

Cultural Assimilation and Architecture

GuanXi and the Legacy of the Chinese Canadian Church

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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ABSTRACT

Known for priding itself as a multicultural nation, Canada's multicultural attitude does not come without a cost - as immigrants establish their roots and interact with the diverse ethnic groups within their communities, the process of cultural assimilation inevitably occurs. The process of assimilation can create not only social withdrawal and isolation, but also painful divisions between generations of a single family. This often results in psychological and emotional stress, leading to the questioning and finally the abandonment of one's home culture and origin identity. While this process can be seen as universal, this thesis focuses on Hong Kong Canadians and the tradition of GuanXi. GuanXi is an intricate relational network that is cultivated informally through social exchanges which govern Chinese attitudes towards long-term social relationships. GuanXi is an important yet disappearing element within Hong Kong identity, and the ability to recognize these bonds and utilize this network is rapidly being lost through the process of cultural assimilation.

Using the suburban Chinese church, which remains one of the few typologies that bring different generations and cultures together, this thesis proposes employing the principles of GuanXi as a way to focus design intentions. The goal of the thesis is to design a building that helps to foster and preserve the generational ties eroded by assimilation, leaving behind a cultural legacy for future generations.

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To the Chinese Canadian Church and those who serve to pass on its legacy to future generations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

iii	Author’s Declaration
iv	Abstract
vi	Acknowledgements
viii	Dedication
x	Table of Contents
xii	List of Figures
xxii	Preface

4 **GUANXI: A LEGACY IN CRISIS**

038	The Principals of GuanXi
042	Affectual Bonds of Relationships
042	Honour in Dependency
043	Temporal yet Sustainable
043	Conclusion

1 **CULTURAL ASSIMILATION**

005	Multiculturalism in Canada
008	Myth of the Model Minority
010	Generational Struggles
010	Conclusion

5 **FROM GUANXI TO GATHERING**

049	“Agora” Projects
051	Arcus Center for Social Justice
053	Olympic Sculpture Park
055	Farmopolis
057	Conclusion

2 MINOR CULTURE

- 014 Critical Regionalism
- 017 Architecture and Black Identity
- 019 Spatial Agency
- 020 Conclusion

6 GUANXI-SCAPE

- 060 Design
- 096 Conclusion

3 HONG KONG IDENTITY

- 027 The Culture of Hong Kong Architecture
- 030 Eastern and Western Society
- 031 Conclusion

- 097 **Conclusion**
- 101 **Bibliography**
- 105 **Appendix**

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

- xxiii Fig. 0.1 Chinese Lanterns Exhibit
Photograph by Ingus Wan

CHAPTER 1

CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

- 001 Fig. 1.1 Toronto VS Everybody
Peace Collective. “How Hometown Love Gave This Canadian Small Business a Grand Slam.” Digital image. CBC. May 16, 2016. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/dragonsden/blog/interview-with-peace-collective-yanal-dhailieh>.
- 003 Fig. 1.2 Assimilation Variables
Reproduced by Author from
Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 66.
- 004 Fig. 1.3 Diagram comparing the results of CBC’s poll on Assimilation
Proctor, Jason. “On Diversity.” Digital image. CBC. October 03, 2016. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/poll-canadians-multiculturalism-immigrants-1.3784194>.

- 005 Fig. 1.4 **Colour Code Episode 4: The “Angel Complex”**
The Globe and Mail. “Colour Code Episode 4: ‘The Angel’ Complex.” Digital image. Youtube. September 27, 2016. Accessed August 14, 2017.
- 008 Fig. 1.5 **“Too Asian?” Book Cover**
 “Too Asian?”. Digital image. Between the Lines. Accessed August 14, 2017. https://btlbooks.com/images/made/images/covers/_resized/TA_fcov_fin_72rgb_432_648_90.jpg.
- 009 Fig. 1.6 **Banana Boys Book Cover**
 Sonya. “Banana Boys.” Digital image. AZN Modern. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://aznmodern.com/2015/10/30/director-nina-lee-aquino-chats-about-banana-boys/>.

