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Reconstruct the Missing Narrative: Rethinking
Contemporary Chinese Architecture Through
Ancient Landscape Paintings

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This thesis addresses the issue of lacking self-identity and missing narrative under contemporary Chinese architecture discipline. Using ancient landscape paintings as design source, this project aims to create an environment that provides personal experience and exclusive meaning from a participant's point of view instead of an omniscient view.

Paintings are selected from different dynasties and artists, but all based on one important cultural theme: Reclusion. Thus, the reconstructed narrative would provide a tranquil environment for inhabitant to have a temporary retreatment from the city life through making, seeking and thinking.

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**PART1**  
INTRODUCTION  
Narrative/Missing/Reconstruct

**PART2**  
METHODOLOGY  
Architecture / Film / Phenomenology

**PART3**  
PAINTING ANALYSIS  
Summer Mountains / Streams and Mountains / The Riverbank / Autumn Colors Over Rivers and Mountains

**PART4**  
NARRATIVE  
Seeking / Making / Thinking

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. NARRATIVE
2. MISSING
3. RECONSTRUCT
Narrative

Designing ancient garden based on landscape paintings and poems began to thrive from Song Dynasty. The inherited narrative is a medium to create an environment that provides personal experience and elusive meaning from a participant’s point of view instead of an omniscient view.

In the southbank a hall was built, named “Hall Like a Villa”.

To its north side above the water was a little bridge called “Little Flying Rainbow”.

I crossed it, walked toward north then west, and saw a pavillon called “Little Surging Waves”. Lots of bamboos were standing opposite to its south side as a screen.

Passing through the bamboos along the bank, there is a huge stone called “purifying Will Place”, where I could sit and play the water.

Here, water turned its way toward north, and it was so vast as if it were a lake. Lots of willows stood at the west bank, called “Willow Band”.....

Continuing walking toward east, I arrived at the back of “Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion”.

There, several huge pine trees stood and generated soft sound when wind was blowing. This place was “Listening to Windblown Pines Place”.....
Little Flying Rainbow Bridge is in front of the Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion, to the north of the Hall Like a Villa, Crossing the Surging Wave Pond.

The Bridge bows as if to drink the water, its shadow is projected under the sunset as if to turn the wave.

Despite the gloomy water and mountain, the rainy season is not arrived, Why is the Azure Dragon suddenly flying?

Streams, bridge, and the color of spring grass, Wood fence, thatched cottage, with afternoon crowing of the cock.

I know you are trying to assist in governing the country, To lead the way across the cold stream.

The shiny and gorgeous baluster reflects the sky, The magnificent towers are hidden behind the mist.

I come like riding a Golden Turtle, Wish I escaped from secular life and follow Qin Gao to be an immortal.

The bright moon illuminates the endless land, The lotus in my hand shines upon the autumn water.  

Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion is above the Surging Wave Pond, Its south side facing the Hall Like a Villa, At its top, you see various mountains outside of Suzhou town.

I once begged for a dream in Jiuli Lake, and received the character “Reclusion” in the dream......

That mountain and water in the dream has already faded away, So I built the high tower to escape and hide myself.

Recollecting the past, where on earth is the capital for the emperor? Leaning on the baluster, I only see the dim mountains in the dusk.  

There is water in the garden, covering several hectares, similar to Su Zimei’s Surging Wave Pond, so I built a pavilion at middle, called “Little Surging Waves”......

Likewise, the little pavilion sits alongside the water, Still, the blue water circles around the middle column.

Aren’t there fresh wind and bright moon with you when you go to fishing? There are also children singing that water washing cloth.  

Everywhere has river and lake to put your mood, After hundred of years bird and fish will already forget that feeling.

Luwang formerly has house in Wu Lake, Yuanming’s house of reclusion is not desolated yet.

In the dream I come to realized positions and riches are only an illusion, In the life of reclusion who knows how far the life has been gone?

Recalling the past, where on earth is the capital for the emperor? Leaning on the baluster, I only see the dim mountains in the dusk.  

