

A Rediscovery of the First-Generation Female Architects in Taiwan:
Xiu Zelan and Wang Chiu-Hwa

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00 Introduction

This thesis aims to reveal the history of the first-generation female architects in Taiwan. Throughout history, the female architects in Taiwan had been ignored due to the nature of their minority. In fact, even until nowadays, women still lack a representative in the field of architecture and the built environment. The absent role model had evidently led to the “leaking pipe phenomenon”, meaning the female students are not staying inside the industry after finishing their studies. This of course is closely related to the traditional gender roles in Taiwanese society, and the stereotyped architecture profession. The fact that Taiwan already had its first female president in 2016, a powerful improvement of gender equality, the representation of women in the built environment is still relatively poor. According to the Statistical Office of the Interior Yuan, in 2019, 10% of the registered architects are women, and only 6.8% of the architects in practice (with their own firm) are women.¹ In the 2020 National Award for Arts, one of the first-generation female architects Chiu-Hwa Wang (1925-) became the first woman to win this award for architecture since its inception in 1997. Wang is considered to be the “Mother of Libraries”, the first architect to build the modernized libraries since the 70s. Another important figure is Zelan Xiu (1925-2016), who is recognized as the first female architect in Taiwan. Xiu’s most iconic work is Chong-Shan Building, so significant that the image of it was printed on a one-hundred-dollar bill NTD. In fact, Xiu and Wang were two of the very first women became architects in Chinese History. The first school of architecture in ROC (Mainland China) was established in the early 20th century, around the time they were born. These female architects had greatly influenced the built environment in Taiwan, yet they were rarely mentioned in architectural discourse.

This research will apply the “feminist analysis” proposed by Jos Boys, aiming to “expose the ways in which the world is male-defined, and to show the ways in which women do not define it”.² Feminist Analysis provided an academic and theoretical “lens” to examine the design and experience of female architects. Simone de Beauvoir famously argued “Man is defined as a human being and woman as a female – whenever she behaves as a human being, she is said to imitate the male.”³ In an industry that was (and still is) dominated by men, how did they transform and project their identity as women in their projects? What is their social experience that was hidden from the history? Is it true that they were imitating men, or are there other unique qualities in their works? They seemed to be rather pragmatic, always acted with the “do more, talk less” attitude. Does this reflected their anxiety as women surrounded by men? Or was it just a character influenced by their cultural background (again, a male dominate culture)? This research intended to answer these ambiguous questions, and the conclusion might be very different if taken from different position.

¹ Statistical Office of the Interior Yuan, 2019, Republic of China (Taiwan), <https://www.moi.gov.tw/cp.aspx?n=5590>

² Boys, Jos. “Is There a Feminist Analysis of Architecture?” *The Built Environment*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1984, pp. 25–34.

³ Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Classic, 2015.

With the establishment of Women in Architecture Taiwan (WAT) in 2018, stories of female architects were gradually exposed by the public with their effort. The first book dedicated to Zelan Xiu *The Obsession of Modernity: Architect Xiu Zelan and Her Times* was published in 2019. This book serves as an important historical record, because many of Xiu's drawings and documents were missing, some of her buildings are even demolished. Additionally, Xiu was considered to be associated with the privileged class, thus was selectively “forgotten” by the canon. *The Obsession of Modernity* provided precious information of Xiu, but the feminist aspect of her was not comprehensively discussed. Wang, on the other hand, had gained much attention in recent years thanks to WAT and National Award for Arts. Media started to write about her, mostly describing her life story, instead of theoretical analysis of her works and ethos.⁴ Notably, both Xiu and Wang had never published any biography nor portfolio, so most of the primary sources are interviews. They remain incredibly silent, subtly speaking with their architecture. This research also intended to fill in the gaps in the literature, to review the stories and works of Xiu and Wang with a gender-based theory, and to retrieve their “voice” in architectural discourse.

The thesis starts with the historical background. It is necessary to introduce the convoluted political history of Republic of China and Taiwan in order to construct the lifetime of the two architects. The so-called “first-generation architects” is specifically defined by the retreat of the R.O.C government from Nanjing (Mainland China) to Taiwan in 1949. These architects were the key actors during the postwar reconstruction and modernization. To strengthen the feminist theme in the research, the feminist movement will be added to the timeline. Then the thesis breaks into two parts, focusing on the two first-generation female architects in Taiwan, Xiu and Wang. The first part will reveal their story, describing how they were born as “daughters” and became “women”. This part will rely mostly on secondary sources such as books and articles about them. The second part is a case study of one significant building by each architect, to discover their design intention, self-projection, and architectural achievements which were lack of discussion. This part will be based on the documents found in the archive and analyzed with my interpretation. The two cases will followed by a discussion, shortly summarize the previous chapters and compare the two architects. The research seeks for the absent role models of female architects by illustrating how they are equally great but different from the other starchitects, which are mostly male. Exploring and learning from the history of Xiu and Wang enables the young female students from the later generations to envision their own future.

⁴ Ching-Yueh Roan, Interviewing Roan: Chiu-Hua Wang, the architect who is the key female figure to architecture historical context in Taiwan, Xinmedia, 2020, <https://www.xinmedia.com/article/176824>

01 Historical Background

To set up a comprehensive understanding of the two first-generation female architects of Taiwan, a historical background must be first introduced. Taiwan, an island ruled by different political power for over 200 years, has a very mixed representation when it comes to culture. Among the Dutch, Japanese, Qing and other governances, the ROC government had been the entity that influenced this place most. After the Chinese Civil war in 1949, the defeated ROC government retreated to Taiwan and introduced the culture and ideologies with their arrival. The so-called five thousand years old of Chinese culture dominated the island ever since. This premise explains why this research aimed to explore the Taiwanese architects, but always started with China. Acknowledging the convoluted history could help decipher the characters of Xiu and Wang, to truly unpack the layers of their works, personalities and identities. The other important perspective is the feminist analysis. The history related to the female's rights in China would form an overall understanding of the public perception of the two female architects, and explains why they acted in a certain way.

The Dawn of Change

The ideology of Chinese elites was strongly shaped the Confucianism. Proposed by Confucius over 2000 years ago, Confucianism defined the values, behaviors and principles of the educated class, which was often the ruling class, based on a series of virtue and morality, in order to achieve the harmony of society. These conventions and manners were advocated by many dynasty through out Chinese history, because it designated roles for everyone in the society, from the Empire to civilians, from men to women, and justified these relationships. This system strengthens the social obligations of the educated people, which provided a clue for the social and political movements in Qing dynasty, or the intention behind Xiu's Garden City.

The complex relationship between Chinese nationalism and Western Culture could perhaps be best explained by the concept of "century of humiliation"⁵. In the First Opium War in 1840, the Qing dynasty was stunned by the disparity between its own military power and of the Western countries. The disgrace of losing lands and indemnity had driven the Chinese elites to propose "Westernization", or "Self-Strengthening Movement", to "learn from the enemies and beat the enemies."⁶ Architecture, as an important accomplishment of Western civilizations, was also introduced into China.

Xiu and Wang are the very few first women to achieve architecture education in

⁵ "Century of Humiliation" is the term used in China to describe the period of intervention and subjugation of the Chinese Empire and the Republic of China by Western powers in between 1839 and 1949. (Adcock Kaufman, Alison, "The "Century of Humiliation," Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order", 2010)

⁶ "Self-Strengthening Movement" is a series of social and institutional reform proposed by the Chinese elites after the First Opium War. The movements aimed to acquire the advanced technology from the West, in order to resist the invasions from the West.

