Conference: Impact, Conditions, Methods

For the conference’s first subtheme Impact, presenters considered how architecture centres might create value, achieve impact, and contribute to positive change in a world where less than 3% of buildings are created by architects. Conditions examined how the organizing and financing of architecture institutions is affected by larger economic fluctuations, and how different forms of partnerships and interaction with various stakeholders are played out. Methods discussed architecture centres’ presentation and dissemination strategies, as well as the effectiveness of participatory involvement of the audience and local community.

Building is about relationships between people.

Gregory Dreicer, CAF

In the ensuing discussions, skepticism surfaced regarding the uncritical acceptance of “progress” and growth. A sense of crisis and loss of “gravitas” in architecture’s and the architect’s general influence in the built environment raised the question of alternative “forms of gravity” propagated by new relational modes of knowledge and interaction. Architecture as authentic destination for moments of solidarity in experience was reinforced, as was the priority to “think out of the box” to convey the relevance of architecture especially to decisions makers, and active agenda-setting with architecture as protagonist. Among the wide-ranging presentations, certain contrasts and comparisons are highlighted below.

“Architecture is too important to be left to architects.”

Andrea Lepk (from Giamarlo De Carlo)

Architecture as Process

Gregory Dreicer from Chicago Architecture Foundation started by explaining how to have impact by treating “Architecture as Process”, as activities inseparable from everyone’s lives rather than as enigmatic aesthetic objects. Besides their notable documented architecture cruises that account for 70% of the CAF’s annual revenue, he also introduced CAF’s mission to inspire people to “discover for themselves why design matters”. CAF’s message that “building is about relationships between people” is illustrated by their pioneering participatory approaches in exhibitions like “City of Big Data”.

Architecture as Tactic

Larry Ng showcased how Singapore’s URA was “Curating the City” with its strategic planning and judicious resource management, delivering impressive achievements on liveability and sustainable growth benefitting the city-state’s residents. In contrast, Rick Bell from AIA New York Center for Architecture focused on “results” of public outreach, elaborating on programmes addressing health and social dimensions of design, or ones such as “Design as Activist” that bolster the civic spirit in design. Fellow New Yorker Eva Franch i Gilabert of Storefront for Art and Architecture persuasively voiced out the intellectual necessity of advancing more provocative positions to “inform, agitate and enact” as well as deploying unconventional tactics such as serving paella to attract diverse audience.

Architecture as Dedication

Ole Bouman (now curating Shenzhen’s Bi-city Biennale) recounted his deep involvement in the Netherlands Architecture Institute’s (NAI) remarkable makeover from being an introverted bastion to a welcoming civic space, while all the time cherishing the valuable autonomy of architecture as a distinct discipline. Bouman’s dedication to architecture at the NAI translated into numerous imaginative initiatives, with the Urban Augmented Reality (UAR) smartphone apps being the most technologically-enabled re-experiencing of architecture.
How do we take change to the streets? ... By talking about 'Design as Activist'...by doing something that pushes design to the forefront, within a very clear civic spirit ... we have half a chance to make something happen.

Rick Bell, AIA NY

In contrast, Francis Rambert from Paris’ Cité de l’architecture upheld quality exhibitions on urban architecture that blur boundaries, whereas Kieran Long from London’s Victoria & Albert Museum relies more on the presence of conventional artefacts including full scale models while adopting a multi-disciplinary curatorial approach.

Architecture and Independence

Michael Stevns of Siemens spoke about The Crystal in London as a large new-built facility to debate and exhibit sustainable urban solutions as well as connect the public with city decision makers globally. Such involvement of private corporations in architecture is presented as a viable way forward for innovative partnerships with business. Vitra Design Museum’s Marc Zehntner represented another type of independent institution, one which focuses on networking and cooperation with other private actors. Maarten Gielen of Rottors in Brussels is also an independent operator of critical practice. In his concluding keynote, he questioned the representational and discursive modalities of architecture institutions while reflecting on the constructedness of spectatorship in exhibitions. Gielen also brought up the nature of change and the question of “how institutions become drivers of change?”, an appropriate topic that was deliberated in the closing discussion.

Architecture Centres should lead rather than follow, by virtue of their contacts, knowledge and judgement ... they ought to be able to say this will be a good idea to discuss, or to make an exhibition of.

Paul Finch, CABE / WAF

Architecture for All

HKAC’s well-received presentation introduced its mission to communicate “Architecture for all” and the many aspects of outreach and engagement. Being Asia’s only representative of a self-initiated, non-profit organisation, there was much interest in HKAC’s bottom-up, opportunistic nature of operation, and its involvement of volunteers from grassroots to professionals. In particular, the HKAC’s project Centre-under-Flyover received affirmative attention as an ingenious approach to utilizing leftover land in the city. Announcing its presence on the world stage, HKAC also received copious constructive comments and ideas for its future – there is much to learn!