CHAPTER 2

ARCHITECTURE AND MINOR CULTURE

- 013 Fig. 2.1 **Photograph inside Mississauga Chinese Centre**
 Photograph/Image by author
- 015 Fig. 2.2 **View of Tadao Ando’s Church of the Light from the street**
 Plows, Judy. “Tadao Ando’s Church of the Light.” Digital image. Judy’s Japan Journey. March 22, 2012. <http://judysjapanjourney.blogspot.ca/2012/05/tadao-andos-church-of-light.html>.

- 016 Fig. 2.3 Interior of Tadao Ando's Church of the Light
Plows, Judy. "Tadao Ando's Church of the Light." Digital image. Judy's Japan Journey. March 22, 2012. <http://judysjapanjourney.blogspot.ca/2012/05/tadao-andos-church-of-light.html>.
- 017 Fig. 2.4 National Museum of African American History, Washington
Bradley, Darren. "Critical Round-Up: The National Museum of African American History and Culture." Digital image. September 21, 2016. <http://www.archdaily.com/795650/critical-round-up-the-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture>.
- 018 Fig. 2.5 Dark facade and "Corona" shape of National Museum of African American History, Washington
Bradley, Darren. "Critical Round-Up: The National Museum of African American History and Culture." Digital image. September 21, 2016. <http://www.archdaily.com/795650/critical-round-up-the-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture>.
- 019 Fig. 2.6 Aerial of Birmingham Civil Rights Institute 1993
Bond, Max JR. "Birmingham Civil Rights Institute." Digital image. The Avery Review. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://www.averyreview.com/issues/6/african-american-museums>.

CHAPTER 3

THE FORMATION OF HONG KONG IDENTITY

- 025 Fig. 3.1 Neon Signs as a cultural icon are quickly disappearing in the city of Hong Kong
Dewolf, Christopher. "Hong Kong Is Losing Its Identity, One Neon Light at a Time." Digital image. Rice Media. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://ricemedia.co/379-2/>.
- 027 Fig. 3.2 Exterior view of old Ritz Carlton Hotel, 1983
Baycrest. "The Ritz Carlton Hong Kong Night." Digital image. File:The Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong-night.jpg. Accessed August 14, 2017. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Ritz-Carlton_Hong_Kong-night.jpg.

- 027 Fig. 3.3 **Aerial view of new Ritz Carlton Hotel, present day**
The Ritz-Carlton. “DISCOVER A LUXURY HOTEL DEEP IN THE HEART OF WEST KOWLOON.” Digital image. The Ritz-Carlton. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/china/hong-kong/area-activities>.
- 028 Fig. 3.4 **View of Tai O Fishing Village, Hong Kong**
Blair, Jonny. “THE INCREDIBLE STILT HOUSING IN THE FISHING VILLAGE OF TAI O IS THE MAIN DRAW HERE AND IT’S WELL WORTH A TRIP!” Digital image. A Lifestyle of Travel. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://dontstopliving.net/visiting-tai-o-fishing-village-lantau-island-hong-kong/dscn1949/>.
- 028 Fig. 3.5 **HSBC Tower, Foster and Partners**
“Helicopter Flight over Hong Kong.” Digital image. November 27, 2014. <https://personalnexus.wordpress.com/tag/hong-kong/>.
- 028 Fig. 3.6 **Bank of China Tower, I.M Pei**
“Helicopter Flight over Hong Kong.” Digital image. November 27, 2014. <https://personalnexus.wordpress.com/tag/hong-kong/>.
- 029 Fig. 3.7 **People walking across an elevated walkway in Central**
VideoBlocks. “People Walking across an Elevated Walkway in Central.” Digital image. Accessed August 14, 2017. <https://www.videoblocks.com/video/people-walking-across-an-elevated-walkway-in-central-hong-kong-island-hong-kong-china-tlapse-fqyt7xk/>.
- 029 Fig. 3.8 **West Kowloon Masterplan Proposal Diagram, OMA, 2010**
OMA. “Map of Desires of the Public of Hong Kong.” Digital image. OMA. 2010. Accessed August 27, 2017. <http://oma.eu/projects/west-kowloon-cultural-district>.
- 030 Fig. 3.9 **Water Rings**
Photograph/Image by author
- 030 Fig. 3.10 **Haystack**
Photograph/Image by author

