To think and discuss the relationship between culture and design is timely indeed if we consider the fast growing process in which China is immersed. This rapid social and cultural development in recent years has launched a debate among Chinese architects and designers about the correct way forward for China.

In the Chinese development process, traditional values and thoughts have been greatly affected while at the same time new thought and value systems have not had a chance to mature. This period has produced great change in which impetuous and superficial concepts and an eagerness for quick success and instant growth have emerged.

We can see grow a conflict of tradition versus new. To think on it is really the topic of this lecture.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

We call culture to the sum of all the knowledge and skills developed by a community in their ongoing struggle to control the nature, comprising an identity throughout is history.

The natural environment, the climate, the food, the clothes, the techniques developed to control the wild nature, the research to developed such techniques, the social relationship of the community, the education and language, the expression of emotions through the arts: poetry, music, dance, painting; the habitat construction thanks to architecture, would be some of the most important features that define the culture of a community.

Culture is the set of characteristics that define **the way of life of a community engaged in a continuous process of change and evolution in search of improving the daily life quality of its inhabitants.**

Today, when we hear mention of the word "culture" our attention is at once drawn to the world of the arts and sciences: painting, music, poetry, cinema, etc, or scientific research, academies and university centers, are effectively, in a broad sense, what we call the world of culture. This is because **the fine arts, expressing emotions, along with science, expressing knowledge, represent the highest level of cultural development of a society**, and for that reason take on a highly symbolic and representative meaning.

But following this way we can guess that culture could be a complex and fragile term which can disappear instantly just when you call it up…

Architects and designers should be more interested to approach at a definition of culture more practical and useful for a productive development of their activity.

They need to describe with precision the place where they have to design: understand the "culture" of the site and its surroundings, the context, the public space and communications, the dynamics of their movements, the laws that regulate and order it, and the functions to will develop.

Designers must have a complete idea about the characteristics of the project site that has the mission to change and improve. And to complete the process design, all that would be harmonized with the needs and expectations of the clients and the people who will be the inhabitants of the new space.

To understand means to perceive new things and environments, observe them, study them, and intuit them.

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

I would not dwell too much on definitions that we all know, just let me remind three or four concepts

Architecture is one of the more ancient professions, perhaps the world's oldest. If we consider the primarily activities, such hunting, fishing or farming, the search for foods, it might be is the second oldest profession. When the man was no longer content with natural refuges he became an architect. Then, **Architecture is a service.**

Architecture and design are sciences too. Architects and designers, like scientists, must explore to find new solutions and should have a taste for adventure, to tackle reality and be able to understand it and propose the changes that they were expected to improve it.

Architecture does not exist without people. People are the users of architecture. Listening to people is very necessary.

But, to me, the most important is: we cannot forget that **Architecture is an art**. It uses technique to generate an emotion, and it does so with its own specific language: space, proportions, light, materials and its derivative techniques, working to achieve a harmonized solution.

Architecture shares with all the arts the same creative process. It proceeds in an experimental way, exploring: in our case, on the city, the function, the environment, the materials, mixing science and technology, but of course Architecture is **about poetry, about society, about creating places that people can enjoy.**

GLOBALIZATION

Culture is what exists. And, **as a dynamic cultural factor, architecture has the goal to "project" the future**. Architects and designers have an exciting work acting as change agents on the limits between the old and the new.

The changes brought by the globalization process updated the discussion on the relationship between design and culture.

Globalization encompasses two main issues in urban development. One is the globalization of the city. Different cities share urban elements gradually, which are caused by globalization. The cities on the same layer or of the same type will have similar characteristics.

The other is the globalization of design. The globalization of material, technology, human education and thought cause the globalization of design becoming in a kind of universal values, which can lead to a possible negative effect: "westernization"

Even western countries like Spain have experienced the same effect of such a phenomenon, which in this case I should call "modernization". It could be negative if it comes without an appropriate reflection.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE

What we know as "modern architecture" was born at the beginnings of XXth century in North of Europe. In those countries, a climate without enough sunlight did suggest to architects the design of big glass surfaces in facades. Later, in the north of USA, with similar climate conditions and based on the same concepts, was invented the curtain wall, a solution which became a symbol of modernity in the called "international style".

As if it was just a fashion, the origin of the concept, not to have sunlight, was rapidly forgotten. In Spain, for example, a country with almost 90% of sunny days, hundreds, maybe thousands of buildings were designed with curtain walls, buildings that require cool air conditioning all year, even in winter. This was a result of a bad design, and of course a not sustainable solution. A simple but clear example of what I call a negative effect of westernization, modernization or globalization, as you prefer.

Following a different path, **researching on the traditional construction techniques** in sunny places, it was proposed the redesign of classical systems to get shade and a properly sunlight control in a passive and natural way. Facades with big sunshades, sliding or fixed, became a part of the new architectural language as a modern answer to a local problem, based on tradition.

This rediscovery could be defined as the birth of the second skin concept, which nowadays has been extended as an efficient solution to meet sustainability requirements, and also offering to designers a rich range of overlay images to compose facades, exploiting another fundamental concept of contemporary art, simultaneity.

Understand our own design context. This is the clue, a smart and sensitive way of approach to the tradition with new ideas and intentions.

Most cities in China are experiencing the effects of globalization. It is a frequent topic the discussion about the relation between globalization and local identity. Cities are homogenizing day by day, but in this process regional characteristics are decreasing.

If we admit that this is a problem, architects and designers should try to keep the traditional without any kind of resign to the more contemporary design language.

ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS RESPONSIBILITY

Architecture is an art, but an especial kind of art, **a particular art that produces things to serve a purpose.** And if it is not developed with responsibility, according to Renzo Piano"…it could be a social dangerous art, because it is an imposed art. You can

avoid listening to bad music…", or watching bad movies or paintings that you are not interested, "…but you cannot miss the ugly tower block opposite to your house. Architecture does not give the user a chance". This is the reason that architecture became a serious responsibility, that usually lasting many years.

The richness of our profession is to have a good interpretation of social needs offering a way to develop them.

Frank Gehry said, in some way paraphrasing Michelangelo ("the sculpture is already in the marble block") that a good building is already in the site before it is built. This means that the work of the architect would be discover it, trough understanding the local conditions and the place tensions: that is, the culture of the site.

"...understand the character and feeling of the site and of the surrounding environment, as if from them, in a way that is difficult to rationalize, would raise a sort of latent architectonic solution..."

As designers, we have a serious commitment with culture, with our client needs and expectations and with our user's needs.

In that sense we should "...propose flexible guidelines of growth and modification, even after the building is completed..."

TRADITION AND MODERNITY

To reach a synthesis between tradition and modernity, that is the binomial we must to consider to work with. This would be a new challenge for us in countries experiencing rapid change as China does these days.

At the beginnings of modernity, the concept of tradition has been used as a contrast to creativity, the conservative and traditional associated with unoriginal imitation or repetition, in contrast to fine art which is valued for being original and unique. But now we should consider interaction with tradition as integral to the development of new and also original artistic expression.

Following "...an open project method without prejudices of form or concept helps us to convert problems in to advantages, working with reality and not against it..."

On this basis, our studio in Barcelona has done an important project in the old and historic center of the city. It was a residential place of very high density with a close and disorder medieval urban trace. The goal of the project was to develop a new social housing program, modernizing the area with new infrastructures and making a total renovation of the public space. Reading on the site conditions and trying to preserve the character of the old town we did a micro surgery project, choosing some buildings which deserve to be keeping up and renovate. 50% of the project was existing buildings and the rest were new. This project received several awards and was published in books and magazines as a good example of integration between old and new.

Thousands of years ago, the Chinese philosopher Lao Zi said: "We form a pottery pot with sticky clay, in order to use its hollow space; we build the walls and windows of a building, in order to use its interior room… We make an effort to form tangible substances, but the aim is to create useful hollow spaces…"

Lao Zi expressed his idea by means of the concepts of "substance" and "void", describing the relationship between physical appearance and space. The ancient Chinese were master in landscaping trying to work with high sensitivity towards the nature and the environment. The original natural character was respected and the optimal harmoniously combination of buildings with nature was a permanent objective. The natural environment was treated as an important element of architectural design. **These traditional concepts could be a guide to help us in our work on the boundaries between that exists and deserves to be preserved and the original new ideas that we are expected to project.**

OUR OWN DESIGN TOOLS

These days there is in London an exhibition about the works of 16 Beijing architects. It was organized precisely by Cui Kai, who recently was here gave us a lecture on his work. The exhibition shows the best contemporary Chinese architecture. Following his example, we must to work with our own design tools in order to propose, like them, a new and contemporary solution which at the same time respects tradition and cultural context, not in a decorative way.

Drawing: We have a particular language to express our creative imagination. Drawing is our main tool to develop our ideas and seduce and convince our customers.

Integration and contrast: Two ways to search harmony, by integrating the context (mimic) or by contrast with the context (differentiate). Although contradictories both terms work usually simultaneously in a complementary way.

Material and construction systems: The intensive use of some local material provides good visual integration with the surrounding environment although the shape and volume of the new building contrast with that environment.

Composition on design: Scale and proportion, horizontal and vertical disposition. Mass and empty.

"...the use of different colours and textures as dynamic composition tools, reinforce the intention of having an open superposition system structuring the project..."

Public space: The empty space between buildings is an essential part of the project, there may not be a casual residue. That space is the public architectural space, and in such condition must to be considered and designed. The quality of a city depends, along with the quality of its services, on the physical and visual comfort of the public areas. Also depends of its scale, its urban equipment, the balance in the distribution of green spaces, the properly distribution of circulation and rest areas, etc.

Landscape: Treatment of landscape should have similar consideration to the public space, which is the urban landscape. Landscaping is much more tan gardening.

Landscape architecture should work leading the way in urban development by planning and designing an ecological infrastructure of landscape, through which landscape can be recreated and preserve as a medium to connect people with land and cities. Topography and vegetation can be strong elements to define the architecture character.

New design elements: transparencies, lights, reflections, virtual or intangible elements. The quality culture of the buildings and construction must assume a much higher priority than the image and must also be geared toward the future. It's required a good understanding of the design process focused particularly on the project details.

NEW DESIGN FACTORS

Environmental factors of a territory that quickly wears have become essential patterns of contemporary design. A few years ago, sustainable development and energy saving were only discussed in academy. Today that has changed. **Architecture quality will be more and more associated to sustainability of buildings.** This already is one of the central architectural and design challenges, and will remain so in the next years, especially in developing countries like China.

But sustainability means, in first place, the regular use of common sense. In this case, indeed, we should also observe and learn of the wit of traditional solutions. **A good project should solve these questions with a smart design and passive methods and only then, with the help of technologies.**

This is not a topic to be left to the engineering. On the contrary, it is a concept that has to be on the designer table from the very beginning of the project. And of course it should be on the goals of a company like this. Because it is not just the use of some technology resources added at the last moment. We can say even more, the **buildings should be not only sustainable, but must appear so.**

Working consciously through the understanding and knowledge of our design place, and mastering our own design tools, we will be able to conceive a harmonious solution, the more convenient contemporary architecture and design to a specific cultural place.

Thank you very much.

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