China. The Department of Architecture in Central University was established in Nanjing (Mainland China), 1928, due to the continuous of Westernization movement. Department invited architects studied in Europe and the US to introduce the contemporary architecture canons. The education transplanted the “Architecture as art” from Beaux Art school, emphasizing the importance of style, proportion and classical elements as well as the architecture engineering.) The professors also introduced the contemporary Modernism to China, which laid the foundation for Xiu and Wang’s works. In 1938, ROC established the Architecture Law. For the first time, the architecture profession and role of architects were legislated and institutionalized. From this time on, the career “architects” officially existed. Xiu and Wang are the two excellent example of the drastic change in Chinese history, for both their profession, and their gender.

The shift of Women’s Role

The idea to reform society also reflects on the roles of women in society. In the traditional social structure, which links back to Confucianism, women were not expected to be educated, and even if they did so, the purpose was to serve the family and raise their children better. The elites involved in Self-Strengthening Movement noticed the other half of the population - female, could also dedicate to this shift of improvement. In 1897, social political activist Chih-Chao Liang (male) proposed Women’s education in order to make the women a force of production, and to become “good mothers” to educate the next generation. Many traditional restrictions to women, such as foot-binding, were encouraged to abolish. This seemed to improve women’s social status with more opportunities offered, however, it was not about women’s right at all. This phenomenon was a typical appropriation of women’s right in the context of Chinese culture: instead of proposing true gender equality, the Chinese version emphasized on the benefit the change (of women’s role) could offer, and operate on a rather superficial level. Similar situation also happened in ‘50s, KMT Central Women’s Work Conference proposed “Use women employment to replace women movement”, and claimed that the legislative equality had already made women’s movement “a history”.⁷ This perhaps echoed with the appreciation of collective harmony that Chinese culture values, and the 2000 years history and conventions were just too heavy to eradicate. This struggle and contradiction could also be seen in later case studies of the two female architects.

Even though the progressive of female’s right was poor and slow, still in several aspects succeeded. As the Qing dynasty thrown over by the ROC in 1911, some changed were put into legislative levels. One example was the admission of female students in universities in 1920s. This allowed Wang and Xiu to enter Central University and study architecture in 1940s. Another is the constitution of the ROC, established in 1947 which stated clearly the gender equality and women’s suffrage. This ensured that Wang and Xiu could attend national exams for architects’ license, which first took place in 1953 in Taiwan.

⁷ Ku, Yenlin, *The Women’s Movements in Taiwan*, Owl Publishing House Co. LTD., 2020, P.55

Linking the Dots in Contexts

The five parallel timelines depicted the events happening parallel yet intertwined - in Taiwan, in Mainland China, and in the West. Positioning the timelines of Xiu and Wang, the protagonists of this thesis, could help clarify the causal relationships of their works and their lives. Born in war time China, Xiu and Wang were both daughters of upper class intellectuals, which provided them more opportunities to dictate their own fates. Had their first architecture trainings in Central University in Mainland China, due to the troubled conditions in the country, they both decided to leave - Xiu moved to Taiwan for work while Wang travel to the US for higher education. The political history of China suggested how architects, especially Xiu, how her training as a modernist, contradicted with the political language in architecture. The western history timeline indicates that the impact from the West in both China and Taiwan is constant, and how Wang was matured as an architect in such environment. These timelines summarize the entangled history of the past 150 years in East Asia, and set a fruitful beginning for the discussion on two of the first-generation female architects in Taiwan.

History Background Timeline

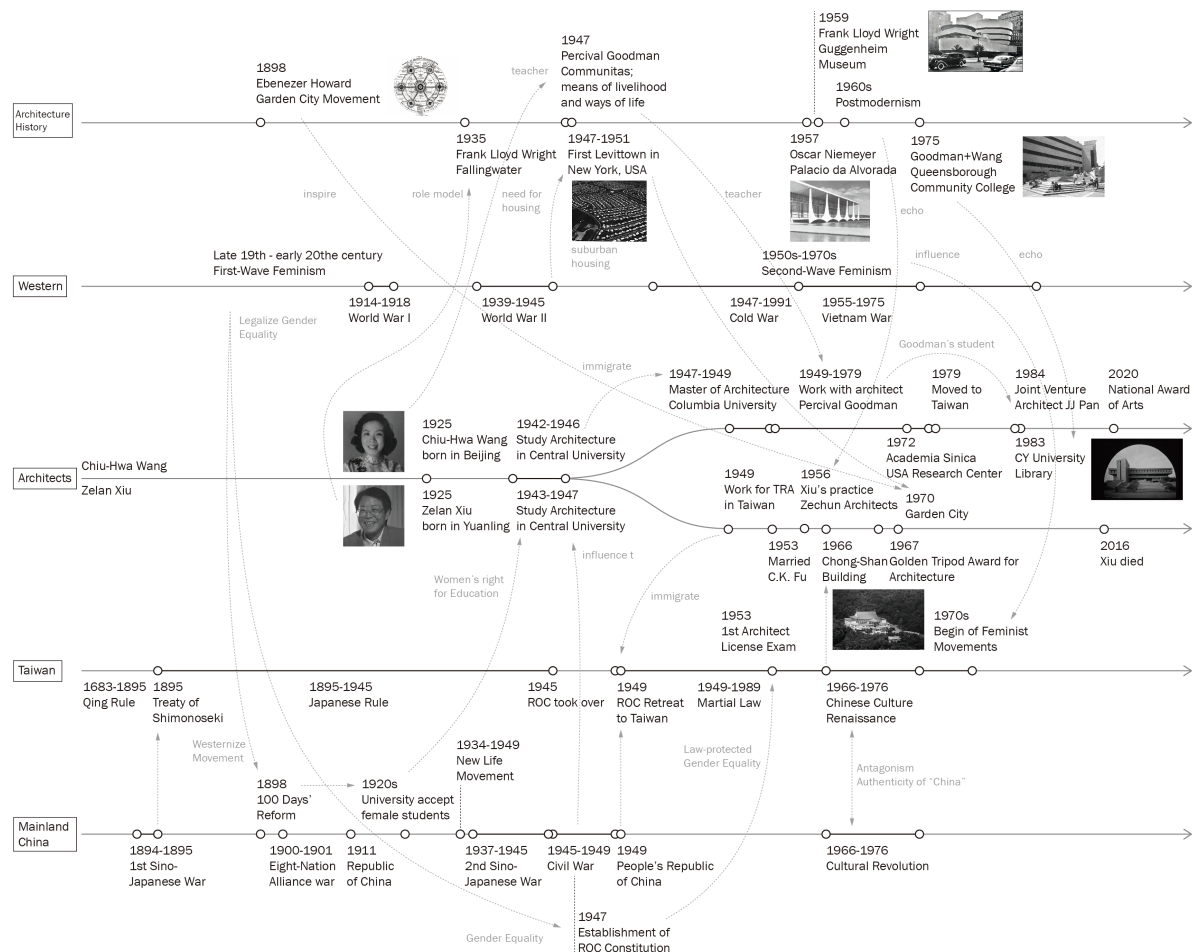


Fig. 1-1. History Background Timeline

02 First Taiwanese Female Architect Xiu Zelan

Xiu Zelan holds the title of the “first female architect in Taiwan” given by the media. The “first” is a double coding: one refers to her pioneering role of a female being architect, chronologically being the first; the other one acknowledges her outstanding performance in her profession, winning the first place in competing with other female architects. This implies the scarcity of females appearing in the built environment, and the extra attention towards her female identity apart from her performance – after all, no one was ever titled with “the first male architect in Taiwan.”

