

Disappearing Cultural and Regional Identity

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Abstract

The architecture can be regarded as the container containing many environmental factors. apart from its physical factor, it also includes cultural, economic and social factors. Particularly, according to Denial Grincer (2016), buildings can be considered as consequential and expressive objects representing the values and identities of culture. However, rapid urbanization and globalization have resulted in disappearing cultural and regional identity in many area and cities with the trend of application of same architectural styles, materials and building methods. Especially in some Asian countries, following the modernization of western progress, an increasing number of faceless architectural character become the dominant of many Asian cities. Under the strong influence of international culture, the weak local traditional culture is gradually threatening people's perception of the cities they are living.

Keywords

Building, Culture.

1. Introduction

In the past a few decades, the iconic building, a new type of architecture, has emerged, driven by social forces, the demand for instant fame and economic growth (Jencks, 2005). There are more and more iconic buildings, as the landmark, stand in many cities of the world. The CCTV Headquarters is one of the respective examples in China, as an iconic building, that have been sparked public debate for being a few years. Two towers rise from a common platform and merge in a cantilever to form a loop, which nicknamed locally as "Big Plants" because of its unusual shape. Actually, as the statement of Charles Jencks (2005), the original design intention of Koolhaas is to present a building that looks like a moon gate from the distance, the ornamental surround that punctuates every Chinese garden, rather than in relation with any form about plants. It is obvious that the cultural overtones in this building is too weak that the public cannot perceive and even think it is incompatible with Beijing's culture in their mind. Particularly, it was referred specifically as a "weird architecture "in a speech at a literary symposium in Beijing by Xi Jinping, the president of China (Rory Stott,2014).

Apparently, "Big Plants", the common perception of CCTV Headquarters in the Chinese people's mind, suggests the limits of some kinds of iconic buildings. As shown in Figure 1. As a landmark in the city, it cannot represent the city and become a representative urban icon accepted by the public. Apart from extraordinary form and structure that make them stand out from the surrounding, the most common characteristics of these buildings still are: taut plane surfaces without applied ornamentation and decoration; open interior spaces; a visually weightless quality produced by using cantilever construction; and glass and steel, as the characteristic materials of construction, combined with usually less visible reinforced concrete. Behind these buildings, there is indistinct or little relation with the cities' cultural identity, which makes an increasing number of cities in China gradually resemble any other big cities in the world.



Fig. 1 The CCTV Headquarters

In my view, the projects designed by architects are more than just architecture, it can be significant objects enable people to immediately associate them with the cultural identity of a city or region. In other words, building can be a sign that evoke emotional or spiritual responses, which would be an memory that had existed in the people's mind, and even as a agent the teach people something about the past. Particularly, in today's China where the regional culture gradually weaken and even disappear, the culture under the architecture seemed especially important. The architects have the responsibility to start their design with more consideration of the need of the people and reflection of Chinese cultural value, rather than simple imagination of glitz and exaggerated forms to pursue eye-catching objects. As shown in Figure 2.



Fig. 2 Design and architecture

2. Design Scheme Analysis

Based on the important role that culture play in the architecture, I believe a more reasonable way is to mix classical and modern architectural designs, by extracting traditional elements from classical culture and architecture to create new architectural style that fit in with its location and satisfy all the

local participants and the surrounding residents, rather than a simple way to imitate classical architectural form. In other word, the past is literally given new life as the relationship between past and present is explored.

This strategy is fully illustrated by my project called "The City Wall". It is a design about renovation of an urban village. Urban villages are a unique phenomenon formed due to the rapid urbanization of China, commonly inhabited by the poor and transient with terrible crowded living environment, such as high density of building with multiple storey and narrow alley, which cannot allow enough sunlight to enter the interior of building that is dark and damp year around. This village is located the downtown segments of Xi'an, the ancient capital known as Chang'an in the Tang dynasty, and specially a part of the site is overlapping with that of the City Wall of Chang'an that has been destroyed for a long time. Considering the significance of its location and the existing problems, I intend to create a long and high profile by stacking different volumes with diverse functions to form a complex and new visual city wall to remind people of this important period in the long history of China. Additionally, the texture of the urban village is maintained and transformed into the facade, which is also the important part in the inhabitant's memory and the process of Chinese development. At same time, large area left to be used as farmland and greening to serve the inhabitant of the urban village as well as the surroundings to enjoy enough sunlight and outdoor activities. All of the elements regarding the city wall, the urban village and the farmland illustrate the various history and culture about the same locality can teach people something about themselves.

Furthermore, through a series of diagrams, these three completed buildings designed by different architects can also prove its validity of this strategy. Regarding their focus on the materials and forms, they demonstrate their unique ideas and approaches in relation with local culture and tradition and bring about new and successful achievement in architecture.

Asakusa Culture and Tourism Center designed by kengo kuma is the first precedent that I want to use to substantiate my arguments. As shown in Figure 3. The center is located at the departure point for tourists of Asakusa temple, accommodating different programs, like information center, exhibition space, sightseeing stand for temple. The new form created by kuma by vertically stack the volumes that extend the Asakusa's neighborhood. It is obvious that the new layered architecture had not existed in conventional Japanese architecture with stacked roofs responding to history.