We have to learn a new way to speak to politicians ... to find the new position for the architect. Because the traditional idea of planning, urban design are all dead, they don’t work, they are too slow...

Pippo Ciorra, MAXXI Architettura

DAC’s success in establishing a real platform for exchange with the conference is thoroughly commendable, and one hopes that the genuine desire for follow-up discussions and collaborations that was expressed by all would eventually materialize, in the form of a second conference, or even a recurrent event.

We’ve got to be able to get that message from the politician to the person on the street ... If we are the safeguarders of our built environment as architects...

Angela Brady, RIBA President

*All photos courtesy Danish Architecture Centre and Line Juul Greisen.

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On Visions and Directions for the Department of Architecture at HKU - A Conversation with Prof. Weijen Wang

Hing-wah Chau

W = Prof. Weijen Wang, Head of the Department of Architecture, the University of Hong Kong; C = Hing-wah Chau, Registered Architect, Hong Kong

Review of Curriculum and Historical Development

C: Congratulations to your recent appointment as the Head of the Department of Architecture, the University of Hong Kong (HKU). As you have been teaching here for eighteen years, how would you review the curriculum and the historical development of the Department?

W: I think we should start the history of the Department from the post-war context of colonial Hong Kong. The Department was established then, like many other departments at the University of Hong Kong for educating elite professionals, such as medicine and engineering, or government officials. The urban and economic development of the colony in the 1950s demanded great supply of professionals in architecture serving the industry than those only few moved from London. When Prof. Eric Lyte was invited to chair the department in 1976, the earlier architectural educators at HKU like Gordon Brown, W. G. Gregory and others had established a good foundation for the school and introduced modern architectural traditions. Being probably one of the top schools in Asia, HKU architecture has already trained many good professionals like Jackson Wang in the earlier years, as well as the later generation like Rocco Yim and Anthony Ng.

There was no doubt Eric brought into the Department new educational ideas beyond the professional training, with new curricula that were already dominant in the US, including the overall concerns on the built environment, landscape and urban design, as well as aspects of social, cultural, history and theory. In addition to the establishment of Planning, Landscape and Urban Design Programs, Eric was also clearly aware of the future of Hong Kong and started his "China Project" in the mid-1970s. By bringing Vernacular and Chinese Architecture into the history teaching, he invited active architects like Chak-kong Chang, who had worked for Water Gropius and was familiar with Chinese traditions, to join the Faculty. Eric later started the faculty exchange program with Tongji and Tsinghua during the 1980s. He also clearly had "Asian Architecture" as a bigger project in mind, networking HKU with architects in the region like Tao Ho in Hong Kong, William Lim and Liu Taiage in Singapore, Fumihiko Maki in Tokyo, and actively participated in many institutions and events in the region like ArchAsia, NUS and AA Asia.

I joined HKU in 1984, three years before the handover, while Eric had been the Head and Chair Professor of the Department for more than a decade. The Department under Eric at that time was clearly one of the best architectural departments in Asia in terms of the quality of design teaching, staff's expertise, diversity and their multi-cultural backgrounds, resources of the school and supporting facilities, as well as its clear objective and teaching pedagogy. Being primary working as an architect in practice before I moved to Hong Kong, the teaching at HKU was a new experience to me. The new experience was not so much on the teaching itself, but on the fact that students were expected to have comprehensive knowledge of building technology than the schools in the US did. Compared to many of the North American architectural education like Berkeley, studio teaching had been mostly focused on developing design concept at a schematic level, so the teaching here was different from what I experienced before.

I was first assigned to teach Year 3 design studio, which was exactly your year. The first semester was not much surprise to me as it was about generating ideas based on the given program and site context. But in the second semester of your BAAS final project, probably the second half of the semester, the design scheme had to be somewhat settled and students had about one month left to refine their design concepts in order to develop the project into a set of comprehensive drawings integrated with other technical and functional requirements. Apart from that, there was a separate assignment requiring students to produce a set of conceptual working drawings, including structural framing plans, building services and landscape drawings.

Also coming from academic backgrounds in the US and UK including Princeton and AA, I presume Eric's idea on architectural education had also been re-framed after he joined HKU. By having bachelor students to acquire knowledge at both levels of architectural concepts and technical skills within three years, undergraduate curriculum was not only a liberal art education major in architecture, but also became part of the professional training to enable them ready for their year-out intern. Under Eric's leadership, HKU tried to achieve two things: to train students with technical competence similar to most European technical universities, such as ETH Zurich, TU Vienna or TU Berlin; and at the same time, to encourage students to develop architectural concepts embracing larger contextual issues in relation to arts, history and culture, similar to many North American leading architectural schools at the time. Theory was mostly taught at the postgraduate level, through different modes of engagement such as seminar courses and joint studios with other universities and participation in architectural competitions.

C: Any major difference of students' works or teaching approach before and after the handover in 1997?

