

Arch 599 Travel Seminar—Field Studies in China

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Emblematic Landscape and Urbanism of China

One of the most important aspects of field research is the opportunity to gain insight into the relationships between culture, society, and politics, and place—urbanism. In this regard, the main objective of the Field Studies Travel Seminar will be to examine the emblematic nature of Chinese urbanism, architecture, and landscape architecture. As we travel across four different cities, we will examine the urban morphology of each city and pay particular attention to the symbolic nature of place and space both historically and contemporarily. We will attempt to document and analyze our findings through specific cultural and social lens with the objective to create an illustrated lexicon of Chinese urbanism and place as the final deliverable for the course.

While it is easy for us to understand buildings as urban icons and therefore its emblematic nature, I propose that this phenomenon extends itself to gardens as well as urban spaces and places. The power of the symbolic nature of things cannot be underestimated in China. The importance of “saving face” within the Chinese society is an excellent indication of this possible interpretation. The Chinese resistance to alphabetizing its written language is another. It is not the physical reality or fact that is important, perception and representation prevails and permeates through all aspect of Chinese society and culture. This said, our act to document this phenomenon will take us beyond the traditional recordation of architecture, landscape architecture, and place to include documentation of people, culture, art, and human activities.

Within this larger pedagogical objective are then the sub-topics of focus for each location:

Guangzhou – Architectural Excess – a city steeped in history better known to the West as Canton is in the process of renewal. As the new urban fabric threads its way through the remnants of the existing one, Guangzhou is constructing a new city axis and public attractor weighted heavily with what LA architecture critic, Frances Anderton, raises as urbanism of “architectural excess” – **emblem** of excess.

Chengdu – *Tian Fu Zhi Guo* – the Land of Abundance for its agricultural wealth – is known for its spicy Sichuan cuisine and the spirit of its people. Ranked China’s fourth most livable city, culturally-rich with temples and other historical relics dotting the landscape, the capital of the Sichuan province is not averse to embracing modern developments in its skyline. Shopping malls, hotels and offices have sprouted as **emblems** of its status as China’s political and economic centre of Western China.

Yan’an – Symbol of Chinese Revolution – Yan’an is located on the Loess Plateau in northern Shaanxi Province. The town was of great strategic importance in ancient wars, and is steeped in revolutionary traditions. It was here that the Chinese Worker’s and Peasants’ Red Army, after completing the 12,500 kilometers Long March, established a revolutionary base. Yan’an was the seat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Celebrate as the birthplace of the Chinese communist revolution; Yan’an is an urban **emblem** of Chinese Communism in the process of a capitalist revolution through the discovery of rich natural resources.

Shanghai – Curatorial Urbanism – an urbanism that is based on the idea of individualized urban experience that is necessarily temporal and experiential with many possible different and ephemeral narratives defined by the hybrid momentary urbanism of the **emblematic** during the 2010 Shanghai International Exposition – an artificially produced urbanism that could singularly manifest its own urban paradigm.

Course Structure

This is a research based academic course for graduate field studies in architecture, landscape architecture, and urbanism. The course is a 5-week offering with one week of pre-departure research and four weeks of field investigative work.

Pre-departure Research

In order to facilitate efficient and effective usage of time in conducting field research while traveling, the course will start with one week of intense literary research on campus in Los Angeles. The intent is to define the parameter of the topical interest by each student within the framework of the emblematic and allegory. Each student or student team will start the research with a study of precedents to broadly locate the evolution and trajectory of each place of intended visit within the history of its development and establish a first reading of its morphology.

Research will focus on identifying specific places of emblematic interest and establishing a complete spatial and formal analysis with full documentation to include plan(s), applicable section(s), 3-dimensional models, images, and diagrams. More importantly, the research should also identify areas requiring field confirmation and in depth analysis. A thesis should be identify to guide the field research to include an objective based list of data to be collected and strategy for the collection of such data.

Field Research

With established objectives and clear identification of data to be collected and/or confirmed based on real time site observation, each student or student group must be cognizant of the limitation of time at each location to establish effective and efficient research process. Due to the nature of travel workshop, unpredictable conditions will invariably alter the established process of field analysis. Given this possible scenario we will establish a pre-field discussion before departure on a daily basis to review itinerary, places of visit, and refine our field analysis strategy and concentration. Assignment will be distributed and discussed to clarify tasks and objectives for each day of research. Each of you will be required to exercise rigor in the completion of all observation and documentation in order to eliminate the need to return at a later date.