Fig. 3 Asakusa Culture and Tourism Center

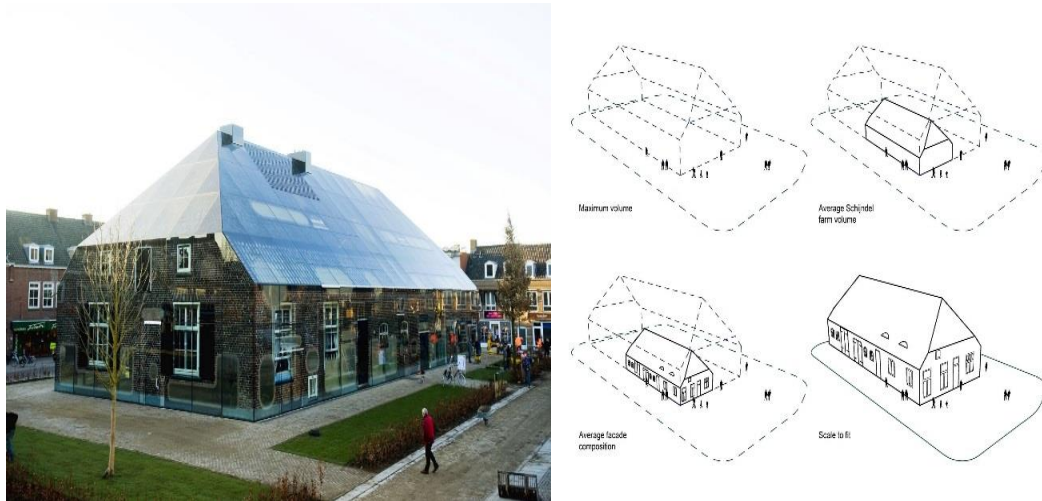


Fig. 4 Glass Farm

Another projects that I tend to illustrate is Glass Farm, designed by MVRDV. The goal is to create a new structure in Schijndel's market square. In this project, the MVRDV focus on the old form of a traditional Schijndel farm. They finally decide to remain the form by scaling up it that is 1.6 times larger than real size to fitting new site and function including restaurants, shops and wellness centre, and the entire building is covered by glass facade. Additionally, the most interesting point in this design is that the glass facade was printed by the image produced from the photos of the traditional Schijndel farms, and part of this image was treated to become translucent at the height of real windows. At night, the structure will be highlight by the illuminated inside to present its memorable significance. As shown in Figure 4.

Moreover, Ningbo History Museum is a representative and successful example against China's rapid modernization, concerning the distinct way of Wang Shu to stress Chinese traditional culture in architecture. Contrasting with previous projects, the main traditional element that Wang Shu focus is the material about tiles and craftsmanship. Based on Ningbo, a famous city with long history and rich and unique culture, he harmoniously combines the traditional building elements that are salvaged from local traditional building with modern architectural form, and also, importantly, he creates innovative techniques inspired from regional building of "tile wall" and "concrete wall with bamboo splint framework". The tiles that are inherently tied to local origins became the important characteristics and also emerge in his other projects. These special elements could help some locals to find a feeling of home and even some memories about their childhood, because some of which likely is a part of their old house that have been demolished. As shown in Figure 5.

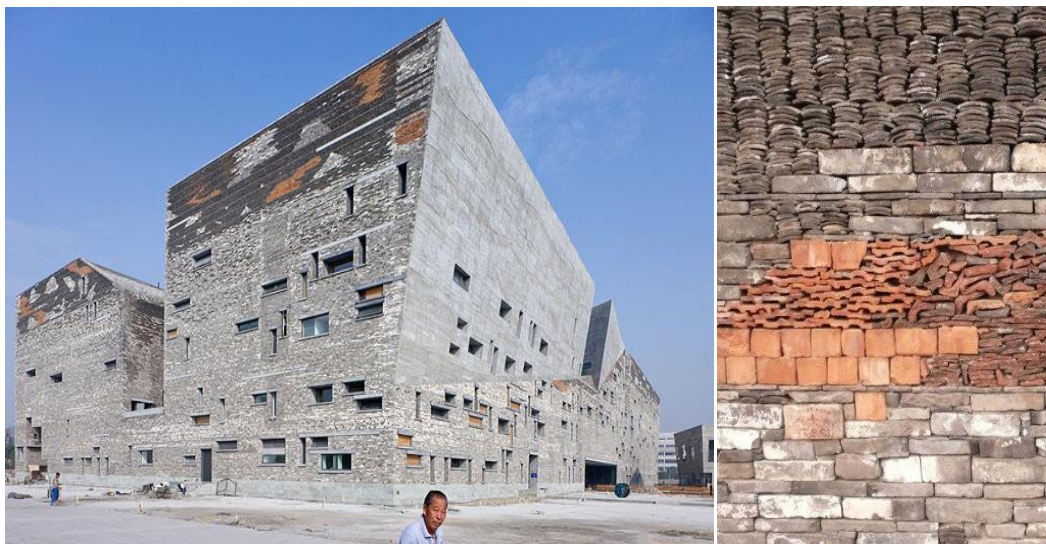


Fig. 5 Ningbo History Museum

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, both my project and three precedents show the similarity of idea that integrate regional cultural characters and traditional elements into modern architecture. They effectively retain the characteristics of regional culture in the modern building to affect the way that people feel about the city, which strongly proves the building can be the landmark as well as the urban icon--a definition of a city and a statement about its history and culture, instead of the meaningless symbol. as the statement of Richard Hooker, (cited in Grincer, 2016), " Architecture can be 'read' ". The architecture is crucial medium to convey and remain the culture and the traditional elements that are incorporated into modern architectural strategies in different area, presenting distinct regional identity for people to recall or perceive the diversity of the world.

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