HALL LIKE A VILLA 

LITTLE SURGING WAVES 

LITTLE FLYING RAINBOW BRIDGE 

TOWER FOR DREAMING OF RECLUSION

In contemporary context, as international style prevails, the narrative quality from ancient garden has stopped developing. Concepts and theories were brought up to revive the narrative quality, as it is essential to Chinese architecture's distinct identity.
Shan-Shui City

Shan-shui city, a spatial planning concept was proposed in contemporary China to construct the “architecture landscape city” by integrating aesthetics and ideas from landscape paintings, poetry, and gardening design.

I.M. Pei creates the narrative sequence by referring to ancient Chinese gardens.

However, certain landscape elements such as artificial mountains are directly plugged in, which people cannot experience through.

Wang Shu revives the atmospheric and narrative quality based on landscape painting.

However, the interior and the exterior narratives are separated.
In this thesis, we will use landscape paintings as our design source to revive the narrative quality. We will use the methodology developed from the research to deconstruct the selected landscape paintings, transform them into a narrative, and then reconstruct the narrative into architecture.

By extracting events, atmosphere, and spirits from original painting narratives, and by borrowing the principles of paintings to transform them into sequences, we will set up architectural narratives in contemporary context for people to experience.

Ma Qingyun used various vernacular materials to guide the narrative sequence. However, no landscape scenarios are incorporated into the sequence.

Ma Yansong used the parametric method to construct both architectural and landscape scenarios. However, architectural scenarios are merely formally imitated as mountains without consideration of spatial narratives.
II. METHODOLOGY
ARCHITECTURE

1. BERNARD TSCHUMI
   MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPT / PARC DE LA VILETTE

2. WANG SHU
   NINGBO MUSEUM / CERAMIC HOUSE
   XIANGSHAN CAMPUS

3. THOMAS HILLIER
   URBAN THEATER
SEQUENCE

1. DIAGRAM OF MOVEMENT

2. SEQUENTIAL PATH

3. PROGRAMS FROM EVENTS

4. SPACES

All Figures: Reprinted from Manhattan Transcripts, by Bernard Tschumi.
Creating the sequence from landscape paintings involves steps from extracting path, defining programs based on scenes, and designing the corresponding spaces.
TWO SCALES

Scale 1: Facade
Scale 2: “Going Into”

MOUNTAIN VS. CAVE

Mountain: Outside, Body Form
Cave: Inside, Interior Space

DIALOG
Built form & Nature
People & Nature

Figure 35. Wind in Pines Among a Myriad Valleys

Figure 36. Immortal Mountains with a Cave

Figure 37. The Riverbank

WANG SHU
NINGBO MUSEUM/ CERAMIC HOUSE
XIANGSHAN CAMPUS
MOUNTAIN VS. VALLEY
Mountain: Solid, Mass
Valley: Void, Circulation

DIVERSITY
Far distance: Different Things
Near distance: Experience

ATMOSPHERE
Visual realization of conditions in landscape paintings as a way to revive atmospheric quality of narrative and phenomenology

Two Scales
Mountain vs. Cave
Dialog
Mountain vs. Valley
Diversity

Form

Material

Spatial Relationship
THOMAS HILLIER
URBAN THEATER

Figure 40. Yoshino River in Yamato Province (Woodblock print), by Ando Hiroshige

Figure 41. Architect’s Transcription

RIVER = SEGREGATION

PRINCESS = A KNITTED MEMBRANE
COWHERD = PERIMETER GRASS PARKLAND

The membrane extends towards the outer parkland

Figure 42, Figure 43; Retrieved from http://www.thomashillier.co.uk
EMPEROR = ORIGAMI LUNGS
The lungs are physical barriers that manipulate the knitted skin to represent conservative attitude toward love

UNCONDITIONAL PIETY = STRINGS
The manipulations are articulated by pulley systems

METAPHOR
A set of architectural language as a way to express the metaphors behind a drawing to address the current cultural and social issues.