Post Field Analysis

Following each day of research students may be asked to discuss observations in a group setting. These discussions should address an aspect of the site(s) that had some personal meaning to the observer, the discussions need not be limited to the topic of the exercise and students are invited to use graphic media.

As a collective your will establish a graphic template using InDesign to compose findings and analysis into a final publication in pdf format. Use 6 x 9 page, vertical format, double-sided publication. Please go to <http://lulu.com> for publication specification details. Make sure that all of you use the same fonts, with identical font size and format for titles, headers, captions, and body text. I recommend 10 points for all body text, 8 points for captions, and no text should be larger than 14 points unless conceived as graphic image. Please note, no pages should be more than 50% full (each page should contain more than 50% negative space).

In addition to the above, your research will also address the following two main bodies of investigation:

1. Cultural/Theoretical Context – This investigation will situate each place of visit in the broader context of theory, debates and preoccupations that characterize the cultural climate of the era. What critical cultural, political, social and economic circumstances define, influence and distinguish the era? Our inquiry will include parallel discussions about the influence of philosophy, art, and other forms of cultural expression.

2. City/Site Context – In this investigation we will discuss how the physical character/quality of spaces, scales and textures of the city and specific site influence the development of the built environment. In addition, we will discuss the place as an agent for morphological change. Lastly, we will explore how social rituals and events are reconfigured as a result of each environmental and spatial intervention.

Methodology

The field study exercises will impart structure and focus to independent investigative analysis as well as providing a means for the class to coordinate their efforts in compiling a more extensive final product in the form of a publication. It will also encourage analytical observation and recordation. The course will require students to be inquisitive and seek answers to their own questions through observations, documentation, and discussions.

The research will utilize the following analytical devices with the intent to catalogue the broadest swatch of speculations and assumptions about China. The objective is to identify the different stands of definitions (oppositions and contradictions) that frame China and expose the possible combinations that define its urbanism:

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| Diagrams & Sketches | Given the advances in technology in digital cameras and video camcorders, the ability to produce clear and concise diagrams are the most critical aspect of any architectural or urban field research and documentation process. The ability to be on site to make real-time observations is invaluable. More importantly, the ability to record those observations in a coherent and concise manner is even more critical. One of the most important assignment for this travel workshop is to fully diagram and document all the places we will visit to achieve a thorough understanding of each place within the framework of the larger focus on the emblematic. Perspective sketches, while they are informative of your focus, are probably not the most efficient use of your time on site. Your objective through field sketches is to capture the diagrammatic essence of each place and its unique urban conditions. Post site visit consolidation of your field research to compile and organize your finding will be the critical completion of the entire scholastic research and documentation process. Inclusion of free hand field sketches is acceptable but the entire final product must be well organized, graphically consistent, and properly composed to propagate a narrative with thesis and be informative. Post site production to include recreation of 2-D and 3-D diagrams from field notes is expected. Final diagrams must be clear, concise, and illustrative of thesis as stand-alone graphic devices or be combined with images as overlays. Use the diagrams in a serial manner with graphic consistency to achieve cohesive narration. |
| Digital Photography & Video | The usage of the digital camera to include digital video camcorder is highly encouraged. The act of digital photography or video recording should not be conceived as simple digital documentation. Each capture must be thoughtful and insightful to illustrate your findings. To achieve this, one needs to shoot as much as possible to capture as much as possible in order to yield useful content after editing. General rule of thumb is one good image in every 50 frames of shots. Serialized captures and framing of images is highly encouraged. A field shot diary of date, time, and place to include environmental and climatic |

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conditions must be rigorously kept. Post production will be critically important to the success of digital documentation. Images within the still or moving pictures must be used to illustrate a thesis or expose an architectural, urban, cultural, social, and/or political condition. Images and footages should not stand alone as simple field recordation. The intention is not in photo-journalism or creation of a documentary film. Usage of digital photography and/or video must be illustrative of rigor as instrument of scientific data collection. This means appropriate digital manipulation with diagram overlay is expected to highlight and illustrate your key findings. Proper framing of views and post production re-framing of images will be critical to the reading of the captured content.

Sampled Material,

Maps, & Found
Objects

In addition to the traditional field methodologies of diagrams and digital recordation, field sampling of found objects, clippings to include the sampling of printed matters, maps, satellite images, and web samplings are encouraged. The idea is to selectively sample the popular media and everyday found objects in China to expose, explore, and analyze the validity of the emblematic hypothesis of urban China. Please note, bibliography and listing of origin of all sourced material are mandatory and must be included in the final presentation and publication.