W: In general, the search for the cultural identity of Hong Kong before and after 1987 has been clearly reflected in many topics of student's theses projects, ranging from the condition of high-density metropolis to the urban vernacular of Mong Kok, as well as urban architecture in Shek Kip Mei and Sham Shui Po. Some topics, probably, have been repeated several times, such as the study of Hong Kong illegal façades or urban renewal at To Kwa Wan. Those types of searching for local identity can become a strong momentum for the Department, but at the same time, this can also be a potential dead-end if fewer new ideas and methods were brought into the study. However, this identity gives students a sort of confidence and a cultural expectation about "Made in Hong Kong", which could be very positive if developed well.

When I look back, the educational objective and teaching pedagogy established by Eric probably reached its high point in the late 1980s and early 1990s. On one hand it met the need of society and profession in general; on the other hand, it enabled the Department to move beyond a British colonial architectural school towards an academically and intellectually active school in the region with a high international standard. Eric put together the technical competence of the UK and Europe as well as his interest in history and theory, enriched by his academic experience in North America. He also brought in to this place a very clear agenda of making HKU with the architectural knowledge of both East and West. The preparation of HKU partnership with China orchestrated by Eric, and the active participation of HKU in China's architectural education reform before the 1987 also established the Department as a key player in the region.

Eric also acknowledged the importance of establishing strong networks with the professionals, not only to gain support for the accreditation and acquiring donations, but also to bring knowledge from the professionals into teaching. Eric supported his teachers engaging practice like Patrick Lau and Barry WU, and also recruited a group of architects who came to Hong Kong before 1997, including those who were involved in the Hong Kong Bank project, such as Naoori Matsuda and Peter Koo. He also invited young architects in town interested in pursuing academic career to join such as David Lung, as well as the landscape architect, CK Wong and later Stephen Lau. Under his leadership, he built up a diversified staff profile...
brought back the Planning Department, he also conducted a major curriculum reform in the Department and restructured it into the current profile. With long experience as the Dean of Princeton’s School of Architecture, he knew very well how to mobilize resources and move forward for new agendas. Ralph set up clear directions, brought along with him a group of young and energetic new teachers from the east coast of the US and also UK, introduced new ideas and pedagogies to the teaching. He set up the Shanghai Study Centre, introduced the new tradition of thesis public review, moved the exchange program from MArch to the BAAS, upgraded the Faculty's facilities, especially computer fabrication labs and new CNC cutting machines as well as 3D printers.

For a school long been in a relatively comfortable position with little outside challenges, under Ralph’s leadership and initiatives, the new momentum for teaching was re-activated and competitions among teachers for studio teaching were soon built up. The curriculum of the Department, both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, have soon become compatible with many top architectural schools in the US and UK, and strong networks with many architectural schools internationally have quickly been established.

As part of the result of the university efforts for internationalization and the large number of quality student intake from China, the profile of students has significantly changed in the last ten years. Compared with twenty years ago, the Department now has a lot more diversified student backgrounds, and new possibilities available for them to choose to work for or study after graduation. Just looking at the number of applicants applying for our MArch program, we have more than 400 applicants this year, as compared with slightly over 100 applicants fifteen years ago. Another major impact to our education, and also enormous opportunities in front of us, as we all know, is the architectural development of China. Ralph unfortunately got sick a few years ago and since then, the Department had been under acting headship. Against this background, I now take up the position as the Department Head.

Strategic Position and Uniqueness

C: What is the strategic position of the Department? Can you share your visions as the new Department Head?

W: While maintaining to be competitive internationally having most updated knowledge and skills for architectural design, we distinguish ourselves from others by asking where we situate and what uniqueness we have in this particular time. The Department has moved beyond its colonial and postcolonial history, standing out from the global constellation of architectural academies by its unique vantage point in Asia - as an intellectual crossroads of East and West on issues of contemporary China. Unprecedented speed and scale of urban development in the 21st century’s China provide us opportunities to engage pressing issues for formulating strategies in design: social, urban, environmental, tectonic and technological. The question for us is, how are we able to take these challenges for formulating critical architectural discourses that we can offer to the world?

for the Department with teachers not only from Hong Kong, the UK and US, but also from East Asia and South Asia including Japan, China, Taiwan, Singapore, India, and the Philippines.

C: How about the Department after Eric and recently during the leadership of Prof. Ralph Lerner?

W: After Eric, Prof. Patrick Lau became the Department Head. Patrick, a former student of Eric, was an active architect in Hong Kong with a strong tie with the community and continued Eric’s direction on education before the arrival of Prof. Richard Fraw. Richard, with his teaching background at Bath and his long practice in Ove Arup, introduced methods of a much stronger technical integration into the design education. At that time, for Year 3 design studio, students were required to collaborate with structural and building services students from the Faculty of Engineering, to form a design team of four to five people over their studio projects for a comprehensive design resolution. There was clearly an effort trying to integrate architectural design with sustainable technology and building construction. After Richard, Prof. David Lung and Leslie Lu became the Department Head respectively. It was also during this period that the University adjusted its governance structure by giving more academic power and resources to each faculty and dean.

