

Dean's Roundup (Friday, 9 October 2015)

Roundup: *Ceiling function*, the mathematical operation of rounding a number up to the next higher integer.

Roundup: a term in American English referring to the process of gathering animals into an area, known as a "Muster" in Australia.

Rounding up: when a helmsman cannot control a boat and it heads into the wind

Roundup: the plan for an invasion of northern France by Allied forces during World War II (Wikipedia)

Dean's Roundup: part blog, part bulletin; part honour roll, part curatorial [cu-ra-to-ri-al (kyŭ-rĕ-tŏr'ē-əl, -tŏr'-) n. nounised by the Dean

Dear All,

One of the emails I had in the wake of recent Dean's Roundup discussion on form vs function came from Zhu Tao and an interesting discussion ensued. I would like to keep the conversation going within the faculty so I've asked Tao to write this week's DRup blog. Here it is...

In his September 18 Roundup, Chris commented on 'truth and beauty' in architecture, with a fun case study of coffee cup design. Although he later modestly called his comments a 'light-hearted blog,' I think he's talking about something significant. I'd like to follow up.

First, I'd say Chris was defending a basic, universal value of architecture. If summarizing his arguments to a few bare points, we can see his implication more easily. In his words, 'beauty,' obviously, is about form. Speaking of 'truth,' Chris first referred it to function in the case of coffee cup, and later to structure in the case of hotel tower design (a hotel tower, Chris implies, should be able to stand up). Basically, Chris was making an argument equivalent to Vitruvius' three architectural elements - Firmness, Commodity, and Delight. If someone presents this tripartite architecture value system, I guess none of our architectural colleagues would disagree, although we might feel it too general. But we'll feel the statement provocative and pointed if someone delivers the same statement in this way, and I think that's what Chris is saying: Delight won't be possible without supports of Firmness and Commodity. I agree with Chris. And I think his statement hits onto a problem of contemporary architectural education.

In term of form-function relationship, I find one tendency prevalent in many architectural schools today. Let's call it 'biotechnical determinism +intuitive mysticism.' It first, conceptually, splits function and form, and then pushes each to an extreme end.

On one hand, the 'biotechnical determinism' side still holds the same belief that once spurred the futurists and many technocratic avant-gardes on during the 1910s-1920s. Hennes Mayer's *Sachlichkeit* slogans were typical rhetoric of that belief at the time: "All life is function and is therefore unartistic"; "All things in the world are a product of the formula: function times economy." Today's 'biotechnical determinist' rhetoric remains conceptually the same, yet it has been updated with an exclusive belief in

computer: the computer can set up all essential 'parameters' of human activities, and in turn 'generate' an architecture of total functionalism.

On the other hand, the 'intuitive mysticism' side sees form so mysterious and autonomous that it can only be achieved by intuitive criteria, and it's detached from any rational analysis and clear communication between teacher and student. This frequently reminds me of the teaching of Johannes Itten during Bauhaus' early period: students could never learn the true art without converting to his religion, dressing in the costumes he designed, doing meditation, fasting themselves to hallucination, and only occasionally eating a bit cheese and garlic.

Today, for me, the strangest phenomenon is that in the actual studio teaching, students' design processes violently oscillate between the two extremes, without an attempt to synthesize them. Usually students start with 'biotechnical determinism.' They propose rather banal understanding and simplistic definition of function, without critical awareness of the arbitrariness of the criteria they establish and the limitation of computer software they use. And then their design processes quickly swing to the intuitive, expressionist side. The supposedly most objective process suddenly becomes the most subjective. Form becomes hermetic and self-referential. This drastic flip is like Bauhaus students who suddenly betray Hennes Mayer and surrender to Johannes Itten. Eventually students' design often end up with similar results, subject to stylistic fashion.

Form without function will become abstract, detached. Formal exploration itself will quickly flatten. Functional concern without formal sensibility will only result in a set of codified technocratic regulations. It's a key of our architectural education today to rebuild a dialectical relationship between the two, in order to allow them to enliven each other.

Dr. Tao Zhu

Other contributions most welcome. Congratulations on the achievements listed below.

Chris

Division of Architectural Conservation Programmes

1. Lynne DiStefano

- Appointed Lecturer by the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO at Nara (ACCU Nara Office) for the "Training Course on Cultural Heritage Protection in the Asia-Pacific Region 2015 –Preservation and Restoration of Wooden Structures," 24-25 September 2015. See: <http://www.nara.accu.or.jp/english/g1-2015web.html>.

2. Dr. Hoyin Lee

- Appointed Adjudicating Panel Member for the *HKIP Awards 2015*, organized by the Hong Kong Institute of Planners (HKIP), 26 September 2015.