Becoming an Architect

Xiu Zelan was born in a wealthy and well-educated family in Yuanling, Hunan in Mainland China, 1925. In 1943, Xiu was admitted by Central University. Her mother hid her notification in order to keep Xiu staying close to the family.⁸ Traditionally, Chinese parents hold great power towards their children, and the children should not act against their parents’ will according to “filial piety”, an important value in Chinese culture. Being the only daughter among other four brothers, her parents worried about the risks she needs to take being a female student alone in another city. Xiu described this story in one of the interviews: “My mother wouldn’t let me travel far away to study architecture. She did not understand what architecture was. In my hometown, at the time, there was no such thing as architecture.”⁹ Architecture was still a very novel and rarely understood discipline in the 1940s of China. At the time, the younger generation were encouraged by the government to study civil engineering and architecture, because the government believed that once the Sino-Japanese War is over, the reconstruction will be immediately crucial and will need the skills of architects to help. The previous education she had received had made her determined to become an architect in order to serve the country. This anecdote reflects Xiu’s independent, adventurous and patriotic characteristics, which challenges the traditional feminine quality. At the end, she was fortunately enough to decide her own destiny and joined Central University, and became one of the two only female students out of forty in her year. During Xiu’s study in Central University, she met Chiang Kai-Shek, who was the principal of University at the time and later became the leader of ROC. Xiu became close to Chiang, and through this connection, she received numerous commissions later on when she established her own firm in Taiwan, after the whole government retreated to Taiwan.

In 1949, after one year of intern in Nanjing, Xiu decided to work for Taiwan Railway Administration (TRA) as assistant architect and moved to Taiwan due to the civil war. As an architect, which was still a rather rare profession at the time, she designed both train carriages and train stations. During her service in TRA, she met Fu Chih-Kwan, a civil engineer and a colleague she worked closely with. Xiu married Fu in 1953 and began their cooperation as architect and structure/civil engineer. Together

⁸ Distance between where the Central University was, Chongqing, and Yuanling is about 350 km.

⁹ Huang, Yu-Shan, director. *The Architect of the Frozen Music- Zelan Xiu*, Series: Women of the Century in Taiwan, episode 6, Taiwan Public Television Service, 2001.

they established their firm, Zechun Architects in 1956, and worked on many public buildings including schools and military buildings. In 1968, the ROC government decided to extend the mandatory education from 6 to 9 years. The policy made the school buildings Xiu designed become important childhood/teenage memories for many people, and her user-based design had inspired her successors. On the other hand, as a Christina, Xiu's sculptural, artistic religious buildings also stood out from other rather pragmatic, boring postwar Modernism buildings blocks.



Fig. 2-1. 100-dollar bill New Taiwan Dollar

Xiu received gradually more commissions in the mid-1960s. Only 7 years after her firm was founded, she had simultaneously 14 projects under construction, and 20 staff including designers and engineers in her firm.¹⁰ Xiu was educated and trained to be a modernist, however, she earned the title of "the first female architect in Taiwan" was a Chinese National Style Building: Chong-Shan Building. After the Chinese civil war, the ROC government had struggled to stress their identity as the authentic Chinese political entity. In 1965, President Chiang appointed Xiu to design a building that could represent the Chinese spirit, a political and cultural icon for the country. This decision was made based on not solely Xiu's connection to Chiang, but also her excellent performance in many public education buildings, much appreciated by the Minister of Education. Located in Yang-Ming Mountain in Taipei, the building functions as the meeting venue for National Assembly. Chong-Shan Building resonated with Chinese Palace. For instance, the round-shaped front hall echoed with the Heaven Temple¹¹, implying the orthodoxy of the ROC government. Apart from its cultural and political connotation, it also had surprising architecture engineering achievement. Chong-Shan Building was the first building built on a volcano¹² with large span conference halls. This experience had made Xiu and Fu confident and mature in designing buildings on mountain topography, which led their later project Garden City. The celebration of Chung-Shan Building had pushed Xiu to the peak of her career and made her famous across Taiwan.

¹⁰ The Lady's An Architect." Edited by Jeff Lee, Taiwan Journal, 1962, taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=20&post=26264.

¹¹ The Heaven Temple in Beijing is where the Emperors of Ming and Qing annually visited for ceremonies that prayed for good harvest. Emperors were considered "Son of God", thus holds the right to speak directly to heaven.

¹² Chiang, Ya-Chun. "Tes-Nan HSIU and Chinese Cultural Renaissance." Architectural Institute of Taiwan Magazine, Apr. 2017, pp. 8–14.

Becoming a Wife



Fig. 2-2. Family Photo of Xiu, Fu and their son, Fu Texiu

As a prestigious female social elite, Xiu's marriage life had constantly drawn the public's curiosity. In other words: how can a woman manage her family properly if her career is so successful? Xiu was very aware of her identity as female, and she understood that she was definitely not a traditional wife because she held a high position that was very rare for women. In one of the interviews, she complained that people often called her "Mr. Xiu"¹³, which caused her awkwardness in her identity, as if this would affect her role of being a wife. Interestingly, in contemporary architecture office, the designers still call their supervisors, usually male architects by "Mr.", and call their female architects by "Teacher/Professor". This shows the strange situations for women to become architects in such culture/language framework.

Xiu believed that the harmony in marriage comes from respect, and she carefully positioned herself not to be aggressive to her husband, like a shrew. Fu, on the other hand, seemed quite open to this non-traditional setup in his marriage. Perhaps the name of her office can provide some clues. "Zechun"¹⁴ implied that she did not play solo, instead it was a group work, considering the significant contribution from Fu. In fact, the importance of Fu in Xiu's career cannot be overly stressed. Xiu and Fu's son, Fu Texiu once stated in an interview: "...I think they cooperate perfectly, because a good architectural concept is very artistic which needs a good construction to come

¹³ 先生, usually translated to "Mister" in English, originally means "born before", referring to people who could teach based on their experience and wisdom. It originally was used regardless of gender, yet in modern context it is commonly used as title for men. It also means "husband".

¹⁴ The "Ze (澤)" from "Zechun (澤群)" is the same character as the "Ze" from Xiu Zelan's name (修澤蘭). "Chun (群)" means group, implying teamwork. In Taiwan, like in many countries, an architect's firm is usually named after his/her name, yet Xiu decided to do it differently.

along with it.”¹⁵ One of Xiu’s previous colleagues also claimed that “she might never achieve her accomplishment without Fu”¹⁶ because Fu, as structure engineer, was the key person who put her bold, innovative imaginations into reality. It is true that many of Xiu’s designs were sculptural and considerably different from the ubiquitous postwar sober buildings. From this perspective, the realization of Xiu’s design indeed needed an outstanding structural engineer. It seems like Xiu was depicted as a romantic “dreamer” while Fu being the pragmatic “practitioner” so that each of them fits their gender stereotype. However, throughout architectural history, almost no engineer was ever mentioned along with the architect, who always takes the authorship of the architecture. It would not be exaggerated to say that Xiu’s success was shared to Fu, or Fu’s accomplishment was emphasized to fulfill the public’s belief - after all, how can a successful woman be without a supportive man?