In 2005, Prof. Ralph Lerner was appointed as the new Dean of the Faculty and also the Chair Professor of the Department. Not only he restructured the entire Faculty and also
When twenty years ago Eric made an effort to build up connections with China for the future development of the Department, China was in her early stage of economic reform, and HKU had a role as the bridge between China and the West. Now, we are facing a completely different context in which Wang Shu has won the Pritzker Prize, and Chinese architects are building up their architectural discourse with large number of critical design works there. When I joined HKU in 1994, we had a joint-studio with Princeton and Tongji, taking Princeton to Shanghai to share our knowledge in China as a stepping stone for others to explore possibilities in China. Now, everyone flies directly to Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou, or Xiamen and Chongqing, setting up their own relationships. While claiming that we are at the crossroads of East and West, how do we re-position ourselves and what do we know about the architecture and urbanism of China? Rather than serving as a bridge or a liaison for collaboration in the past, the new city is not just an extension of the old city, but also a world? In addition to keep our curriculum very contemporary and compatible with our friends in Europe, we are producing similar products, only trying to keep up with the stylistic trend.

Looking at what is happening in China in terms of massive urbanization, construction, and design, how do we establish the uniqueness and true innovation of HKU in our teaching and research situated in this place and this time? How do we take advantage of being here in Hong Kong, as part of China, and also in one of the best internationally networked cities, with the most diversified talents of our staff and students? On the one hand, we should be aware of that, our city Hong Kong, together with PRD, is a dynamic city for density, diversity, and dynamic and efficiency in habitation and urbanization, and many of these skills are still waiting for us to explore; on the other hand, when the world is looking at China for development potentials, we should not miss our opportunities for taking the lead in this momentum. I think this is where we can strengthen our teaching for developing uniqueness and innovation.

**Research and Teaching Strengths**

C: What are the potential strengths in design research and teaching of the Department that you would like to encourage?

W: Following up what we said about building up our core knowledge in architecture and urbanism on China and Hong Kong, as part of a research university like HKU, we also have to face the challenge for demonstrating research outputs while our staff have to spend most of their time in the studio teaching. The most effective way and important resolution for the Department to do is to integrate research with design, and also with the design teaching. There are several areas for teaching-research in the Department in relation to our position in China and Hong Kong, including:

History and Theory: issues regarding the development of Chinese architecture and urban spaces under transformation, historical and contemporary, or issues that are important and directly related to current critical social and political conditions in China.

Sustainable Technology: issues regarding the development of new technologies and in construction, developing it into a unique research area as an integral part of the sustainability issue in the developing China. For example, how do we take opportunities to look at the construction situation in China, engaging contractors and sub-contractors in PRD, developing new skills in prefabrication, metal panels, materials for exploring unique sustainable design.

Urbanization and Habitation: with more than 100 million people in China moving from rural to urban in the last ten years and Chinese urban population has increased to 51 percent by end of 2011, what model of density and housing shall we adopt? What kind of habitation condition in cities of big and small could we develop, while to address issues on urban sustainability, legibility, privacy, and liveability?

Computation Design and Digital Fabrication, as well as Visual Communication: With many young teachers who have a strong background in this aspect, how do we keep the momentum and making it relevant to China's development?

C: When you mentioned the social and political engagement, you mean to facilitate the establishment of civil society through architecture...

W: We can participate in design while staying politically critical through architecture. For example, in our studio projects this summer, students are taking students to rural areas for fieldwork and helping the villagers to build new public spaces, or in the Chengpan village (長潭村) design research that I was involved. These are efforts of making slight twists and oppositions to the current model of development of China and China. What I am saying is that our research on history and theory can also take the momentum of our research on current Chinese pressing issues, such as social inequality and problematic distribution of resources and land planning. Facing China's top-down decision-making process in planning and design, how can we, as architects, work with local communities to take position and facilitating a more bottom-up design for villagers?

I am saying that architecture has to be multi-disciplinary and our design innovation is definitely not limited to the creation of building forms. Do we produce innovative forms only based on the possibility of our design tools — AutoCAD, 3D Max, Rhino, Grasshopper, or should we use these tools to address issues that we are concerned — materially and space, social, environmental and technological? Architectural design is something that can bring all these social, technical and environmental issues together for achieving a better city and a better human living condition.

C: How about sustainability and technology?

W: The way we look at technology now is inevitably integrated with sustainability. Rather than treating sustainability as a cliché, we would like to investigate, for example, how to do a better insulation, how to have a better water recycling system, and how to integrate scientific research with a design task. How can we design buildings that are nice-looking and, at the same time, sustainable?

China is probably a country that consumes the largest amount of energy and resources in construction. In what ways can we reduce energy consumption through innovative use of materials? Through understanding of the dominant construction mode in China, can we have some breakthroughs in the formation of building envelopes? Compared to the advanced and expensive green architecture in Germany and Switzerland, can we pursue alternative methods which are inexpensive, but innovative? This is what sustainability means to China and this is what HKU can contribute.