CHAPTER 4

GUANXI: A LEGACY IN CRISIS

- 035 Fig. 4.1 Photograph of “Red Envelope” typically given around Chinese New Year
O,Neill, Edward. “The Case For and Against Hong Bao.” Digital image. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://www.hubhao.com/the-case-for-and-against-hong-bao/>.
- 037 Fig. 4.2 Cover of PDF publication “Connections and Engagement”
Vancouver Foundation. “Connections & Engagement Report 2012.” Digital image. July 2012. <https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/about-us/publications/connections-and-engagement-reports/connections-engagement-report-2012>.
- 037 Fig. 4.3 Spectrum of Cooperation, Richard Sennett
Produced by author from:
Richard Sennett, Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 136.
- 040 Fig. 4.4 GuanXi Diagram
Photograph/Image by author
- 042 Fig. 4.5 Bonds of Relationships Diagram
Photograph/Image by author
- 042 Fig. 4.6 Honour in Dependency Diagram
Photograph/Image by author
- 043 Fig. 4.7 Temporal yet Sustainable Diagram
Photograph/Image by author

CHAPTER 5

FROM GUANXI TO GATHERING

- 045 Fig. 5.1 Sundays at HSBC building, Hong Kong
“Hong Kong, a Smart Vertical City or a Dumb Extrusion?” Digital image. Avoid Obvious Architects. Accessed August 14, 2017. <https://aoarchitect.us/2015/02/vertical-city/>.

- 048 Fig. 5.2 **Story Time**
 OTA, KIYOSHI. “Intergenerational Community Learning Centres Would Benefit Old and Young.” Digital image. *Montreal Gazette*. Accessed January 6, 2016. <http://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-intergenerational-community-learning-centres-would-benefit-old-and-young>.
- 050 Fig. 5.3 **Minimal Agora**
 ConstructLab. “Building ‘togetherness’ through Architecture.” Digital image. Archinect. April 4, 2017. <http://archinect.com/features/article/150001158/building-togetherness-through-architecture-an-interview-with-constructlab>.
- 050 Fig. 5.4 **Mon(s) Invisible**
 ConstructLab. “Building ‘togetherness’ through Architecture.” Digital image. Archinect. April 4, 2017. <http://archinect.com/features/article/150001158/building-togetherness-through-architecture-an-interview-with-constructlab>.
- 052 Fig. 5.5 **Sunken gathering space**
 Hall, Steve. “Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership / Studio Gang.” Digital image. December 15, 2014. <http://www.archdaily.com/576630/arcus-center-for-social-justice-leadership-studio-gang>.
- 052 Fig. 5.6 **View from a meeting room connected to the central gathering space**
 Hall, Steve. “Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership / Studio Gang.” Digital image. December 15, 2014. <http://www.archdaily.com/576630/arcus-center-for-social-justice-leadership-studio-gang>.
- 054 Fig. 5.7 **Outdoor yoga class in ampitheater**
 Harala, Elle. Digital image. 17 Unique Seattle Event Venues. Accessed August 14, 2017. <https://nationaleventpros.com/17-unique-seattle-event-venues/>.
- 054 Fig. 5.8 **Wedding at Sculpture Park**
 Sheehan, Daniel. “OLYMPIC SCULPTURE PARK WEDDING OF ANNIE & DAVID.” Digital image. June 1, 2010. <http://www.abeautifuldayphotography.com/blog/2010/06/01/seattle-wedding-photographer-olympic-sculpture-park-wedding-of-annie-david/page/50/nggallery/thumbnails/>.

- 056 Fig. 5.9 **Aerial view of Farmopolis on the Thames**
Wayward. "Farmopolis." Digital image. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://www.wayward.co.uk/project/farmopolis>.
- 056 Fig. 5.10 **Accessible and flexible spaces focused on gathering**
Wayward. "Farmopolis." Digital image. Accessed August 14, 2017. <http://www.wayward.co.uk/project/farmopolis>.

