable bodily experience. Fourth, the triangular displaying spaces provided sufficient room for skylights. These could be installed on flat roofs over the displaying spaces, which would then be invisible from outside, instead of cutting openings into exterior walls. The skylights alone are able under normal conditions to provide

200 Dong (2013b), "Image and Setting – Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing" (in Chinese), p. 65.

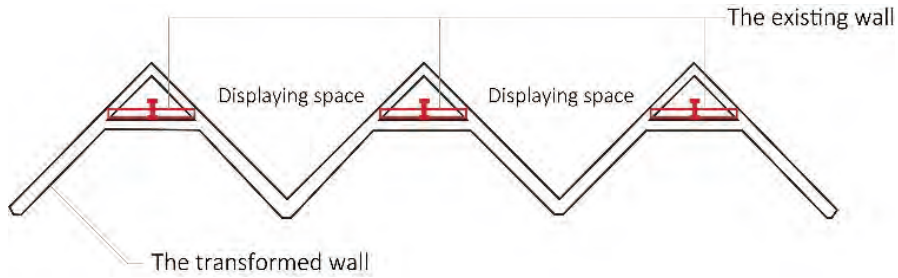


Figure 14. The transformation of the exterior wall (Image: Author)



Figure 15. Exterior wall of Red Brick Art Museum (Photo: Author)

sufficient light for exhibitions without the assistance of artificial lighting.²⁰¹

The old walls and the series of old openings were retained completely and made use of. The old walls between the openings were retained as exterior walls, and also played a role together with legs of the triangles in forming triangular chambers to cover up the steel columns and water pipes. The newly built zigzagging walls, going back and forth through the openings, left the old exterior walls unaltered, and generated more exhibition space, greater sight distance and better light quality, as well as a better spatial experience.

All of these features represent the idea of “following rather than altering the object’s original features”. The renovation aimed to meet the requirements of an exhibition building while relying on the existing materials at the site in their current state, and in the process achieved a number of unexpected benefits. The aim of resolving a pragmatic problem acts as a starting point, but as a scheme proceeds more advantages are subsequently discovered. These advantages may all depend on one single adjustment. If one adjustment is implemented and more advantages are brought about, it might be considered an

ingenious approach, one that achieves “twice the yield, half the work”. The interaction between the old walls and the new zigzag walls in the Red Brick Art Museum can be seen as analogous to the interaction between Yin and Yang. The old wall is the Yin while the newly built wall is the Yang. The imagery of the new building was generated based on the aim of balancing the existing conditions with the new requirements. The function of interaction is to generate in such a way that the interaction between old and new walls brings forth new conditions, and thus the new building façade was formed and “twice the yield” was achieved.

The form of the façade was not designed in advance to meet visual expectations before entertaining any pragmatic considerations: it was formed in the process of dealing with functional problems. The form proved suitable in this case, although it might not be suitable if it were borrowed and applied in any other case, because of the process in this particular project of “following rather than altering”. It is the product of the interaction between the particular circumstances of the original site and the designer’s imagination. The form of the façade in this case was the consequence of the building process rather than the purpose of design.

201 Dong (2012), *Broken Walls and Ruins* (in Chinese), p. 24.

Square Hall and Circular Hall

Through the main east entrance, there is a main foyer area which is an area for mixed use, a hall for free events (the Square Hall), a room where press conferences can be held or temporary exhibitions displayed (the Circular Hall), a small lecture hall for meetings and presentations, a bar and a reception room. There is also a loft over the main entrance foyer for offices. In general, within this 9-metre-high steel structure, there were two ways to create more space: digging down to create space beneath, and expanding into the upper space.²⁰² The renovation relies both on the existing shelter and on the overlapping of multiple imageries of the new place, with the aim of achieving “twice the yield” with “half the work”.²⁰³

The small lecture hall required artificial light and good soundproofing, and thus it was better to place it underground. It is sunk 3 metres below ground level; because of the strong pressure of underground water at the site, this was the lowest level it could reach. But the architect was concerned that a 3-metre height was not enough for a lecture hall and he

decided to raise its roof by 1.2 metres above the ground floor. After paving it with red bricks, the resulting 1.44-metre-high platform proved well suited as a stage for performance. Hence, the architect aimed to make this brick platform serve as a space in which free events can be staged as well as a huge staircase linking the ground floor and the loft.²⁰⁴ It is simply called the Square Hall for its shape (Figure 16).