Department of Architecture

1. Ms. Juan Du

- Invited speaker and participated in the Panel on "Bringing Social Innovation to Housing for the Creation of Sustainable, Thriving and Resilient Cities" at the Asia-Pacific Housing Forum 5, organized by Habitat for Humanity, on 3 September 2015.
- Published "Sustaining What?" in *New Observations: a Collection of Architectural Criticism*, ed. Shi Jian (Shanghai: Tongji University Press, 2015), 226-229.
- Organized an international academic research project for research on China's Low Carbon City planning and design, in collaboration with the Shenzhen Center for Design, and Shenzhen International Low Carbon City.
 - Contributors of HKU's research are: Juan Du, Natalia Echeverri, Phil Jones, Dorothy Tang, and Ivan Valin.
 - Other participating schools are Harvard University Graduate School of Design; Projective Architecture Office; Syracuse University, School of Architecture; the University of Cincinnati, College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning; Columbia University GSAPP; Shenzhen University School of Architecture.
 - Curated and moderated a Symposium along with an Exhibition at the Low Carbon City Pilot Zone in Shenzhen.

2. Ms. Tris Kee

- Has been nominated as advisor to the HKIA Professional Assessment for M.Arch graduates (Wallace Ng, Winnie Lam, and Lawrence Lai) preparing for professional qualification exams

3. Professor Weijen Wang

- received an award of the 2015 SHA Commendation from Home Affairs, LCSD of HKSAR, to individuals who make an outstanding contribution to the development of sports, culture and arts, community building and community service.

Division of Landscape Architecture

1. Ashley Scott Kelly and Dorothy Tang

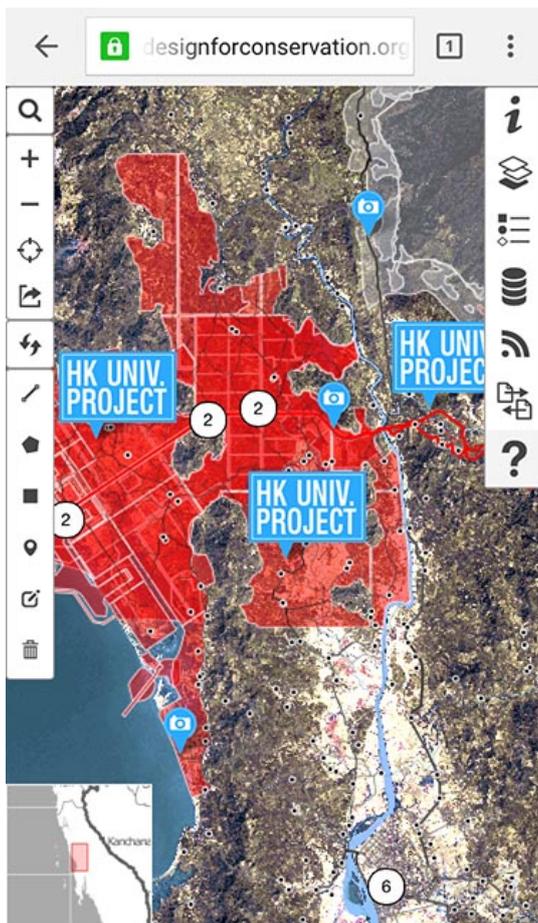
- On July 15, Ashley and Dorothy co-authored a report with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Myanmar. The report "A Better Road to Dawei: Protecting Wildlife, Sustaining Nature, Benefiting People" outlines strategies and recommendations for planning, design, maintenance and construction phases for the Dawei-Kanchanaburi road link between Myanmar and Thailand. The report has been translated into Myanmar, Thai, and Karen.

http://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/wwfmmr_betterroadtodawei.pdf

- On July 24, Ashley and Dorothy presented two co-authored papers on the Dawei Special Economic Zone and cross-border road link at the International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The papers, "Opening Tenasserim: Governance models for frontier infrastructure" and "Dawei SEZ: The Emerging Economic Landscapes of Myanmar" were debated on diverse panels consisting of international academics, local academics, and civil society groups and activists.
- On September 15, Dorothy and Ashley attended a meeting in Bangkok with WWF at the head offices of Italian-Thai Development (ITD). ITD is Thailand's largest civil construction firm and the principal developer for the road link and Myanmar's largest Special Economic Zone. Dorothy and Ashley presented progress on a "Design Handbook, Building a Sustainable Road to Dawei" to ITD.
- On September 24 & 25, Ashley presented research from Dorothy and his "Design Handbook" on sustainable road infrastructure to nine government departments and ministries in Dawei, Myanmar. These included members from Planning, Highways, Water resources, Myanmar Timber Enterprise, Agriculture, Botany, Rural development, and Fisheries. Following the presentations, WWF-Myanmar, Stanford's Natural Capital Project, and Ashley took government officials along the road to explain land use change, erosion control, slope stabilization, and other principles of sustainable transport infrastructure and development.
- On September 29, Ashley presented his *Development and Conservation Awareness Map* (DCAM) to scientists from the Smithsonian, Stanford, Fauna & Flora International, University of Bern Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), and World Wide Fund for Nature in Yangon. DCAM is being piloted in Myanmar's Tanintharyi Region with civil society groups and

international NGOs. The objective is to coordinate often contradictory knowledge of development projects, at any stage of planning and operation, impacting the region and to facilitate dialogue. As new plans for projects are discovered or as existing projects change course, they can be added to the map via simple drawing tools, uploading, and commentary by the platform's diverse user groups. DCAM is also a pedagogical tool in use at HKU to both coordinate and disseminate innovative landscape planning strategies developed in studios in the Division of Landscape Architecture.