Interviews and Field
Interactions

As we travel through the different parts of China, your presence, individual or in a group, will always attract the attentions of local inhabitants. In the necessary interactions, chance encounters and planned interviews with them, make sure to document all aspects of the encounter to include their demeanor and stance. Again, date, time, and place of each documented encounter to include environmental and climatic data need to be rigorously recorded. In addition to the specifics of the encounter/interview, be fully aware of the situation surrounding your activity. Make sure to take general surveillance and with the assistance of your colleagues to document the entire setting to include all by-standers. Sometimes the activities surrounding your direct encounter with a local person may prove to be more interesting and informative.

Artifacts of Creative
Acts

Lastly, as a creative response, each of you is also required to engage in a series of "creative acts"—small serial design interventions: pictorial, object, or both—that will begin to address the emblematic urban conditions explored and analyzed. The creative acts must be serial to clearly illustrate its address in response to the differentiating conditions of each place. Artifacts of creative acts should be conceived as diagrams, 2-D or 3-D, in response to the observed urban conditions. The final artifact(s) should be documented and included in the final presentation and publication.

Captions and Text

All the items above must be supported by captions and text. Do not rely on graphic devices alone to express your findings. Just as this is not photo-journalism, it is also not a pictorial book. You must exercise your writing ability to communicate abstract ideas.

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Los Angeles (USC)	May 31 to June 4	Registered USC students only not applicable to Continuing Education scholars or faculty led student groups
Depart for Guangzhou	June 5	
Guangzhou	June 7 to 13	
Chengdu	June 13 to 20	
Yan'an	June 20 to 27	
Shanghai	June 27 to July 2	End of Travel Component of Program
Final Report Preparation	July 5 to 9	Registered USC students and continuing education scholars only
End of program	July 9	Final report due at 6:00 pm

Reading Assignments:

Li, Xiaodong; Yeo, Kang Shua. *Chinese Conception of Space*. Beijing, China: China Building Industry Press, 2007. Pages 1-47, 102-145. ISBN: 9787112091928.

Venturi, Robert; Brown, Denise Scott. "Shanghai", in *Shanghai Transforming*. Edited by Iker Gil. European Union: Actar, 2008. Pages 66-71. ISBN: 9788496954663.

Haar, Sharon. "Shanghai's Spectacles", in *Shanghai Transforming*. Edited by Iker Gil. European Union: Actar, 2008. Pages 72-75. ISBN: 9788496954663.

Rowe, Peter G. "Urbanizing China", in *Shanghai Transforming*. Edited by Iker Gil. European Union: Actar, 2008. Pages 76-79. ISBN: 9788496954663.

Sassen, Saskia. "Disaggregating the Global Economy: Shanghai", in *Shanghai Transforming*. Edited by Iker Gil. European Union: Actar, 2008. Pages 80-85. ISBN: 9788496954663.

Li, Xiangning; Zhang, Xiaochun. "From Lilong to International Community", in *Shanghai Transforming*. Edited by Iker Gil. European Union: Actar, 2008. Pages 204-211. ISBN: 9788496954663.

Volume, "Ubiquitous China", Archis 2006 #2

Frampton, Kenneth. "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance", in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Edited by Hal Foster. Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983. ISBN: 094192002X.

Haralambidou, Penelope. "The Allegorical Project: Architecture as Figurative Theory", in *Architecture and Authorship: Studies in Disciplinary Remediation*. Edited by Anstey, T.; Grillner, K.; Hughes, R. London, UK: Black Dog Publishing. Pages 118-129. ISBN 1-904772-74-9.

Course Requirements & Evaluation

Requirements for class consist of presentations, field research report to include final workshop publication, field studies assignments, daily journal and/or sketchbook, and course participation.

Course participation will include presentations from all students of concurrent field observations.

Grading Grades will be calculated based on the following distribution:

Discussion Participation	10%
Field Documentation (daily journal and/or sketchbook)	25%
Post Field Analysis	35%
Final Presentation and Publication	30%
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	100%

Attendance

This course adheres to the School of Architecture attendance policies. Because of the concentrated nature of foreign studies course offerings, consistent attendance is a critical aspect of the course. Absence from class can not easily be "made up" when the class experience involves unique exposure to resources not otherwise available to the students. As such absence from field studies activities can have significant impact on the evaluation of student and may result in an unsatisfactory grade.

Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>

Accreditation Statement

The USC School of Architecture's five year BARCH degree is an accredited professional architectural degree program. All students can access and review the NAAB Conditions of Accreditation (including the Student Performance Criteria) on the NAAB Website: http://www.naab.org/accreditation/2009_Conditions.aspx