Aspect 1

• the relationship between research and design

Research and design are interactive. They proceed alternately in the whole process, as shown in the picture. Research appears at every stage of the whole design process, from problem identification, to concept generation, concept resolution and design solutions. Research triggers artistic inspiration, or inspiration provide certain direction for research. Conversely, design as a type of practice, reflects and gives feedback to research conclusions as well.

Aspect 2

• the relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

The chosen research group: Design of the Urban Fabric, aims to provide sustainability and vitality of the urban environment by (re)designing urban fabric, from both human and technical perspective. It focuses on the interactions between the physical environment (tangible) and intangible structure, such as social and psychological perspective. Through studying the composition of the urban fabric and how the existing fabrics are changing or supposed to be changed in the future within the given context, it explores how design can anticipate or stimulate these changes.

Referring to the research question of this graduation project: “How could spatial design interventions contribute to the restoration of psychological trauma imposed by disasters and the creation of a more liveable environment in the explosion area in Binhai New Area, Tianjin?” , it is clear that the question matches the study field of this research group. The project is located in the urban area of a developing context and will be working on neighborhood scale. It aims to build the connection between the design of the physical environment and the restoration of post-disaster psychological trauma as well as the improvement of social inclusion and stability.
Aspect 3

• the relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The graph above shows the methodical line of the graduation lab. It emphasize the cooperation of research and design. Firstly, from the research on theory, images, data, etc. combined with individual interests, the research question is set. Based on the research question, the research process continues to more specific project research such as people's behavior of the project area, the spatial and social quality of that place. In this phase, the designer may already have some design ideas. Then the design can start. Designers may refer to cases to get some inspirations, and participatory design can be involved if possible. Designers and stakeholders work for the project together towards the design product. If, after this, there are further questions coming out, then this whole research and design process will proceed as described on and on.

In the project: towards a restorative and livable urban environment, the methods chosen are correlated to the research questions. Literature study focuses on theories about restorative environment and livability. Site research (observation, interview...) aims to explore the physical settings of the project area, people's behavior and their perception about the living surroundings. Based on the information acquired in these steps, more specific spatial and social analysis are introduced, which is part of the research as well. Combined with reference cases and own experience, the design gradually comes out. In this process, pattern language is introduced, which bridge research and design.
Aspect 4

• the relationship between the project and the wider social context

From the disaster perspective, the psychological trauma imposed by disasters has not raised enough attention from the society, especially in the domain of urbanism. In China, there are comparatively comprehensive post-disaster aid system built and experience gained after going through earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, etc. However, the emphasis is rather on physical aspect than on psychological one. Although psychological consultancy has been gradually implemented into post-disaster assistant procedure, this issue hasn’t aroused enough concern by urbanists and urban designers.

The explosion brought about stress to people, however this stress not only derives from the explosion itself. Generally speaking, under the influence of the “One-child Policy” implemented from 1980s in China, those “one child” have been growing up to be the “pillar” in their families. The “only-childs” have no choice but to burden the stress of raising children and at the same time, being obliged to provide for their parents both economically and emotionally. With rapid population growth and increasingly fierce social competitions, “stress” would definitely go up instead of down.

Apart from this, in Binhai New Area, labor population takes up over 80% of the entire population, among which the floating population plays the dominant role. Targeting at this typical group of people, who are away from their hometown and are seeking for social status, social inclusion as well as sense of belongings, to improve social interactions requires closer concerns. The current urban space in Binhai New Area, especially in the explosion-affected area (and in most newly-built areas in China) however, seems to be heading towards the opposite direction: social segregation.

In summary, social issues are of great significance in this explosion case, not only for post-disaster psychological restoration, or stress reduction, but also towards a more stable and inclusive social environment. As urban designers, it is our job to create such spatial environment in order to satisfy specific social demand.

Reference