We are now recruiting two academic positions in structure and environmental design. We are recruiting the candidates to have engineering knowledge, and hopefully at the same time, understand architecture. They can be engineers working with architects for a long time, or the other way around, or ideally, they both. We would like to bridge the gap between design and technology on developing sustainability design.
In Europe, there are architectural schools that can provide both architectural and engineering training at the same time.

C: I think this is what the American architectural education has got lost for a while since post-modernism, partially due to an overwhelming theorization on architecture. On the other hand, there is a different architectural teaching mode in Europe, such as TU Berlin and ETH Zurich. These are good examples of architectural schools that give students a very solid background of technical knowledge, as well as a grounded preparation for their future design innovation. Our students have to equip themselves with a solid knowledge, not only to follow the norms of technical practice or be restricted by engineering constraints, but rather, to be on top of it in order to handle design tasks innovatively.

W: When we look at architecture in Portugal and Brazil, we immediately notice that designers there have very good engineering knowledge. The thickness of slabs they designed can be thin and elegant without secondary beams, and everything is well-integrated into a unified whole. If architects know how to build, it means the building form should have a better integration with structure and envelope and surfaces.

C: This recalls me the teaching pedagogy of Yung Ho Chang when he started the Graduate School of Architecture at Peking University. He required all first year students to participate in actual construction process: to calculate structure, purchase materials and to build in full scale.

W: I agree and I think it is a good way to think about design: how to build it? Although I have geological and engineering background, I received a typical American architectural education. At that time, I took those technical courses at a relatively passive way although I could pass the examination very easily since I could do structural calculations well. However, at school we tend to get fascinated by courses of history and theory, as well as political, cultural and contextual issues, but not so much of considering architectural design as a material based issue. I am now looking at architecture very different from back then.

One important thing we will now pay a lot more attention is to re-establish our students' ability to be able to layout a good plan, which shows their basic understanding on function, circulation, structure, construction, composition, and also basic human comfort. Students are now mostly designing building massing and space through Rhino and assume plan is only the result of their massing exercise. If we human beings are still going to walk around in the space horizontally with our feet, they are still required to have the ability to plan the space through a beautiful floor plan.

W: Apart from history and theory, techniques and construction, urbanization and habitation, sustainability and technology, are there other areas of strengths to be reinforced?

C: Of course. Architecture Computation and Digital Fabrication have developed very rapidly in the last twenty years. I hope to see our teachers and students, being here in Hong Kong and close to China, are able to design something unique by using the capability of shops nearby. Digital fabrication should not merely be limited to cutting playwoods by digital machines and glue them together for installation. We would like to push forward by using softwares for the design of real materials, such as steel, concrete and fibre-glass. And also, how can we use parametric methods to enable our design for better choices for shading and ventilation in high-density housing. In addition to exploring their geometric possibilities or formalistic as simulations.

Another area is Visual Culture. We have wonderful classes to teach students how to draw, how to put materials together and how to organize visual elements for communication and generating architectural design. However, it is also a discipline that should be developed into a research area, and in addition to skills, students can also have a broader knowledge on visual art. Contemporary design practice is no longer limited to hand drawings, sketches and physical models, but also inevitably involves the use of computer softwares for editing films and producing multimedia presentations.

W: Of course, this has always been an important component of our teaching and we will certainly continue. In addition to have China and Asia as the main content in one of the History and Theory of Architecture courses, we are also having a joint program with Tianjin University for an annual Summer Study Trip for Historical Chinese Architecture to different places in China. For myself, the transformation of historical building typology has always been one of my design interests. The study of historical architecture through measured drawings of historical buildings was a basic training for architects in China in the past, for developing their material sensitiveness and understanding of culture contexts. In my view, vernacular architecture is very much related to notions of modern architecture for its functional clarity, sensible and rational resolution using available materials and resources. This is also related to craftsmanship, materials and ways of doing things, which were also the foundation of the Bauhaus.

C: How about the elective postgraduate program?

W: In the past students were required to specialize in architectural management and professional practice, apart from history and theory as well as technology and computer-aided design.

C: This is a good question. We are now under a curriculum reform for MArch program. In addition to courses related to Professional Practice covering building codes and planning guidelines, we are also adding knowledge on sustainable design and construction communication - to the curriculum, as a theory course on modern and contemporary architectural discourses. We do not require students to identify their majors in particular areas as we think MArch is part of the general design training for an architect. However, I would like to reframe and reinforce the strengths of several research disciplines in our MArch program: History and Theory, Urbanization and Habitation, Sustainability and Technology, as well as Computation and Digital Fabrication. We like to identify Urbanism and Habitation from the area of History and Theory as a separate discipline, as we think it is an increasing important issue now and here. Rather than selecting one special focus, each student is encouraged to take electives from different areas because a broader knowledge can help them develop their design expertise.