¹⁵ Huang, Yu-Shan, director. *The Architect of the Frozen Music- Zelan Xiu*, Series: *Women of the Century in Taiwan*, episode 6, Taiwan Public Television Service, 2001.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

03 Garden City

Garden City is the first suburban housing community design in Taiwan. Located in outskirt of Taipei in the mountain, Garden is often described as the realization of *The Peach Blossom Spring*¹⁷ by whom ever visited it. In this project, both the client and the builder were the architect, Xiu. Garden City reflects every dimension of her complex identity: as an architect, as a developer, and as a woman. With her effort to support the working women, Garden City became her most “feminist” design.

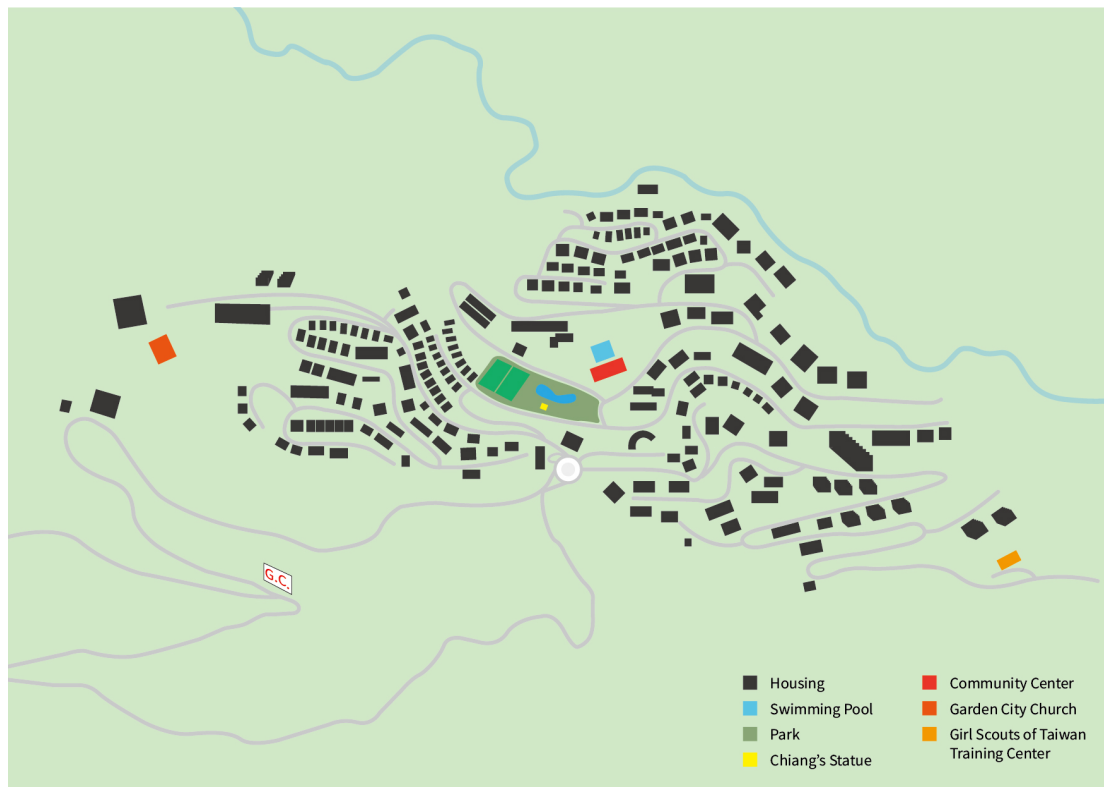


Fig. 3-1. Garden City Masterplan (present)

Building the Peach Blossom Spring

After the intense and high-pressured work of Chung-Shan Building in 1966, Xiu was invited to travel to North America for architectural inspection. She was impressed by the suburban housing development in the USA and Canada. The low-density housing built within the natural environment had provided a healthy and relaxed lifestyle. In the late 1960s, the population of Taipei had reached 1.6 million, 6 folds within 20 years.¹⁸ Xiu envisioned that the gradually denser city needed a more progressive way of living, and the overall living condition should also be elevated to “international standards”. Just like how Ebenezer Howard’s attempted to realize his Garden City Theory in the late 19th century, Xiu and Fu established “New City Corporation” in

¹⁷ *The Peach Blossom Spring* was a fable written by Tao Yuanming, an Old Chinese Writer, about an accidental discovery of a utopia in a complete isolated location where people live harmoniously with the natural environment.

¹⁸ Taipei City Yearbook 2016, Taipei City Government, 2016, <https://www-ws.gov.taipei/001/Upload/430/refile/41653/7561488/f30d1fda-ed5c-415a-b08c-d61247507f5e.pdf>

1968 and raised funds from investors. She purchased lands on a mountain in Xindian, about half an hour drive from Taipei city center. The idea was to “situate the home inside the garden, instead of having a garden at home”¹⁹. Garden City was planned to be self-sufficient with a supermarket, community center, church, and swimming pools. Garden City was targeted to be an upper-class, high quality housing. Unlike the mass production housing in the USA, each building here was designed individually, depending on the location and geographical conditions. Each house had their own luxurious terrace to look out to the sceneries. (Fig. 3-2.) Xiu’s idea of “build upon nature” following the topography of mountains could be an inspiration from Frank Lloyd Wright’s FallingWater. To ensure the quality of the neighborhood, not only the design and construction quality were personally supervised by Xiu, even the buyers were hand-picked by her. Notably, Xiu declined the funding from large enterprises, because she worried the content of Garden City would be altered and dominated by commercial interests.²⁰ In order to allow the community to financially sustain itself, Xiu also planned an amusement park to create revenue, and New City Corporate would become the organization to manage and maintain the community. This concept derived from “Community Development”²¹, which was a trendy idea across the global North. The masterplan of Garden City reflected the socialist aspect in Modernism, and Xiu’s dedication as developer was for public good instead of personal gain, which resonated with links to the mission of educated class in Chinese culture, as well as her Christian believes.

Being the first, Xiu was taking a high risk of unprecedented and unknown situations. In the suburban areas, in the late 60s, there was a lack of municipal planning and infrastructure. In order to build on the slope area, Xiu and Fu carefully planned and built the infrastructures, such as roads, drainage system, water supply system. The supposedly public construction had skyrocketed their expenses. On the other hand, only 3 years after the establishment of Garden City, the area close to the site was forbidden for construction purposes due to the newly planned Feitsui Reservoir nearby. Eventually the buildable areas were only half of the size of its original plan, and only half of the houses could be built and sold. She could not use her connection with Chiang’s family to smooth things over, and perhaps it was because Fu was arrested for “speech crime” earlier that year due to the “White Terror”²². The high standards Xiu requested and the land issue had put large stress on the project. By the time when Garden City struggled to complete, New City Corporation had owed huge debts. The financial issue of the New City Corporation severely impacted Xiu’s career. She had relatively few new projects from this point on. Some critics mocked her failure by saying “she had talent in design but not financial management”. But they all concluded with the fact that most of the residents stayed once they moved in. The residents had formed a strong connection with the environment and one other, producing a “Peach Blossom Spring” in real life.

