

P5 Reflection

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My graduation project is mainly about the revitalization of the old port area of the Chinese city Xiangtan. As a riverside city located in the south part of China, Xiangtan has been through a long historical period during which some of the most formative moments of Chinese politics and economy happened. As the departure point and the cultural core of the city, the old port area, however, is now marginalized by the urban expansion and economical growth which impoverishes the old port area even more. Meanwhile, the old port area of Xiangtan is a urban area suffering from yearly flooding, during which the local residents have no choice but to move to other safe space provided by the government.

Therefore, my basic design vision is to intervene the site area with a flood-proof urban-scale built environment for local people to stay during flooding, introduce several positive programmes, and let them be the triggering factor towards a prosperous future of the vernacular community at the same time.

The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject

Our graduation lab is known as Intecture, which in my point of view basically means the integration of architectural and engineering design.

My design task echoes to the topic quite well, since the possible design solution involves several fields, such as the urbanism(the whole site approach), the hydraulic engineering(the floating boat houses by the quay), the constructing flow(the installation of the demountable walls), etc, instead of trying to solve a complicated issue by merely designing space on architectural scale.

Meanwhile, the broad integration also brings the endless design tasks. After the finishing of the technical design of my main dwelling building, I need to choose one aspect to further deepening my design as a whole(probably the design in urban scale which is the complete space sequence and experience of my proposed programmes from the riverside to the inner community).

The relationship between research and design

The whole design process of my graduation project started with a thorough research of the site "context". It is one of the three main aspects which are constantly reflected during the whole design process in my graduation lab Intecture. The context study helped me figure out the potential programme and building techniques which I am going to use after knowing the realistic requirements, and the ideal location of my design intervention. I basically conduct my design in a context-led way, with the aim to discover the uniqueness within my site area which implies the distinction from others in a problematic way, to provide the problem-oriented design solution for it afterwards.

In my research paper, the regional spatial characteristics of Xiangtan was clarified, while the experiences of urban waterfront movements of Venice were referred for the comparison. At last, the paper helped yield the inspired design vision as the guiding principle of generating the

possible crisis-initiated revitalization of the old port area of Xiangtan in which the yearly flooding acts as a hinge instead of a boundary to the richness of the local lives by the river bay.

The relationship between the methodical line and the approach of the graduation lab

Compared to the defensive and retreating methods which are often taken facing the water issues, my design approach is quite adaptive which tends to accept and celebrate the given hydrological instability brought by water. It allows flooding water levels to “invade” the inhabited space, prompting people to adapt to the presence of water, to resolve the stress from water or even, turn the stress into opportunities of its development. This sort of adaptable urban strategy is applied in my design(the floating boat houses, the amphibious boat museum, etc), to help solve the dilemma of identity crisis(off-site resettlement) and the poor physical living condition(sticking to the current status) of my site area.

The relations with the approach of the graduation lab can be referred in paragraph two in which the working flow of Intecture is explained.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

I think my project is quite specific in a way considering its unique site location. However, it's a good thing for people living in any historical conserved area to have a adaptable architectural solution which does not destroy their inherited vernacular houses and make them able to enjoy the convenience and aesthetics brought by advanced technologies, therefore adding the richness of their modern lives with respect on their traditions at the same time. Speaking about a bigger picture, I think my graduation project offers a broader overall design vision towards a given insufficient urban built environment, which could help increase the quality of the living conditions of those people suffering from the social, economical and environmental dilemmas.