W: How about students' participation in design competitions? Are they still required to participate in MArch Year 1 like we did many years ago?

C: We always encourage students to participate in design competitions and we are continuing winning student competitions. They are encouraged to do on their own or use their studio works to submit for competition entries. However, we do not plan our MArch design studios only based on design competitions.

At graduate level, each design studio is expected to have its clear topic and issues of concern, an objective and pedagogy of teaching, providing certain knowledge and skills for students to learn, strengthening their design capacities through research and design exploration. If we simply take a brief of a design competition and require students to work on for the whole semester, I think it is questionable if students end up with less research and use half of the semester time for presentation. This may be good to train students for preparing competitions when they work in the office later, but may not be the best way to use up their valuable two or three studio semesters within their MArch curriculum.

If there is a good competition topic, I would have no objection if a teacher wants to use it as a studio exploration and generate the final output. However, I will be a bit skeptical about using competition as a means of teaching by requiring students to participate and only selecting the best students to form teams aiming at win competitions. It certainly has its reasons in the past to mobilize the whole year of students to participate in competitions but our conditions have been changed. Participating and winning competitions may be good to some students, but not necessarily be preferable to all students. We need to have sufficient diversity in design education.

C: How about the existing teamwork system for MArch final year students to prepare their theses? Will this labour-intensive tradition in collaboration with junior students continue?

W: We understand the issue and potential problems involved, but we also acknowledge the benefit of such practice as a tradition. It is also a way for students to learn how to organize teamwork, how to allocate resources and assign responsibilities in presentation. In a way, I see this as a good exercise for professional practice which is about management of a design team. Under Glenn Murcutt, who basically works on his own without any supporting staff throughout most of his projects, otherwise, architects normally has to learn how to work as a team. Therefore, this tradition may continue, but we will moderate it so that every student can have relatively compatible amount of extra work support, and the helpers are properly credited on their panels.
Collaborations and Joint Studios

C: How about the collaborations between HKU and other architectural schools in Hong Kong, Mainland China and other countries, such as joint studios?

W: We keep the tradition of having close relations with many institutions in China and other places. This year, we have research and teaching collaboration with Tsinghua, Tongji, South China UST, Chongqing, Harbin… and also AA, Columbia and Taiwan. We also have annual student exchange programs for BAAS students with MIT, Princeton, ETH, TU Vienna…

W: We always encourage joint-studio but it is mostly pending on the initiative of each studio teacher. We still have yearly joint studios with Columbia and also encourage teachers to have this kind of collaboration in other studios in a diversified manner. Teachers with their own networks are encouraged to develop design studios with other institutions, whether in Europe, North or South America, Africa or different parts of Asia. In recent years, we had joint studios with Harvard, Yale and Princeton, but I think this should not be limited to architectural schools in North America. We would like to open it up to other places for sharing research interests and concern issues. I would like to see our students to have studios in Turkey, Mongolia or maybe Kenya in the near future.

I think if we only feel good about setting up joint studios with top universities in the US, this reflects a mentality of lacking confidence. We should really have ambitions to outreach our study to a bigger world. Of course when we collaborate with good universities, we are also making ourselves compatible, but that is only one way of doing it and we should try multiple ways.

C: The design studio of “1K House” of MIT was related to affordable housing and the first 1K House has been erected in Sichuan in 2011.

W: That is certainly a fresh new angle to start thinking about design. That is also because Yang Ho at MIT has confidence in his own teaching agenda.

As we discussed earlier, the situation today for HKU is very different from fifteen years ago. Universities in North America no longer need to use Hong Kong as a stepping stone to knock the door of China. We should have our own significance so people would like to collaborate with us, either in Hong Kong or in Mainland China.

C: How about the collaboration with other architectural schools in Hong Kong?

W: I myself have just as many good friends in Chinese University (CUHK) as in HKU at a personal level, and I am totally open to any collaboration on teaching and research, studio review or even an exchange of teachers. It is totally healthy for some teachers at HKU to teach at CUHK or the other way round when opportunities open.

Symposia, Public Lectures and Publications

C: Any plan for symposia in the near future?

W: We are planning one Housing China 2020 symposium in the coming May. High density Housing is one of the major design issues to be explored in Hong Kong as well as in Mainland China. Other than accepting the current practice, how can we raise critical issues to challenge the norms and to move forward to something innovative or of better quality? With a large number of rural population to be urban population in China, what models of density and type do we adopt? Is Hong Kong the model for China? If not, what options do we have?