¹⁹ A slogan for Garden City written by Taiwanese writer, politician Lee Ao.

²⁰ Yin, Baoning. *The Obsession of Modernity: Architect Xiu Zelan and Her Times*. Artco Books, 2019

²¹ According to UNTERM, Community Development refers to “A process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems.”

²² White Terror refers to the suppression of political activities during the Martial Law period of ROC.

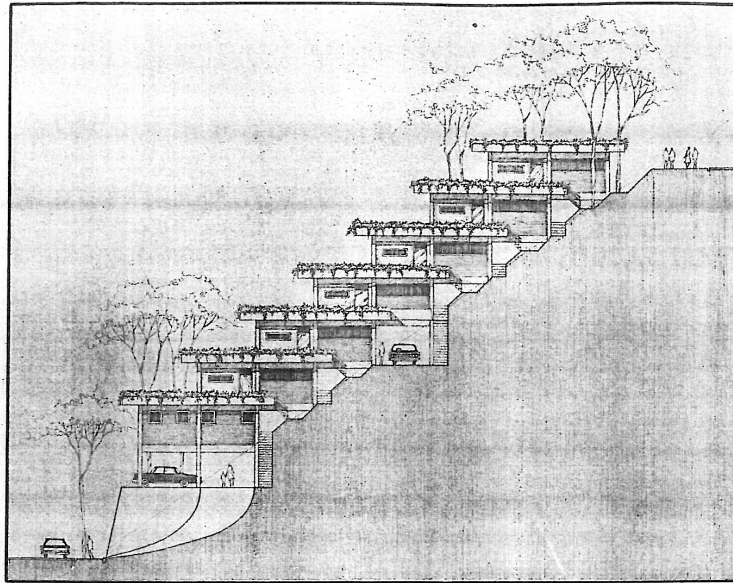


Fig. 3-2. Section of Stepped Type Housing from Garden City

Building the Female-Friendly Community

During the 50s to 60s, when second-wave feminism started in the Western countries, the idea of “Women’s movement” was replaced by “Women’s employment” and advocated by the government in Taiwan. By the end of 1960s, 30% of the employed population in Taiwanese were female²³, and the proportion was expected to grow larger. The office of Zechun Architects and Xiu’s own house were only divided by a wall. She could alter her identity between mother and profession by walking through a door. However, not all the working women were as fortunate. Many of them needed to travel from homes for workplaces, while they were also expected to take all the household labor and watch over their children. Xiu once stated that “Women rarely succeeded in their professions because they had obligations in both their career and their families. One of the reasons I established Garden City was to make a difference on this. Considering the working women need to face the challenge of housework, the community has take-away restaurants, nursery, kindergartens, and other amenities to support their pursuit of careers.”²⁴ The intention of assisting the working women also reflected on the facilities Xiu introduced in her housing design. Each household was equipped with modernized facilities such as dishwasher, washing machine, drying machine, bone crusher machine. These ideas were bold and innovative, because no architect had ever proposed design specifically for, or at least in the shoes of women. Even though Xiu did not dedicate herself to any of the feminist movements, or try to form her architectural firm differently to give female

²³ Employed Population Profile, National Statistics, Republic of China, 2004, <https://www.stat.gov.tw/public/Data/89171643560ZT9Y70G.pdf>

²⁴ Same as footnote 20

architects more favor²⁵, she did project her ideology for working women into her design.

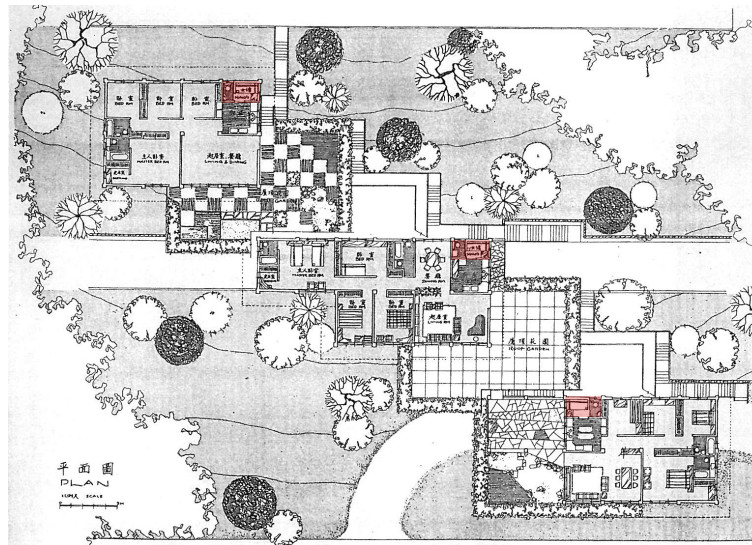


Fig. 3-3. Plan of Stepped Type Housing from Garden City (The maid's room in red)

So, was Garden City a female friendly design? Could the burden of modern women be reduced by introducing high-end domestic facilities and public amenities in community? Interestingly, from the housing plan (Fig. 3-3.), a small room was placed next to the kitchen: Maid's Room. It is not surprised for an upper-class house to have such space, yet it also suggested that these modern facilities were actually helping the maids, after all. No matter if the female perspective was only a slogan or her true reflection, Xiu put her vision for lives of modern women sincerely and pragmatically in practice.

²⁵ The Lady's An Architect." Edited by Jeff Lee, Taiwan Journal, 1962, taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=20&post=26264.

04 Mother of Library Wang Chiu-Hwa

After 30 years of practice in the USA, Wang Chiu-Hwa moved to Taiwan and brought along her ideology of social responsibility. Wang was the first architect to design an open-shelf modern library in Taiwan, and her contribution to this building type had earned her the title of “Mother of Library”. Although Wang started her training in China just like Xiu, and they shared similar interest in building for the society, but she has different approach to her ideology in architecture.

Becoming an Architect (In the Shadow)

Wang Chiu-Hwa was born in 1925, Beijing, China. Her father Dr. Wang Shih-Chieh (1891-1981) was an important politician and scholar in ROC. He once served as Minister of Education, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of Academia Sinica. Grew up in a privileged, academic and artistic family, Wang was educated with both Chinese and Western knowledge. In 1942, she was admitted by the architecture school of Central University with first place. “Architecture is a male-dominated field. My mother said to me, ‘Perhaps you could get married to an architect someday. You could sharpen the pencil for him.’”²⁶ Marriage was considered to be the sole purpose of women, and how trivial women were expected to dedicate themselves to such professions in 1940s, regardless of their social status. But Wang did not follow this traditional track, hence made this quote from her mother a small joke. On the other hand, Wang realized the gender issue in the field of architecture from the early stage of her studies, yet she was not hindered by it. Different from Xiu’s ambition driven by patriotism, Wang never mentioned anything related to politics or nationalism. Instead, her intention towards architecture was purely derived from her interest and passion for art, and the functionality and service this “art” could provide.

After graduating from Central University, Wang continued her architectural study in Washington University, then eventually received her Master’s degree in Columbia University, where she met her teacher and lifetime friend Percival Goodman (1904-1989). Goodman was a famous American architect, planner, writer and critic. Apart from his success in Synagogue architecture, he is also known for his call for social significance in the built environment. In Wang’s award testimonials for the National Award for Arts, she wrote: “Goodman made me understand the ‘social responsibility’ of architects, and further made me realize that architecture is only a small part of the man-made environment.”²⁷ Their cooperation last for 30 years. Wang worked mostly with the organization of plans, where she integrated form, function and activities.