However, as the platform was over a metre above ground level, it raised the question of how to get visitors to make their way up onto the exhibition stage. The designer noticed that visitors are apt to be attracted by previous visitors,²⁰⁵ and so they explored ways of placing openings in the closed exhibition wall to enable sight communication between those outside the stage and those who had already entered. Instead of laying bricks all the way from the foot to the top, the wall was suspended over the platform, leaving a continuous horizontal gap all around the platform, exactly at eye level for visitors standing on the ground floor. This horizontal slot ingeniously eliminated the closure of the Square Hall and allowed

202 Dong (2015), *Heaven and Paradise* (in Chinese), p. 101.

203 Dong (2013b), “Image and Setting” (in Chinese), p. 64.

204 Dong (2012), *Broken Walls and Ruins* (in Chinese), p. 28.

205 *Ibid.*, p. 30.



Figure 16.
Circular Hall and Square Hall
(Photo: Author)

sight interaction between it and the main foyer (Figure 17). The final decision for the height of the slot was 40 cm, as this was the maximum height that could be created without needing guardrails. The moving

feet of visitors already in the Square Hall can be seen through the 40-cm-high slot between the wall and the platform. This draws attention and attracts others to go up into the Square Hall too.



Figure 17. Way into the Square Hall (Photo: Author)

How to access the lecture hall from the main foyer turned out to be another challenge. A space was created in the middle of the main foyer which sinks to 1.26 metres below the ground floor, leading to the lecture hall 3 metres below. The sunken Circular Hall is enveloped by a circular wall at loft level and is illuminated by natural light through the roof and through the hollow surrounded by the circular wall.²⁰⁶ This sunken space functions as a press conference room and a space for temporary exhibitions. The steps leading down can be used for seating or as a children's playground. Opposite these steps, there is a brick rostrum next to the Square Hall, 0.9 metres higher than the ground floor. The space between the raised rostrum and the lowered Circular Hall is enough to let people access the small lecture hall hidden underneath the Square Hall. Thus, the sunken space also functions as a staircase linking the ground floor to the small lecture hall.

It seems the architect did not attempt to think about the scheme from a macro perspective, but rather focused on problems one by one and came up with individual bespoke solutions for them before reaching the final form of the interior space. The requirements for artificial light and sound insulation for the small

lecture hall led to the first solution – that is, putting the room 3 metres below the ground floor. After putting the lecture hall underground, another problem arose – the interior height. However, after the ceiling of the lecture hall was raised, this in turn caused access difficulty for the Square Hall; thus, a suspended wall was designed. Furthermore, access to the small lecture hall was required from the main foyer, and a sunken space thus came to serve as a staircase. The sunken space can also function as a press conference area and sometimes host a cafe as well.

The challenges the architect came across resulted in the design process being updated. Each solution to a certain problem generated new problems and new opportunities. The architect always took the latest circumstances into consideration. Therefore, the imagery conceived in the architect's mind changed to match the changing circumstances throughout the design; and the form of the interior space continued to change until all problems were solved.

The concept of the design was to seek out problems that existed in the building conditions and work out solutions based on opportunities that were also inherent

206 Ibid., p. 32.

in these building conditions. In addition, each solution has two or more roles. The platform of the Square Hall functions as the ceiling of the small lecture hall and the linkage between the loft level and the ground floor, besides acting as a public exhibition space. Similarly, the Circular Hall is a place for press conferences, and is also a linkage between the small lecture hall and the ground floor, a seating area and occasionally a cafe. These multi-functional solutions, again, point to the principle of “twice the yield, half the work”.

Church-like courtyard

There is plenty of open space on the north side of the museum. This is also a part of the project, comprising a small, narrow space on the northeast side and a bigger space on the northwest side. Landscape designers have been involved in the design since 2008.

The design of this large courtyard north of the museum also observed the principle of “following rather than altering the object’s original features”. The design of each object tends to approach certain imagery according to the existing conditions. The imagery relates either to the experience

of moving around landscapes or to the intention to resolve actual problems. The designer realised the mismatch between the building and the courtyard when he turned to courtyard design, which he partly attributed to the separate phases of design of the courtyard and the building – the courtyard design came second after the building design. He felt that the opportunity to establish good interactions between building and courtyard had been missed.²⁰⁷ Therefore, when he started out to design the courtyard, he tried to take references other than the building itself as starting points.