Housing design is somehow bounded by constraints and has to be grounded to the reality of tight and efficient residential units, their clustering and circulation systems, negotiating public and private spaces rather than merely a formal exercise. In this forthcoming symposium, we would like to start with a study of history and theory of housing typologies in Europe, China and Hong Kong. We will bring in architects from Europe like Winy Mass of MVRDV, Eberle of ETH Zurich, Sako from Japan, architects like Li Xianggang and Meng Yan from China and in Hong Kong. Instead of just talking about design in a relatively abstract notion, I think this topic can draw interest from our community of architects who are practicing in housing as well as academia who are looking at the matter. Hopefully, we can also use housing as a means to frame our contemporary design issues. After that, we may organize another symposium about tectonics, materials and construction.

Last year, we had another symposium titled “Rural Urban Framework” which was a two-day symposium. We invited architects from China.
and Taiwan, such as Hua Li, Tong Ming, Zhang Ke and Haile Ying Chun, and discussed how architectural design can be framed as a new design strategy in the rural context of China.

C: Regarding public lectures, who are the potential speakers that you would like to invite?

W: We will have Teyo Ito, Wang Shu, Steven Holl, Takaharu Tozuka, Angelo Bucci and many in the coming semester. We will continue to invite speakers not only from North America and Europe, but also from Asia, including China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and other countries, as well as South America like Brazil and Argentina, South and North Europe and other places. As China is one of the most important platforms for architecture, we certainly would like to invite one or two Chinese architects per semester to deliver lectures. We already invited Yong Ho Chang, Liu Jiajun and Wang Shu. We will extend our invitations to many others.

C: Is there any publication plan within the Department?

W: Certainly, we would like to publish a yearbook to let others to know what we are doing. Hopefully we can also have a journal type of book that can initiate a critical architectural discourse, like Pamphlet Architecture published by the Princeton Architectural Press. We can focus on one issue per semester and publish twice per year. We can have one issue on housing and another issue on tectonics. If we can continue for five years, we will have ten books as a series. In addition to serve as a platform for architectural academia and architects in Hong Kong, it can also serve the networking in the Asia-Pacific region and other countries outside Asia as well, allowing people in the world to know what is going on for architecture in Hong Kong.

C: I remembered that in 1998, our faculty published an academic journal titled Hong Kong Papers in Design and Development. However, only one issue of this journal was published so far.

W: Yes, that was good but it was very difficult to maintain a refereed journal. The aim at that time was to publish a traditional peer-reviewed journal. For the proposed book series, I would like to consider it as our discourses and each book has a clear topic and agenda. I hope this publication will happen and can be something that architects and students would want to buy and keep it, like Oppositions or Pamphlet Architecture.

Time Management and Challenges Ahead

C: Why would you like to take up this appointment as the new Department Head? As you are also an architectural teacher and an architect, how to strike a balance between teaching, writing, design practice, research and administration?

W: Certainly there was a long struggle when I made this decision. In all these years, I never intended to be involved in school administration as I enjoy teaching and treating design as a form of research for developing innovative ideas and carrying out design exploration which can be related to teaching development. Last summer, I was urged by my colleagues to take up this role as the Department Head and I almost felt that I had little choice at that time as I am one of the few senior teachers in the Department. Unless I do not respect this Department that I have been working for eighteen years, I have to share my time and capacity for administration, as a service to the University.

Having said that, once you think something that you probably have to take on; then of course, your mentality has to be adjusted. If I have to spend time on administration, signing documents, looking at figures and numbers, I have to make them into meaningful things. Speaking about my own design research and practice, of course, it would be difficult and I have shortage of time. At the moment, being the Department Head is my first priority and it takes up all my office time for sure.

C: Using most of your office hours for administration only? No more time for teaching...

W: I still have two courses to teach. Now, I return to my architectural studio after seven or eight o'clock and go through design issues up to ten or eleven o'clock every day.

C: So, your staff have to work overtime....

W: Yes, but we have fun and we all enjoy the design studio. I also go to work on Saturdays whenever possible and I hope after one year I can manage my time better. Supposedly, every university teacher is expected to spend at least one-third of the time on research, including design research, one-third on teaching and one-third on administration.

C: This is very ideal....

W: As the Department Head, if I spend about 70% of my time on administration, I hope I can still have the remaining 30% on design as research. I see my practice as a form of design research which is always an essential part of my research output. Right now, I manage my time by reducing my own remaining time. I am working very long hours a day.

C: No time for your family....

W: That's true and I hope it can be better next year. There are different types of academia in the university. There are people who spend most of their time on administration and leadership, while there are others who become department heads because of their teaching and research expertise, and try to still keep up with it.

C: For example, Bernard Tschumi...

W: Bernard Tschumi is one, but there are others who inspire me more. Peter Eisenman, Charles Moore, Louis Eert, Rafael Moneo are also very good examples. When I was a student at Berkeley and later worked at TAC Cambridge for a while, Rafael was the Head of Harvard for almost ten years as the Chair and he is still an important and active architect in practice. He has very clear visions and agendas. For me, he is an encouraging model.

C: What are the challenges ahead and what is your priority?