Objects Meanings = Architectural Language
II. METHODOLOGY

FILM

1. PLAY TIME
   JACQUES TATI

2. 2046
   WONG KAR-WAI

3. IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE
   WONG KAR-WAI

4. REAR WINDOW
   ALFRED HITCHCOCK

5. KAILI BLUES
   BI GAN
Clues are used in Play Time to direct audience through the spaces and help locate oneself. Clues such as elevator, or escalator appeared in current scene, then following scene at a different location to indicate the protagonist’s movement and sequence.
The director used intentional framing in the movie *2046*. The framing is not only unconventional, but also addresses different focal points. Frame and void together constructed the atmosphere of the movie and emotions of the protagonists.
In the Mood for Love

Wong Kar-Wai

Metaphor

Repellent Indication

Same spaces like staircase, hallway, room door, restaurant are showing in the movie with different protagonists, events in different times. The familiarity of the spaces allows viewer to juxtapose the tone and emotion as well as the space itself, which leads to the metaphor of the space. For example, the staircase is a vertical maze indicates the hesitation; hallway indicates the segregation.
As each protagonist’s life is exhibiting through the windows, Hitchcock divided the action of different players but presented them all at once. He created new connections across seemingly unconnected actions for both the viewer and the protagonist.
Fragments of moments are showing in the movie, which seem confusing. However, the arrangement of shots combined formed an intellectual meaning. This meaning does not exist within the individual shots, but only shows when they are juxtaposed. Montage as a technique allows audiences to find different clues and form different story lines, which leads to the autonomy of the narrative.

In contrast of the rest of the movie, there is a 42 minutes long shot, within which protagonists’ movement carved out the spaces.
II. METHODOLOGY

PHENOMENOLOGY

1. JAMES TURRELL
   RODEN CRATER

2. PETER ZUMTHOR
   BRUDER KLAUS FEILD CHAPEL

3. BRUNO TAUT
   GLASHAUS

4. DANIEL LIBESKIND
   JEWISH MUSEUM
RODEN CRATER JAMES TURRELL

Turrell created an environment for visitor to observe the nature, to think about their very existence, to contemplate their relationship with nature.

GLASHAUS BRUNO TAUT

"the path followed by the mind across a multiplicity of phenomena, far apart in time and space, gathered in a certain sequence into a single meaningful concept ... It is hard to imagine a montage sequence for an architectural ensemble more subtly composed, shot by shot, than the one that our legs create by walking among the buildings."

---Sergei M. Eisenstein. Montage And Architecture.

To address the spiritual and artistic ideal, Taut made an innovative "installation" that will provoke thoughts and give inspiration for art, architecture, and even cultural change.
Zumthor made the material and the construction process important aspects of this project. There is a montage sequence as one walking inside the chapel. Cross symbol appears from exterior facade to interior decoration, as a symbol of those lost during the Holocaust.
III. Painting Analysis

Criteria for Selecting Paintings based on previous research:

- The work should depict a sequence formed of diverse scenes or events.
- The work should be a combination of landscape and architecture that contains human activities.
- The work should contain various elements of landscape, such as mountain, water, cave, trees, etc.
- The work should express important metaphors or spirits from traditional Chinese culture.
- The work should inherit certain quality of atmosphere and phenomenology.
- The selection will sort out paintings of different narratives and different metaphors.

1. 溪岸图 | 董源·五代
   THE RIVERBANK | Dong Yuan · Five Dynasty

2. 夏山图 | 屈鼎·北宋
   SUMMER MOUNTAINS | Qu Ding · North Song

3. 溪山图 | 徐贲·元末
   STREAMS AND MOUNTAINS | Xu Ben · Yuan

4. 江山秋色图 | 赵伯驹·北宋
   AUTUMN COLORS OVER RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS | Zhao Boju · North Song
MAKING

1. Following alongside the sunken space, people arrive at a handicraft art studio where they experience art of ceramics and seal-cutting.