The small area northeast of the building connected the large northwest garden and the art museum. It is a narrow space, but it had to have a 4-metre-wide fire lane and a 12×12-metre turnaround space for a fire engine. The architect began by looking for solutions to meet fire safety requirements. The 4-metre-wide fire lane could possibly be located outside of the building, along the north exterior wall, while the 12×12-metre space for the fire engine could be placed at the east end of the lane. However, the east–west fire lane rendered the rest of the space much narrower. Thus, narrowness became a strong characteristic of this place. The architect treated it as “an original feature

207 Ibid., p. 38.

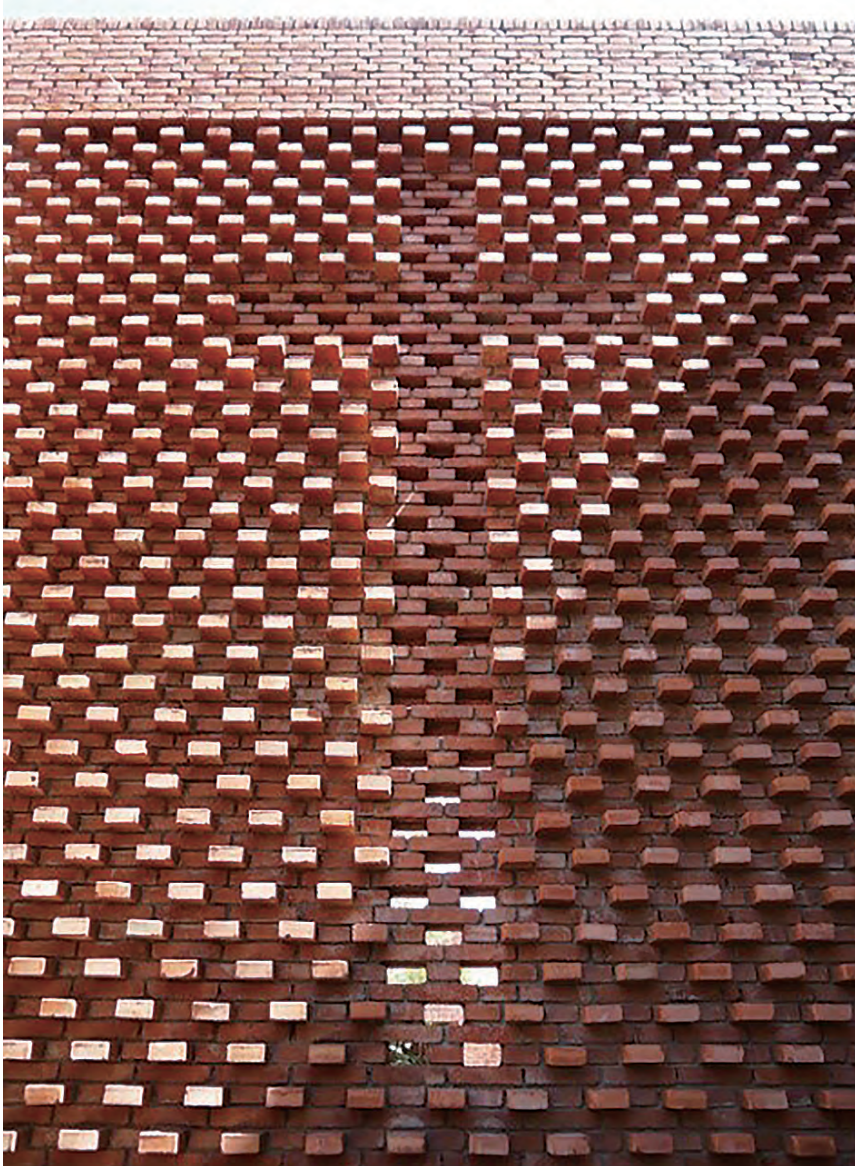


Figure 18. Cross on wall of church courtyard (Photo: Author)

of the object”, attempting to follow and reinforce the sense of narrowness instead of altering it.

The traditional basilica plan suggested itself to the architect, since the sense of narrowness of its space could be possibly adapted to the character of the site. Hence, a small courtyard reminiscent of a church nave was designed to the north of the fire lane. The basilica roof was omitted from the plan, and it became a church-like courtyard. A circular shrine was designed at the east end of the space, and a wisteria was enshrined there instead of a figure of worship. At the west end of the courtyard, opposite the shrine, a 6-metre-high wall was set up. Standing right in front of the high wall, a cross shape appears (Figure 18). The cross was formed by drawing selected bricks out of the wall; when the light comes through from behind it, an observer standing opposite will see the hollow cross. As the architect claimed, the cross was intended to provide a sense of church, as a compensation for the loss of the roof.²⁰⁸

This courtyard occasionally serves as an outdoor cafe, extending the capacity of the indoor one. There are a number of non-Chinese residents living nearby; therefore, the idea of a basilica-style

courtyard was also a means of attracting more foreign visitors. To reduce the sense of grandeur typical of churches and introduce a more human scale, the side walls were set at only 3.3 metres' height, and brick tabletops were added to window sills at below 1 metre height. In addition, large trees were planted in the church courtyard, which were visible through the windows and would also help to shade the cafe during the summer.