Wang moved to Taiwan in 1979, to take care of her old parents, who immigrated to the island with the retreat of the ROC government. She started her cooperation with

²⁶ Edited by Shirley Surya, 7 Facts About Taiwan's 'Mother of Libraries' - M+ Stories, 2019, stories.mplus.org.hk/en/blog/7-facts-about-taiwans-mother-of-libraries/.

²⁷ Wang, Chiu-Hwa. “Award Testimonials.” The 21st Award-Winning Artist of the National Literary Awards: Wang Chiu-Hwa, 2019, www.ncafro.org.tw/artist_detail.html?anchor=award4&content=detail&id=297ef72272b7f76d017308f973330116.

Joshua Pan, one of the most prominent architects in Taiwan and a student of Goodman as well. Before academia and the public started to notice Wang, for a long time, many of their collaborations were only titled with Pan's name. It is possible that traditionally the authorship of a design was accredited to the architect who legally signed the drawings, and Wang was just used to be the "shadow" behind the fame and success.

Becoming a Woman



Fig. 4-1. Wang in Qipao, in Construction Site of Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, 1972

Gender issues are what Wang usually asked in her interviews. It was not clear if people wanted to hear some juicy content or were they truly care for her struggles. Perhaps, the combination of female and architect would always trigger this curiosity. Yet Wang did not seem to experience gender nor racial discrimination during her time in the states. A story she always tells is that she used to always wore qipao²⁸ to inspect construction sites in the US. When the builders saw her, they would then say: "Oh, here comes the architect in a qipao."²⁹ With a touch of humor, Wang smartly responded the speculations about her gender/race related experience. Because Wang was never married, and her personal life is so mysterious that we do not know her story apart from architecture.

The 1980s Taiwan, when Wang arrived, was an era for change, especially in the women's movement. In 1982, a feminist magazine "Awakening Foundation" was

²⁸ Qipao was traditionally regarded to be formal dressing for Chinese women. Xiu also appeared in many photographs in qipao, on construction sites too.

²⁹ Edited by Shirley Surya, 7 Facts About Taiwan's 'Mother of Libraries' - M+ Stories, 2019, stories.mplus.org.hk/en/blog/7-facts-about-about-taiwans-mother-of-libraries/.

established. Through their articles, the foundation proposed new gender relationship that gently raise the public's attention. The women's rights and their role was once again being discussed. A forum on architecture and women in 1984, and the feedback Wang wrote after the forum could perhaps present her attitude towards the issue of women in the built environment. She categorized it into two questions: Are women capable of the work of architecture as men? How can working women deal with their family obligations? She argued strongly that architecture is about people³⁰ and their environment, it is not an issue for men or women to deal with only. Although Wang did not state it very clear, she implied gender equality when it comes to the qualification of becoming an architect. The second part she suggested in Western countries the sharing of housework was becoming more trendy, maybe that would happen soon in Taiwan too. She concluded:

Though it is not absolutely necessary for us to aim for fame and recognition in our work. We must always strive to make the most out of all that we can in a fair and open manner; the value system in society and across time are constructed (by men) and never unchanging.³¹

Women do not have to win (as if this is a competition), but women want to play fair. Wang's texts reflect her understated persona, and her ideology of architecture is beyond the debate of gender but on a humanity and ecology scale. Wang was positive about the future generations, in a way she is proving her own point with what she does.

³⁰ In Mandarin, the general noun for human being is "人"(man). For man and woman, the adjective of "男" (male) and "女" (female) added to describe the person, as "男人" (man) and "女人" (woman).

³¹ Wang, Chiu-Hwa. "Feedback after a Forum on Architecture and Women." *Taiwan Architect*, 1984.

05 Main Library of Chung-Yuan Christian University

Built in 1985, the Main Library of Chung-Yuan Christian University (or Chung Yuan Christian University Chang Ching-Yu Memorial Library, CYCU Library) is the first modern library equipped with open shelves. The project demonstrates Wang's mastery of space, form and function in architecture, and how she envisioned the library to become a center for social interactions. Libraries has been a building types Wang long interested in, derived from her hobby of reading since she was little. As Wang does not mention gender in relation to her designs, the feminist aspect of this project still needs to be explored.

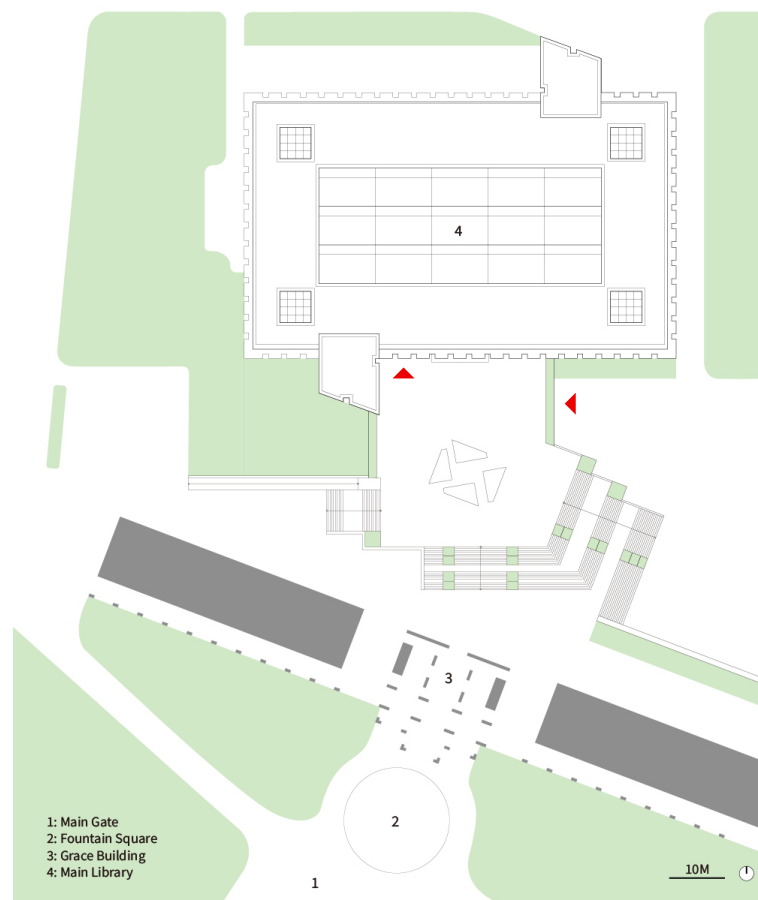


Fig. 5-1. Site Plan of CYCU Library

Building in the Context

CYCU, originally a polytechnic school, was established in 1955 in Taoyuan, a northern city in Taiwan. Due to its long history, the neighborhood around campus grew larger, and a night market was adjacent to the campus. In 1982, 2 years after the school officially recognized as university, CYCU needed to replace its old library with a modernized, contemporary library for higher education. The new library was commissioned to Pan and Wang in 1982. The site was located on the northern side of the Grace Building, the oldest building of the CYCU. The university planned to demolish it along with the old library, but Wang and Pan suggested strongly to keep it - in order to create a contextualized relation to the the campus. (Fig. 5-1.) The visitors

could enter the campus through fountain square, and while walking towards north, the library with brown tiles facade would majestically stood behind the 2-level entry plaza, framed by the arch of Grace Building. (Fig. 5-2.) After climbing up to the staircase, the visitors will enter the library from a higher level (2F). The staircases facing east, south and west, allowing the movements from different directions to join, encouraging visitors to gather and meet. The open shelf reading space with books were located from 2F to 5F. The meeting rooms, study rooms, class rooms and offices were located in lower levels (B1-1F) and should enter from the east side of the library. The library was designed in modernism style, the rational plan layout clearly separated the service and served space, which maximized the reading space and efficiently fulfilled the building codes. The service core on north and south sides balanced up and stabilized the long horizontal opening.