W: One of the challenges is how to gradually consolidate consensus among the teaching staff and to build up the collective belief while at the same time to allow diversity and different expertise. Another challenge is how to bridge the gap collaborating with our professionals and to engage them in our teaching and research in design.

Again, the challenge is how can we develop something unique and then to offer to the rest of the world? Situating in probably the most vibrant place in the world for architecture, if we can take issues of China and Hong Kong and play an active role in the global scene, then we can really offer knowledge to the world and be a leading world-class architectural school. If we only keep telling our students that the best architectural schools are Harvard, Princeton or AA, what do you expect our students to develop their discourse? We have to make our students to believe that they have the potential to be the best, to enable them to build up their confidence and commitments, apart from only learning new skills and tools from the school. The uniqueness of strength will not come right away but we can work on it step by step.

If we look at Tokyo University, they may not be always following the trends of others but have their own traditions and teaching methods. The students have strong self-confidence, believing that they are the best in Japan and are creating unique architecture which can become part of the global scene. If we look at Wang Shu who has a clear cultural agenda, a strong social commitment and responsibility, through which he can then develop his own formal language and unique architecture. My major objective is to facilitate our students for building-up confidences, commitments and directions of their own, moving away from the post-colonial condition in the past, and to proceed for shaping a new ground for our architecture, that will be our priority in the next three years.

C: Thank you very much for your valuable sharing.

(Remarks: The above conversations were conducted on 5 and 7 December 2012.)

Hing-wah Chau
HKIA: Registered Architect (Hong Kong)
Authorized Person (List of Architects)
The Vertical Twist is an attempt to create an iconic Landmark in Kunming as the World Trade Centre, the Vertical Twist part intends to differentiate the program of the Centre of Serviced Apartment at the lower portion and the Corporate Office Tower in the Upper portion, each zone equipped with a Residential Clubhouse and a Corporate Clubhouse respectively.

The Vertical Twist is based on a "Triangular Plan Shape" which is a direct response to the existing Hotel Building and Corporate Building adjacent to the site which strategically shares a common Grand Arrival Point as a Roundabout.

The Triangular Plan Shape aims to maximize the "Unobstructed Views" from the North & South Orientation and to avoid the possible overlooking between the surrounding buildings and the Centre.

The Composite Structure obtains a wide variety of functions, including a Multiple-Functioned Podium consists of Convention & Exhibition Facilities, Banquet Facilities, Shopping Malls, Street Level International Flagship Stores, Landscape Garden, Cafeteria, Cinemas, Rooftop Cafeteria and Garden, underground Supermarkets, Underground Carparks etc.

The Vehicular Circulation patterns are therefore sub-divided into Entrance & Exit for Underground Carpark, individual Drop Off Area for Serviced Apartment, Corporate Office Tower, and the Convention & Exhibition Centre.
**Scheme 2 - The Musical Variation**

The Design Synopsis of the “Musical Variation” is an attempt to express the Composite Program of the World Trade Centre that is Serviced Apartment at the lower portion and the Corporate Tower at the upper portion.

The lower portion of Serviced Apartment is set at an angle to fit North-South Orientation whilst the upper portion of the Corporate Tower is twisted to fit the North-East Orientation as well as the South-West Orientation.

Kunming city is best known for her “Spring all year” weather; therefore the lower portion of the Serviced Apartment is equipped with external transparent lift system for vertical transportation of inhabitants which links up with the “Entrance Garden” in the air at each floor to celebrate the nice weather all year.

**Scheme 3 - The Square Boxes**

The design synopsis of the “Square Boxes” is an attempt to re-introduce the “Super-impositioning” of the program and functions of the required stacking of Serviced Apartment and Corporate Tower. The giant architectural gesture is not only aimed to create the landmark in hi-contrast with the urban fabrics of Kunming, but also a gesture to blend in the surrounding juxta-positioning buildings by contrast.

The Square Boxes is composed of 5 levels each for two separate zones (Serviced Apartment & Corporate Tower) and super-imposed by 8 Boxes vertically.

The vertical super-impositioning of Square Boxes is an attempt to create “Buffer Communal Space” in the air, which performs as Green Balconies for Serviced Apartment and as Green Decks for Corporate Tower above to celebrate the “Spring all Seasons” weather of Kunming.

The cantilevered double volume cubes of each box contains of “Decentralized Clubhouse Facilities” to cater for each zone.

**Scheme 4 - The Chinese Fortune Motif**

The design synopsis of the “Chinese Fortune Motif” is an attempt to Re-explore the Hi-Rise Tube in Tube System by the latticed “External Truss System” which resembling the Chinese Fortune Motif.

The “Tear Drop” Plan Shape of the scheme aims to maximize the unobstructed views of the site as well as to cater for the strong external Structural Patterned Truss system in modules.

The modular system of the external Structural Truss wraps around the Tear Drop circular-formed tower and creates a seamless architectural skin.

The cantilevered Clubhouses at both upper zone and lower zone, defines the Serviced Apartment below and the Corporate Tower at above.