ARCH5131 SUMMER WORKSHOP

REATIVATION OF CHINESE ETHNIC MINORITY SOCIAL SPACES: THE HUNAN DONG MINORITY VILLAGE.

Organized by:
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Dong Traditional Village
01_Programme title

REACTIVATION OF CHINESE ETHNIC MINORITY SOCIAL SPACES: THE HUNAN DONG MINORITY VILLAGE.

02_Programme descriptions, objectives & learning outcomes

2.1_Description

"Architecture is about people."

The African architect Diébédo Francis Kéré approach to architecture represents a clear departure from the formalistic and self-referential trends that have dominated the contemporary architectural discourse in recent years. Kéré’s position presents a profound transformation in this respect towards a notion of architecture that engages directly with local communities and fosters local innovation and craftsmanship.

This workshop starts from the premise that architecture can be a vehicle for collective expression and empowerment, by working closely with local communities understanding their social customs as well as their traditional craftsmanship a new civic approach towards architecture can be achieved that awakens an awareness towards social, sustainable and economic issues facing populations in rural Chinese minority villages and beyond.

The Dong Ethnic Minority people are one of China’s 55 ethnic groups recognized by the People's Republic of China, who live mostly between the regions of eastern Guizhou, western Hunan and northern Guangxi and consist of just under 3 million people. They have a long history of more than 1000 years dating back to Liao peoples and over the centuries have developed a rich culture steeped in tradition and folklore that is strongly connected with the structure of their village settlements.

The Dong rural settlements and the associated traditional timber architecture possesses distinctive and unique characteristics which play a major part in the Dong’s national culture. This uniqueness has to date been recognized both nationally and internationally, culminated in 2006 with 41 Dong villages being included in a preliminary list of UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites.

Dong society is organized around the concept of Kuan which is a form of hierarchical social organization, with a common ancestor or elder at its core; Kuan society links many households that are blood relatives to form a larger family unit. Each family unit constructs a drum tower that is regarded as a symbol of the family’s wealth and status. Drum towers are considered the center of the Dong’s cultural and spiritual life. They are located according to feng-shui rules and all other buildings in the village must not exceed the height of the village’s drum tower. Drum towers also function as a type of totem pole and a spiritual symbol for each large family unit, where important events such as celebrating a baby’s first month of life and naming, as well as public gatherings, debates, official announcements, dancing and singing events are all held.

Unfortunately, the Dong communities today are confronted with very real problems that are challenging both their social structure as well as their economic livelihoods: namely rapid urbanization. The impact of urbanization, which is affecting many Chinese rural sites, brings very practical and immediate problems to the Dongs; Structural decay of village– of abandoned dwellings with most
working members of the community opting to leave the villages and work in the city; the disappearance of traditional craftsmanship such as carpentry, which as a trade cannot compete economically with modern construction techniques and finally the commercialization of their cultural heritage to attract tourists.

The issues central to this research workshop relate to understanding how public “Social Spaces” of the Dong rural settlements (such as the drum towers but not exclusively), the corner stone of their integrated and balanced society for centuries, can not only remain relevant amidst this rural diaspora, but become active focal hubs of the community.

Drum Tower – Exterior and Interior

2.2 Objectives

2.2.1 Public Spaces
To document the Spatial/Social characteristics of the different forms of Public Spaces, namely: Drum Tower, Village Bridge, Stage, Altar and Gate in relation to the existing settlement structure and contextual geography.

2.2.2 Contextualize
To position the public social spaces of the Gau Bu village in the context of other Dong Villages both along the Pingtan River and at large within the three provinces (Guizhou, Hunan and Guangxi).

2.2.3 Prototypes
To generate a phased incremental strategy to reactivate these social spaces through the implementation of series of architectural prototypes.

2.2.4 Knowledge Bank
To create a knowledge bank regarding the upgrading of Dong rural settlements without losing their important cultural identity.

2.3 Learning Outcomes

2.3.1 Mapping
Working in groups students will map the existing social structures, generating 2D and 3D drawings of the Gau Bu village from both Macro and Micro perspective.
Skills: Hand Drawings, CAD, and 3D Sketch-up and Rhino Modeling.

2.3.3 – Timber Tectonics
With the aid of local craftsmen we will analyze the techniques and methodologies of constructing traditional timber Dong buildings.

Skills: Timber detailing and building tectonics

2.3.3 – Prototyping
Having absorbed the craft and techniques behind Dong buildings students will propose a series of “fragments”, i.e. prototypes to attach, enhance, adapt local buildings.

Skills: Fabrication using traditional tools.

2.3.4 – Presentation
The final projects will be presented to the community chief in a public ceremony.

Skills: Graphical representation and public speaking

03_Destination

3.1_ Dong Villages around the Tongdao area, Hunan Province, China

04_Duration and Proposed Dates

4.1_Start > 2016.06.22
4.2_Completion > 2016.07.01
4.3_Days > 10 days (80 hours)