<http://www.designforconservation.org/dcam/>



2. Scott Jennings Melbourne

- Published the following article concerning landscapes of Eastern Tibet and his masterplanning contributions on the Chacken Ling Monastery currently under construction in Qinghai Province:

Melbourne, SJ (2015). Finding the Heart of Landscape in Eastern Tibet. *Topos—The International Review of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design*, 92, 58-63.



Department of Urban Planning and Design

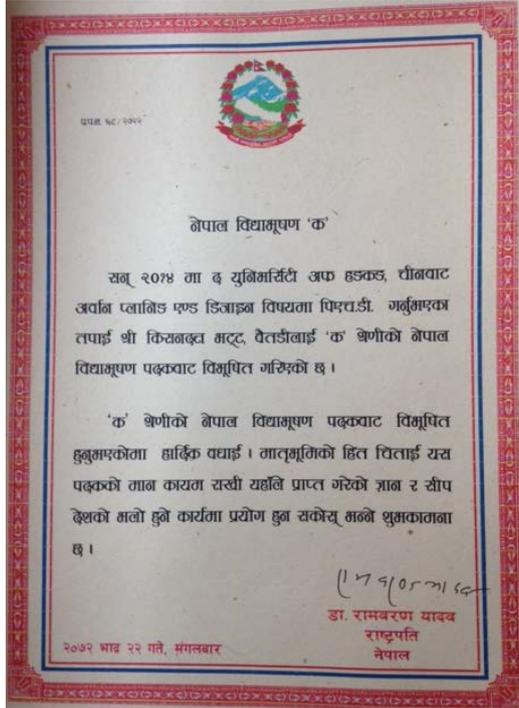
1. Kishan Bhatta (PhD student)

- was honoured with a Presidential education award “Nepal Bidhya Bhusan Medal Ka” for his PhD research from the Department of Urban Planning and Design.



This award is provided to Nepalese Citizen with highest academic degree (i.e. PhD), particularly to appreciate their knowledge and advanced research skills and encourage them to contribute in the development of Nepal.

It was conferred on the National Education Day 2072 and the International Literacy Day on 8-September, 2015 from H.E. the President of Nepal Dr. Ram Baran Yadav. In this occasion, H.E. the Vice President of Nepal Paramanada Jha and Minister of Education Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav were also present in the ceremony. The certificate attached herewith (written in Nepalese) has mentioned Kishan's PhD Degree in Urban Planning and Design from The University of Hong Kong.



2. Professor Anthony Yeh

- was invited to be one of the panelist speakers of the Seminar on Innovative Competiveness of Shenzhen, Hong Kong, and Macau in the 13th Five Year Plan organized by the One Country Two Systems Research Institute at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre on 23 September 2015.





3. Professor Bo-sin Tang

- Gave a presentation on urban planning and development in Hong Kong to a group of Architecture students from the National University of Singapore on 23 September 2015.
- Participated as a panelist in the Lantau Development Forum: Living, Environment and Attractions organized by Sing Tao News Corporation and Lantau Development Alliance in InnoCentre on 23 September 2015.

4. Dr. Roger Chan

- Served as adjudicator for the Hong Kong Institute of Planners (HKIP) 2015 Annual Awards held on 27 September.

5. Dean Webster

- Interviewed by Ming Pao Daily regarding his views on (i) the Council's decision to reject Johannes Chan's appointment as Pro-Vice-Chancellor and (ii) whether this decision conforms to academic freedom and institutional autonomy. His response was published in full and syndicated to other Chinese language papers. His basic intention in responding to the reporter was to stand up for academic freedom and assert the right to make an analytical comment on the issue that is neither ideological nor political in intent. His three analytical points were:
 1. Institutional autonomy and academic freedom are two separate (albeit related) issues.
 2. No university in the world is completely institutionally independent.
 3. Institutional autonomy can affect academic freedom but no specific allegations have been made about how academic freedom might be impacted in the current HK case.

- Of course, as expected, his comments were interpreted politically – made use of by both sides.

The above interview is published at Ming Pao Daily pages A16 and A35, on 2 October 2015. It is also available for viewing at the following link:

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http://news.mingpao.com/pns/%E7%89%A9%E8%89%B2%E5%A7%94%E6%9C%83%EF%BC%9A%E9%99%B3%E4%BB%A4%E5%AD%B8%E9%99%A2%E5%9C%8B%E9%9A%9B%E7%9F%A5%E5%90%8D%20%E5%BB%BA%E7%AF%89%E9%99%A2%E9%95%B7%EF%BC%9A%E9%99%B3%E5%8B%9D%E4%BB%BB%E5%89%AF%E6%A0%A1%20%E6%94%AF%E6%8C%81%E6%A0%A1%E5%A7%94%E6%B1%BA%E5%A E%9A/web_tc/article/20151002/s00002/1443722376963