2. Beside the studio is a platform for woodshop that provide people with another way of enjoying handicrafting.

3. The place for spinning is at the central land, a more quiet zone.

4, 5. The narrow passageway that connects to the end of the riverbank is a continuous space for planting and tea-leaf picking.

6. An alternate route is a place for batik, where people rely on water source to create their art.

Stones and forests are so green, there are also dense clouds. Mountains are so tall that they block the sun, so the weather is cloudy and rainy. In the deep and serene valley, streams course and feeds.

In the dim place, apes live; in the vast place, birds come together.

The scholar, wearing a gown and sitting on a chair, leans on the baluster of the house with his wife and child to view the approaching storm.

The cowboy riding a cow is peeping into the courtyard through bamboos beside the river.

A woman in the courtyard is preparing for dinner; several others are placing the plates.

Six pedestrians are rushing on their way back home. One of them is wearing straw rain cape.

Beside the steep cliff is a waterfall that runs into the river. It is connected to a misty valley far away by a winding path.

1. The scholar, wearing a gown and sitting on a chair, leans on the baluster of the house with his wife and child to view the approaching storm.

2. The cowboy riding a cow is peeping into the courtyard through bamboos beside the river.

3. A woman in the courtyard is preparing for dinner; several others are placing the plates.

4, 5. Six pedestrians are rushing on their way back home. One of them is wearing straw rain cape.

6. Beside the steep cliff is a waterfall that runs into the river. It is connected to a misty valley far away by a winding path.
There are various ancient elitists and numbers of years, The brilliant inscription is a treasure that imprints harmony. Just see everything forms a new prospect, All learning calligraphy and drafting grids are like this. The summer mountains are always verdant and likely to be alive, Apes are likely to crow in the clear valley with the growing waves. Sitting above hundreds of feet of the mountain, the building is high and spacious, How happy would it be to lean on the baluster?
1. 坐禅求道 (冥想室)
A person come to meditate and apprehend the spirit of Tao in the meditation space.

2. 品茗饮酒
By following the spatial clues, the person enter a pavilion to sit and appreciate tea and wine.

3. 品藏文玩, 谈玄务虚
Leaving the pavilion, the person follows the narrow path, where he appreciate curios and talk with fellows.

4. 即兴创作 (曲水流觞)
The person approaches to the stream, where he improvises and creates his own pieces based on an ancient method.

5. 闭门读书, 习字作画
Walking along the stream and then climbing up, the person reaches the library / study space where he can quietly read, and study calligraphy and paintings.

6. 琴棋书画
The person continues the journey until arriving at a quiet corner. He enjoys one of his hobbies, such as lyre-playing or chess.

ORIGINAL NARRATIVE

1. A boy of the mountains come to the house of the scholar, bring a poem by his master, and ask for a painting in exchange.

2. The scholar and his friends drink and write poetic inscriptions in the pavilion.

3. There is a small path that leads the scholar to the stream.

4. Paddling on Tiao stream, the scholar hears the apes crowing.

5. The scholar visit the mountains with splendid buildings, where shadows of spring fill the valleys.

6. At the top of the waterfall, the scholar watches the clouds.

Verdant trees and yellow canaries, mountains are everywhere, Aimlessly I return from the stream after watching the clouds.

In life, one is not permitted to be free all the time, An occasional opportunity for a visit to the mountain - this is leisure.

Filling the valleys are shadows of spring, lining the stream, green moss. Only where violet mists arise are there openings in the cliffs.

A boy of the mountains, bearing an urgent message, inside of the gate. He has come to bring a poem by his master and ask for a painting in exchange.

The house of the scholar, who retreated in mountain, sits beside the tall pines. The scholar is happy that there is a small path leading to the stream.

Don't care too much about how far you are like the fisherman, All you need to do is to follow the path.

Read books about planting on the bed. Stones and mud filled are my splendid house.

My dream and my soul can not go back to the illusory path. All the scenery in my eyes is just dust and dirt.

I view mountains inside the painting and look for old inscriptions, More than a half of this splendid mountain is Tiao Stream.