CHAPTER 6

GUANXI-SCAPE

- 059 Fig. 6.1 **Stouffville Grace Baptist Church at Oscar Peterson Public School**
Photograph/Image by author
- 060 Fig. 6.2 **Map of Stouffville**
Photograph/Image by author
- 061 Fig. 6.3 **Children's Program**
Photograph/Image by author
- 061 Fig. 6.4 **Chinese Speaking Congregation (CSC)**
Photograph/Image by author
- 061 Fig. 6.5 **English Speaking congregation (ESC)**
Photograph/Image by author
- 062 Fig. 6.6 **Site Location**
Photograph/Image by author
- 064 Fig. 6.7 **From Inconvenience to Opportunity**
Photograph/Image by author
- 064 Fig. 6.8 **Gather Arrival and Departure**
Photograph/Image by author
- 066 Fig. 6.9 **Occupation Between Town and Nature**
Photograph/Image by author
- 067 Fig. 6.10 **Progression to Support Gathering**
Photograph/Image by author

068	Fig. 6.11	Solar Orientation and Views Photograph/Image by author
069	Fig. 6.12	Gathering Under One Roof Photograph/Image by author
070	Fig. 6.13	A Central GuanXi Space Photograph/Image by author
071	Fig. 6.14	Events for Generational Overlaps Photograph/Image by author
072	Fig. 6.15	Rainwater Collection Photograph/Image by author
073	Fig. 6.16	South Elevation Photograph/Image by author
073	Fig. 6.17	West Elevation Photograph/Image by author
073	Fig. 6.18	East Elevation Photograph/Image by author
076	Fig. 6.19	Site Plan Photograph/Image by author
077	Fig. 6.20	Ground Floor Plan Photograph/Image by author
079	Fig. 6.21	Site Plan Networks Photograph/Image by author
081	Fig. 6.22	Relationships Under the Canopy Photograph/Image by author
083	Fig. 6.23	Section A Photograph/Image by author

- 084 Fig. 6.24 **York Region Food Network**
 Martin, Simon. "York Region Food Network Hosts WinterFresh Trivia Fund-
 raiser Feb. 2." Digital image. York Region Food Network. January 13, 2017.
[https://www.yorkregion.com/whatson-story/7064659-york-region-food-
 network-hosts-winterfresh-trivia-fundraiser-feb-2/](https://www.yorkregion.com/whatson-story/7064659-york-region-food-network-hosts-winterfresh-trivia-fundraiser-feb-2/).
- 085 Fig. 6.25 **Gathering and Gardening**
 Photograph/Image by author
- 087 Fig. 6.26 **Section B**
 Photograph/Image by author
- 088 Fig. 6.27 **Photograph of church Leader at SGBC**
 Photograph/Image by author
- 089 Fig. 6.28 **A Culture of GuanXi**
 Photograph/Image by author
- 091 Fig. 6.29 **Sunday Morning Practice**
 Photograph/Image by author
- 093 Fig. 6.30 **Depending on Water**
 Photograph/Image by author

CONCLUSION

- 100 Fig. 7.1 **GuanXi Principals Icons**
 Photograph/Image by author

APPENDIX

- 106 Fig. 8.1 **Banner on Lion Rock**
 KOKUYO. "A New Banner on the Lion Rock." Digital image. Wikipedia. April
 30, 2015. Accessed August 22, 2017. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
 File:A_new_banner_on_the_lion_rock_-umbrellarevolution_-umbrellam-
 ovement_-occupyhk_-occupyhongkong_\(15949386119\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_new_banner_on_the_lion_rock_-umbrellarevolution_-umbrellam-ovement_-occupyhk_-occupyhongkong_(15949386119).jpg).

- 108 Fig. 8.2 **Lyrics to “In the Valley of Lion Rock”**
Wong, Benjamin. “Culture in Criticism.” [Music] Below the Lion Rock
– Roman Tam. January 01, 1970. Accessed August 15, 2017. [http://cul-
ture-in-criticism.blogspot.ca/2014/10/music-below-lion-rock-roman-tam.
html](http://culture-in-criticism.blogspot.ca/2014/10/music-below-lion-rock-roman-tam.html).
- 110 Fig. 8.3 **Photograph of Mr. Chu**
Photograph/Image by author
- 114 Fig. 8.4 **The Story of Angie Morris**
Bolton, Jori. “My Neighbour Doesn’t Speak English, but Her Kindness
Needs No Translation.” Digital image. *The Globe and Mail*. September 14,
2016. [https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/facts-and-arguments/my-
neighbour-doesnt-speak-english-but-her-kindness-needs-no-translation/
article31880866/?cmpid=rss1&click=sf_globefb](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/facts-and-arguments/my-neighbour-doesnt-speak-english-but-her-kindness-needs-no-translation/article31880866/?cmpid=rss1&click=sf_globefb).

