China's New Weird

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China’s New Weird
奇奇怪怪的建筑
A new urban typology for Beijing
In 2015, Chinese President Xi called for an end to “weird architecture”.

While the president didn’t give a specific definition of what constituted ‘weird’, he did offer several examples of the sorts of building he felt fell within this new category’s boundaries: The well-known CCTV building in Beijing by OMA, a skyscraper that happens to be shaped like a giant doughnut and Zaha Hadid’s pebble-shaped apartment complex designed for real-estate developer Soho China.

I preferred interpretation is that this comment reflects his tendency towards Chinese nationalism. New York Times quotes one section of his speech where he says that Chinese art should “disseminate contemporary Chinese values, embody traditional Chinese culture and reflect Chinese people’s aesthetic pursuit.”.
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Traditional Human-Scale Hutong Fabric

Western Monolithic Style Fabric
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Scale

Hutong Horizontal Linear Relationship
Vernacular

VS

Modern High-rise as an Isolated Object
Western-style
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Four Generations under one Roof

Chinese Traditional Family Structure

How Family Members Distributed According to Generation Hierarchy in Traditional Courtyard House

daughter (before she married)

Vernacular

Family Structure

Western Typical Family Structure

Western Style

Family Structure

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Spatial Transaction
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I picked three blocks’ fabric from the original site. These fabrics on this site are not completely the standard courtyard house, they are the combination of courtyard house and zayuan (courtyard cluster). So it will show three typologies in one site: standard courtyard house, courtyard cluster, somewhere in between (the processing moment from the courtyard house to courtyard cluster). I transferred these fabric into three dimensional to have a clearer reading of the space. The sectional cut would gave a better reading of different level and hierarchy of the space. The first fabric revealed the main attributes of standard courtyard house: it is like a city within city (people are basically lived in a flat enclosed block surrounded by hutong alley and the walls). When you took off the main road and entered the hutong alley, it is a transportation node that will provide a ride to the courtyard house world, people may have the same starting point but their routines of passing through the alleys are different. Then the area of void space expanded when you enter courtyard void these void are like unique Chinese piazza where people gather but it still has some level of privacy because it is surrounded by high walls. In the end, the void space will get smaller during the process of approaching of the private room.
The second fabric is the courtyard cluster. It contains heterogeneous typology. It developed under the demand of high density so the voids are becoming fragmental. But it developed upon the basic framework of the courtyard house so it still keep parts of the fabric. Due to the rising of the density and heights this fabric share parts of the characters of the matt building. But instead of homogeneous it is heterogeneous. The adding parts are random form so they are not consist of a systematic repetition of simple element. In the end, this fabric is a horizontal skyscraper due to its density.
The last one is the in-between fabric. It is a ‘dialectic city’. This fabric demonstrates the struggling between modernity and traditional, complementing and superimposing and so on. So this fabric instead of a static place, it is the combination of several small communities, within that the continuity is being replaced by communication and it still has its own structure.

One of the possible character of the so called “weird” building is figurative. But not all the figurative things are bad. Weird could still be positive. There would be some weird shape exist at the connecting point. But this weird shape is rational. It contains narratives of the organic growth of both standard courtyard house and courtyard cluster. It also influenced the circulation structure in both vertical and horizontal. It end up with a lot of exposed infrastructure.

The fabric is a paradigm, within it the traditional becomes in a new form and it uniformed with the modernity.
Old hutong Fabric

One hutong Block Fabric

Three Dimensional Reading of the Fabric
Sectional Space

Sectional Space

Sectional Space
New Weird Typology Proposal
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Open Block
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Open Block
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**Dwelling Communities**
- Where people live

**Social Communities**
- Where people gather on purpose to do something together

**Public Communities**
- Where people meet accidentally

**Physical Community Space**
- Community feel

**NOW**
- One family
- One siheyuan community
- Hutong (alley)

**NEW NORMAL**
- Not just dwelling communities
- Social as well
- Different communities make use of the alleys
- Whole the communities interact

**Community Life is Still Existing**
- Dwelling communities are present in the Xisi area while there is no space for the social communities

**Orthogonal Structure of the Hutongs**
- Sufficient for the dwelling function but to create value for the entire city, you need bigger spaces

**More Open Space for Community Activities**
- Adding value by adding an extra structure
Residential Type I: Multi-generation Housing
Residential Type II: Couple Dwelling
Residential Type III: Single person Housing
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HUTONG ALLEY
PUBLIC

COMMUNAL YARD
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COURTYARD
SEMI-PUBLIC

LIGHT WELL
SEMI-PRIVATE
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Density

Density
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Medium Rise _Mediation
Program Types

- Elderly Apartments
- Elderly Care Home
- Clinic

Circulation

- Elevator and Staircase
- Corridor

Courtyard Typology

- Terrace Courtyard
- Social Courtyard
- Public Courtyard