Why would I paddle and float in the autumn wind, Don't dispel the apes and let them crow to me.
AUTUMN COLORS OVER RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS
NORTH SONG    ZHAO BOJU
江山秋色图
北宋 赵伯驹
Mountain = Separation = Frame
Water = Connection = Sunken Space
(Courtyard, Green Space, Platform)

Trees = Leading Clue = Columns
Cave = Physical Path = Entrance to Sunken Space
Valley = Visual Connection = Gap Space
IV. NARRATIVE

THEMES

MAKING
SEEKING
THINKING
NARRATIVE

Meditation space
坐禅求道（冥想室）

Tea and wine appreciate
品茗
饮

Library/ Study space
闭门读书, 习字作画

Play chess/ music/ calligraphy/ Painting
琴棋书画

Wenwan appreciate, talk and do nothing
品藏文玩, 谈玄务虚

Improvisation
即兴创作（曲水流觞）

Handicraft art (ceramic/ woodshop/ seal cutting)
手工艺

Spinning
纺织

Batik
蜡染

Planting/ Tea-leaf picking
种植/
采茶

Entrance/ Exit

Narrative Path

Connection between Narratives

Frame

Sunken Space

Platform
Hasn't been inspired for long, the artist found himself not able to produce any new work. Tired of his lifeless surroundings, he walked along the street aimlessly. Out of a sudden, he saw something vibrant behind a weird hole of a stone wall. A series of curtains seemed to form a path for him. A “mentor” greeted him, guiding him into the world of “thinking”. The moment when he stepped out of the house, he felt astray. There seemed to be no path, but just columns and walls. At a moment when he turned around, a pavillion appeared behind a wall. A guy knocked his door, inviting him with wine and tea. From the other side of the pavilion he saw a strange space protruding out. “Should I check that out?” He slipped himself into the narrow bar of space, flanked by rows of curios. It was a massive space that stood behind the narrow bar. He saw a cup floating through the water strip. Wherever that cup stopped, the person beside would improvise an artwork. “What a fun exercise!” Following the strip of water, he arrived at an elegant cave, where three little buildings stood, one after another. It was such a quiet and secluded place for reading, studying, and creating works. At this quiet corner, with sound of a surrounding stream, he met with some fellow artists, who enjoyed this place as their temporary studios for their creation. Led by that stream, the artist saw people picking tea leaves behind a series of frames. He would like to pass through, but ended up at a batik studio. It was a more lively area than before. People seemed to come purposefully for “making”. Batik drapes were hung along the bank for him to appreciate, until he saw studios floating above the river.

EPILOGUE

A path guided him out of the handicraft art making, where he could finally participate in tea-leave picking. At the point of the intersection, the artist followed the platform to cross the sunken space, and arrived at the field for fishing. Everyone seemed to be “seeking” activities as part of his/her own lifestyle in this much busier area. A ramp connected with fishing platforms guided him to a tea room floating above the river. He wandered along the corridor, watching people and their activities away along the bank. A tiny sunken space at one end brought him into a quiet, almost hidden cluster of buildings. People sought for and picked one from all those different sizes and types of rooms to meditate. A cave-like passageway was connected to a more lively cluster. There he met some fellow artists and chatted as a group with snack and drink. A bridge extended from the cave, leading him into a strip of land, where some performed and created artworks, while others watching. Among those spots, he felt one was prepared for him. He improvised his artwork, as if he were performing. The artist approached to the end of this land, the time to re-enter the ordinary life. He could have hardly imagine a place like this before he came. To him it was a retreat, where he temporarily did not need to deal with daily life. In this land, he was always guided to new places and activities awaiting. It was also a freedom. He could always choose the scenes he would like to approach to. It was worth coming back as well, as there were always alternates that he saw but had not experienced yet.
THEME: STUDY / CREATING

STREAMS AND MOUNTAINS
1. Meditation Spaces
Original Narrative: Scholar’s Cottage
“The scholar withdrew and lived in a thatched cottage with rear farming land”. 11

METHODOLOGY
Intentional Framing: A series of framings lead people from one space to another.