The brick tabletops on the window sills to the south were planned as display plinths for sculptures. Opposite the south wall across the fire lane, the areas between the triangular masses outside the north exterior wall of the museum were earmarked for the planting of more trees, set in a series of square tree grates. These tree grates could be used as display plinths for sculptures as well. Two rows of displayed sculptures along the two sides of the fire lane were intended to achieve the imagery of an open-air sculpture gallery, but unfortunately the tree grates were removed and this imagery was partly lost.

Therefore, everything worked to conform to the conditions as they stood. The architect took the fire safety requirements as a starting point, which further increased the sense of narrowness of the existing space.

208 Ibid., p. 41.



Figure 19. Bridge connecting the museum and the roof of the previous church courtyard (Photo: Author)

Then, the architect put this spatial character to use by adding a basilica-style courtyard. On the one hand, the basilica plan was properly adapted to this long, narrow space; on the other hand, the basilica's spatial form expressed and reinforced the original character of the space. However, as no other structure was allowed to be

built besides the museum, the roof was removed and it became a basilica-style courtyard; following this, a cross was designed in the high brick wall in order to enhance the sense of a church. This courtyard was then planned as an ideal place for an outdoor cafe. As a result of being a cafe in everyday use, the symbolic charac-



Figure 20. Newly-built V-shaped roof above the lecture hall (Photo: Author)

ter of church was virtually erased, and the architect increased the sense of life and liveliness by means of plants and human-scale brick furniture. Finally, the architect found a way to achieve the imagery of a sculpture gallery with the help of brick tabletops and tree grates on the other side. As with the design of the museum,

the architect's creation was generated on the basis of previous conditions, each step being determined according to circumstances at that moment. The creation was updated as the temporal circumstances changed. None of the creations was self-evident; everything was justified by the pre-circumstances that shaped it.

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*"Xi Ye's careful and rigorous analysis in **Conceptual and Pragmatic** establishes a basis from which to explore architecture, paying attention to what it means to the designers and the users of buildings. The meaning can shift not only away from the architect's intentions but also from one group of users to another. The groups could be culturally different because they are separated by space or by time. With her carefully nuanced approach, we see a range of buildings with fresh eyes. The projects that are included here are compelling as architecture, and Xi Ye helps us to see why they speak to us and how we can be moved by them."*

Andrew Ballantyne, Professor, Newcastle University

"Xi Ye's fascinating new book addresses the intrinsic tension in the act of architectural design, between the designer's personal, perhaps idiosyncratic 'design concept' and experience and needs of a building's eventual users. While this relationship is explored in the context of architectural theory, it would be resonant with everyday experiences of those who practise design. For the novice designer, for whom these questions will surely loom large, the book illuminates the early steps in her own path through design practice. For more established designers, the diverse, if not exhaustive relationships drawn between the ideal and the practical will provide clarifying moments for pause, reflection and inspiration for their own practice. Finally, the projects analysed provide, to western readers, a selective but eye-opening showcase of the inventiveness and poetry of contemporary Chinese architecture."

Dr. Louie Sieh, City University of Hong Kong

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Xi Ye is an academic at the Faculty of Humanities and Arts at Macau University of Science and Technology. Her research focuses on architectural and cultural criticism. Her recent publications include 'Reviving a sense of poetry: assessing Wang Shu's contemporary design practice' (**Architectural Research Quarterly**, 2022). Xi Ye holds a Master of Arts in Urban Design from Cardiff University, UK and a PhD in architecture from Newcastle University, UK.

Conceptual and Pragmatic explores the tension between architects' intellectual ideals and expressions and the everyday experience of architecture and its practice. The book alternates between the subjectivity and sensory experiences of the user, including its relationship to popular culture, tectonics, and vernacular architecture. Reflecting on the processes of concept-making and the cultural meaning of architecture, and their impact on architectural design, Xi Ye evaluates the influence of Western architecture on Chinese architectural practice and the tension of the former with Chinese cultural traditions and social conditions.

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