Fig. 5-2. CYCU Library Viewed from Grace Building

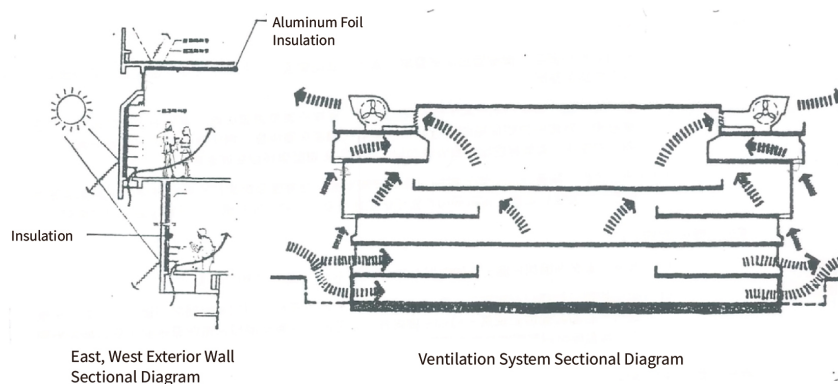


Fig. 5-3. Sectional Diagram for Natural Ventilation

Wang was conscious about the environmental context while designing the library. Taiwan has typical humid subtropical climate with extremely hot summer and rather mild winter. Natural disasters such as typhoon and earthquake hit Taiwan on a daily/yearly basis. The school related regulations at the time suggested that installing air-conditioners in the library was not allowed, leaving the architect to solve the issue of thermal comfort. Wang applied a series of technique in design to adapt to the climate. In order to keep the interior bright enough to read yet cool enough to stay, windows were designed with deep shadings. On the east and the west sides, the zig-zag shaped facades had windows openings only facing north to receive the constant and gentle daylight, and with opening on bottom and top of the exterior wall, these corners became the students' popular reading spots. The large atrium in the center combined with sky lightings, which provides both bright and spacious view and natural ventilation (supported with extra exhaust fans). The lower levels are surrounded by green, and because these space were practically above the ground, the natural lightings and ventilations were still possible. (Fig. 5-3.)



Fig. 5-4. CYCU Library Interior on 4-5F

Building for the Society

The entry plaza was a democratic gesture. The steps are also seats, tables and stage, providing a large platform for social activities to happen. The similar strategy can be found in Wang's previous projects. For instance, Queensborough Community College in New York (1977). On top of the spatial layout, Wang created some "small space" keep the students around the library. Low concrete slabs were placed around the main entrance (2F) and the skylight, which allowed students to sit, eat and talk. The entry plaza was lit up by the lightings combined with the flower beds and handrails, which allowed the social interactions to continuously happen during evening. This also guaranteed safety inside the campus, where movements could be seen from both upper level and lower level of the area. Female students can be more relaxed in open space with crowds around them, knowing the eye sights are their protections.

Fig. 5-5. (left) Staircase Plaza, Queensborough Community College, New York, 1975

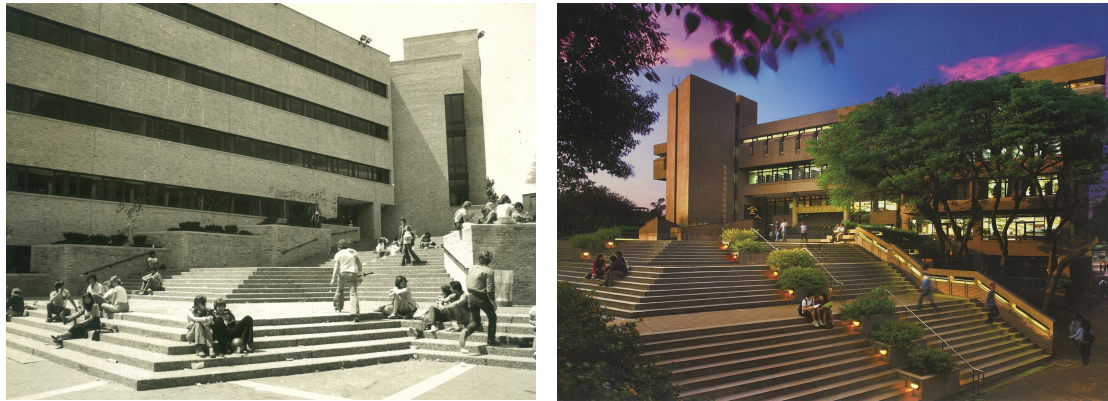


Fig. 5-6. (right) Entry Plaza, CYCU Library

After designing CYCU library, Wang (and Pan) also received several commissions of libraries in other universities. It was also the era when the higher education in Taiwan started to be accessible to people, as the economy became more stable. The construction and modernization of libraries became an important educational infrastructure. Her rational library design, typically a rectangular plan with two service core, an atrium or courtyard in the center. Combined with the landscape design, demonstrated how public buildings could evolve into public spaces.

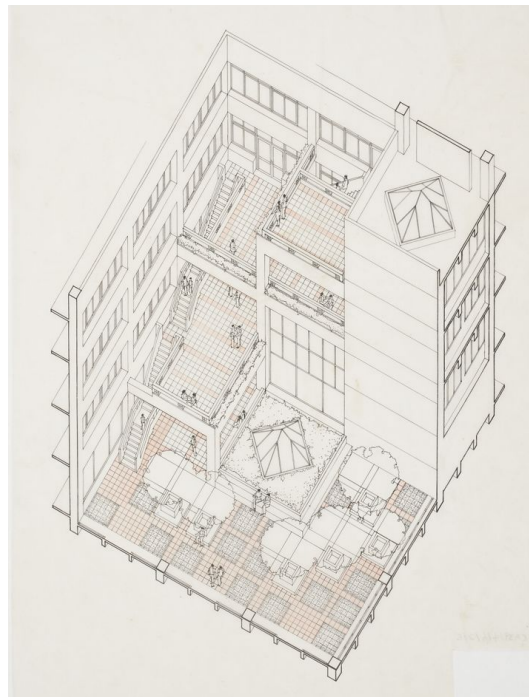


Fig. 5-7. Isometric Drawing of NCHU library, 1989. The multi levels courtyard became a comfortable reading/social space for visitors, allowing natural lighting and ventilation for interior. The eye sights from different directions also provided a sense of control in the area.

Wang has special connection and attachment to the CYCU Library. She donated most of her own architectural books to the Library, and donated over 5 million NTD (approx. 150,000 EUR) of her personal saving to renovate the Library, including upgrading the facilities and reorganizing functions of spaces. Her selfless kindness reflects her social obligations inherited from Goodman, as well as the “sense of mission” to help the society in Confucianism. Contrast to Xiu, who project her female identity in her planning, Wang seemed to focus on building a well balanced status between human, built environment and natural environment. Perhaps she intended to achieve the better and harmonious society beyond the gender division, and by doing so, she demonstrated how a female architect can also simply be “an architect”.