Dialog: Visual and physical interactions between built form, nature, and people.

2. Meeting Room
Original Narrative: Pavilion
“The scholar met friends and inscribed poems in the pavilion”. 12

METHODOLOGY
Clue: A series of similar objects act as clues for people to experience through and approach to the main space.

11 Richard M. Bamhart, Along the Border of Heaven, 148.
12 Richard M. Bamhart, Along the Border of Heaven, 148.
3. Exchange Space

Original Narrative: Bridge
“The scholar started the journey in natural landscape with his friends.”

Metaphor:
Bridge is a space of connection, a space for exchanging.

4. Creative Studio

Original Narrative: Hidden Stream
“They heard apes crow along the hidden stream” (as an inspiration for their poems).
5. Resource Library
Original Narrative: Magnificent Building Clusters
“The scholar and his friends visited magnificent building clusters”. [15]

METHODOLOGY
Multi-focal Points / Repetitive Indication:
a series of buildings with identical form but different details makes people explore and discover one that fits them the most.

Mountain / Cave:
Mountain implies building form, cave represents interior space. Here, it contains libraries of different resources.

6. Gallery
Original Narrative: Waterfall
“The journey ended with appreciating waterfalls at the mountain top”. [16]
The person continues the journey until arriving at a quiet corner. He enjoys one of his hobbies, such as lyre-playing or chess.

By following the spatial clues, the person enter a pavilion to sit and appreciate tea and wine.

Leaving the pavilion, the person follows the narrow path, where he appreciate curios and talk with fellows.

The person approaches to the stream, where he improvises and creates his own pieces based on an ancient method.

Walking along the stream and then climbing up, the person reaches the library/study space where he can quietly read, and study calligraphy and paintings.

The person comes to meditate and apprehend the spirit of Tao in the meditation space.
An alternate route is a place for handicraft art (ceramic/woodshop/seal cutting) where people arrive at a handicraft art studio where they experience art of ceramics and seal-cutting.

Beside the studio is a platform for woodshop that provide people with another way of enjoying handicrafting.

The place for spinning is at the central land, a more quiet zone.

The narrow passageway that connects to the end of the riverbank is a continuous space for planting and tea-leaf picking.
An alternate route is a place for batik, where people rely on water source to create their art.

Following alongside the sunken space, people arrive at a handicraft art studio where they experience art of ceramics and seal-cutting.

Beside the studio is a platform for woodshop that provide people with another way of enjoying handicrafting.

The place for spinning is at the central land, a more quiet zone.

The narrow passageway that connects to the end of the riverbank is a continuous space for planting and tea-leaf picking.
1. 渔猎
The journey begins with a narrow entrance leading to an open field, with a place to experience the activities of fishing.

2. 茶馆
Walking forward, numerous activities are hidden behind “landscape” to be explored. A tea house sits above a sunken space where people have tea ceremony.

3. 集市/庙会/古玩交易
After tea ceremony, a lively market is ahead on the platform, where people hang around and exchange curios.

4. 坐禅求道
Leaving the market, people find their way up through a small passageway to the temples, surrounded by “landscape” at the highest place.

5. 步道
Walking down the steps, people arrive at a place for eating, drinking, and social. Scholars write poems, while businessmen have conversations.

6. 民俗游艺竞技
Feeling refreshed, people walk along a path, appreciating folk performances and purchasing snacks and toys at stands.
Leaving the market, people find their way up through a small passageway to the temples, surrounded by “landscape” at the highest place.

Walking forward, numerous activities are hidden behind “landscape” to be explored. A tea house sits above a sunken space where people have tea ceremony.

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Feeling refreshed, people walk along a path, appreciating folk performances and purchasing snacks and toys at stands.
Introduction

Architectural Precedent

Films
Braester, Yomi, and James Tweedie. 2010. Cinema at the city’s edge: Film and urban networks in east asia. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Phenomenological Art / Architecture

Landscape Paintings
Yun, Duo. 解读《溪岸图》. Vol. 58.