06 Discussion

After the two cases of Taiwan's first-generation female architects and their projects, this chapter intended to discuss and conclude the qualities they share, and also to stress the difference between them. The discussion also underlies why this research proposed to explore these two architects together, instead of just digging into one of them.

Social Responsibility

Both Xiu and Wang showed strong intentions in social responsibilities, yet from their education background and experience, these ideology might formed in different contexts. Born and educated in China until their early 20s, they surely had their characters based on the Confucianism, which leads to the mission for educated class. However, being an architect seem to contradict with the framework which Confucianism set up for woman. Notably, the traditional social obligation for Chinese women only includes reproduction and serve their families. Both Xiu and Wang took the obligation that belongs of men, yet only Xiu was also devoting herself to her family as wife and mother. This almost hermaphroditic role of "Mr. Xiu" had made her sometimes awkward. As they moved to Taiwan and the US at the end of Chinese civil war, the drastically different political environments had shaped them drastically. Xiu, who experienced the Martial Law and Chinese Culture Renaissance period of Taiwan, had strengthen her idea of patriotism and nationalism. In fact, she might not have other options for her ideology, considering the circumstances at the time. Xiu's architecture, especially Chong-Shan Building, links to the "National Style" and dictatorship of the Chiang family. From the new-liberal perspective in the later decades (especially since the Martial Law ends 1989), her association with politics had made her work less "valuable" in architecture discourse. Wang, on the hand, began her further training in the postwar America. The new liberal society and Goodman's vision in architecture driven social change had made her actions of social responsibility launch from a "soft" approach, including the spatial experience, public space, and strategic programming for users. Her dedication was towards "people" instead of "nation". And in the western context, Wang was more free and comfortable to be a woman, or a man³².

Hidden Feminism

Xiu and Wang were never feminist. Born in the time of change in China, they were fortunate to accept educations that was not open to female before, yet they still carried the traditional burdens naturally comes with their gender. Critics usually describe their works with feminine adjectives such as "delicate, neat and elegant", but these are only the surface of their design. In Garden City, it is clear that Xiu had projected her identity as woman in her design, intended to support the working females. Wang, on the other hand, pragmatically addressing sociality in her design, and patiently wait for the day when men and women can be treated equal; the value of sociality she embraced was essential to men and women. Instead of expressing

³² This refers to Mandarin, the general noun for human being is "人"(man). "人" is neutral.

any position they took with words (e.g., portfolio or biography), they put their beliefs into practice. As female architects, they acted very distinct from men, because no male architect would think of designs from women's perspective, nor willing to work without his own "signature"³³. Being very conscious with their gender, Xiu and Wang interpreted architecture and their social responsibility with their own ways.



Fig. 6-1. Photos of Xiu and Wang in Taiwan Architects Magazine, introducing the two first-generation female architects in Taiwan. (Bottom) Xiu and Fu, photo taken in front of the bus of Garden City, with "Garden City" printed on it. Photo taken in '70s. (Top) Wang working on her desk in Goodman's office in New York, wearing Qipao. Photo taken in 1976. The set combination of these two photos interestingly concluded the story of Xiu and Wang: Wang, who worked anonymously for decades, not calling for attention; Xiu, partnered up with her husband, publicly recognized for her pioneering designs.

³³ Architects in Taiwan usually want to establish their own firm, just like Xiu. This allows the architects to have better control over the design, earn fame and fortune. The built up social status is important for men.

07 Conclusion

The convoluted political history of China and Taiwan had shaped the postwar Taiwan, and the architects who designed and built in such context. Architecture, as a discipline introduced to China with political intentions, gradually evolved into a means for social change. By researching the two first-generation female architects in Taiwan, this thesis links their ideology, their works and personal lives to their identity as women in the historical and cultural context.

Women in built environment encounter challenges beyond the complicated tasks all designers would face. Just like Danish architect Dorte Mandrup argued: “I am a female architect.”, it is very difficult to get rid of the label of gender; and when people talk about gender, they only talk about women.³⁴ In Taiwan, the traditional culture conventions had made female architects even harder to concentrate solely in design issues. The struggles of different roles women expected to play (mother, wife, etc) remain the same even until nowadays. Xiu was definitely an extraordinary example, who managed to “assist her husband and teach her child”³⁵ while she kept her own career and firms. Female architects were also seemed to be always pin pointed by other male, instead of an individual. Xiu always mentioned together with her outstanding engineer husband, and Wang was never introduced without her mentor. This situation seems to be universal, just like all the “ghosts”³⁶ in architecture history. By revealing and addressing the importance of these female architects with feminist observations, the full picture of the built environment could be restored.

Historically, women in Taiwan (and China), had less chance to accept higher education due to the traditional social role of women. Even if they did, they were expected to gain degrees in more artistic fields, and they would eventually become wives and mothers. On top of that, architecture, a discipline which deeply associated with engineering and constructions, is usually considered a male profession. The lack of predecessors had triggered the questions on why women were (and still are) lack of representation in the built environment and why is it considered to be the norms of male-dominated industry. Fortunately, with the constant discussion in both academia and mass media, people gradually realized that women can be architects too, and they are equally good. Xiu and Wang, They refused to be confined to the traditional frameworks for women, and their exceptional performances had earned themselves recognitions. Though very different, they are both excellent role models for the future generations in Taiwan.

³⁴ Dorte Mandrup | 25 May 2017 99 comments. “Dorte Mandrup on Gender: ‘I Am Not a Female Architect. I Am an Architect.’” *Dezeen*, 30 May 2017, www.dezeen.com/2017/05/25/dorte-mandrup-opinion-column-gender-women-architecture-female-architect/.

³⁵ Refers to “相夫教子” in Chinese, a traditional way to describe the essential tasks for women.

³⁶ Colomina, Beatriz, “With, Or Without You,” *Modern Women*, MoMA, 2010

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Fig. 2-1. 100-Dollar Bill New Taiwan Dollar, Central Bank of the Republic of China,
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Fig. 2-2. Family Photo of Xiu, Fu and their son, Fu Texiu. Credit: Fu Texiu
<https://www.cosmiccare.org/AudioAndVideo/PageContentDetail/bb8b2286-5823-487e-a3cb-82cfb2c1af1a>

Fig. 3-2. Section of Stepped Type Housing from Garden City

Fig. 3-3. Plan of Stepped Type Housing from Garden City

“Garden City.” *Taiwan Magazine*, 1972.

Fig. 4-1. Wang in Qipao, in Construction Site of Academia Sinica, 1972

Fig. 5-2. CYCU Library Viewed from Grace Building, 1985

Fig. 5-3. Sectional Diagram for Natural Ventilation, 1983

Fig. 5-4. CYCU Library Interior on 4-5F

Fig. 5-5. (left) Staircase Plaza, Queensborough Community College, New York ,1975

Fig. 5-7. Isometric Drawing of NCHU library, 1989

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Fig. 5-6. (right) Entry Plaza, CYCU Library, 2010s

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Fig. 6-1. Photography of Xiu and Wang in Taiwan Architects Magazine, introducing the two first-generation female architects in Taiwan.

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