PREFACE

As a first-generation Canadian-Born-Chinese (CBC), I grew up proud of my Canadian identity but remained questionably associated with my Hong Kong roots. Because I was raised by my grandparents from a young age, I could speak Cantonese fluently but never seemed to learn to read or write Chinese. At school and elsewhere, others would ask where I was from. Whenever I replied that I was Canadian, they often responded with a puzzled look along with the question, “But where are you really from?” While in Hong Kong, simply by the way that I walked and dressed, it was clear to everyone that I did not belong there either. Although I was enrolled in Chinese classes at a young age, I had managed to convince my parents to let me take swimming lessons instead. I was convinced that reading and writing Chinese would not be an important aspect of my life here in Canada.

As I have grown older, I have learned to value the experiences that were forced upon me in the past and actively look for more opportunities to be more rooted in my heritage. Although I could appreciate the traditional holidays and festivities, I was often put off by the mannerisms, everyday topics of discussion, and unwritten social expectations that I found within Hong Kong Canadian communities. In hindsight, I often wonder how things would have been different if I had stayed in Chinese school, if I had listened to more Chinese music, or learned to cook at least a little bit of Chinese food. Thoughts relating to my cultural heritage become more urgent as I think about the cultural legacy of future Hong Kong Canadians here in Canada. How much or



Fig. 0.1

A Chinese lanterns exhibit during Chinese New Year at local mall

how little of Hong Kong culture should I pass on? Although I feel learning Chinese is important, what would I say to my children if they also wanted to take swimming lessons instead?

This thesis begins by questioning the role of architecture in preserving Hong Kong culture both as a cultural legacy and a spatial inheritance. What kinds of spaces would be required and what functions should they serve, so that the cultural legacy of this minority culture can be recognized and passed on to future generations?

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1: 3-6 (NIV)



Fig. 1.1

Clothing brand Peace Collective's slogan (which emerged during a 2014 Toronto Raptors' playoff series) holds an subtle message of Cultural Assimilation of: The Dominant Culture of Toronto Vs "Other" Cultures

HONG KONG CANADIANS AND

CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Living with people who differ racially, ethnically, religiously, and economically has become the reality of being in a multicultural nation like Canada. Sociologists and cultural anthropologists refer to these first-hand encounters with different ethnicities as “assimilation.” Sociologist Milton Gordon describes assimilation as:

The adoption by a person (or a group) of the culture of another social group to such a complete extent that the person (or group) no longer has any characteristics identifying them with their former culture and no longer has any particular loyalties to their former culture. Including, the process leading up to this adoption. Assimilation may be defined as the gradual process whereby cultural differences disappear.¹

In Canada, this process of cultural assimilation occurs as immigrants begin to establish their roots and interact with different cultures within their new communities. Gordon formulates seven stages or sub-processes of assimilation of ethnic minority groups into the major culture or what Gordon calls the “core group.” He notes that not only is this process a matter of

SUBPROCESS OR CONDITION	TYPE OR STAGE OF ASSIMILATION
Change of cultural patterns to those of host society	CULTURAL OR BEHAVIOURAL ASSIMILATION
Large scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society on primary group level	STRUCTURAL ASSIMILATION
Large-scale intermarriage	MARITAL ASSIMILATION
Development of sense of people-hood based exclusively on host society	IDENTIFICATIONAL ASSIMILATION
Absence of prejudice	ATTITUDE RECEPTIONAL ASSIMILATION
Absence of discrimination	BEHAVIOUR RECEPTIONAL ASSIMILATION
Absence of value and power conflict	CIVIC ASSIMILATION

degree, but each of the stages may take place in varying degrees and varies between generations.² While this process is only partially completed in the immigrant generation itself (parents), the effects of assimilation are far more impactful with the first locally born generation who is exposed to the local school system and adopts English as their mother tongue.

Fig. 1.2

Assimilation variables according to Milton Gordon from his book "Assimilation in American life" 1964

Assimilation, while seen as a neutral process, is in fact the collision between a major and a minor culture, where the dominant culture demands the suppression and replacing of the minor culture's set of cultural histories, traditions, and values, often in a one-way direction.³ To avoid economic or emotional discrimination, new immigrants are expected to either conform to or resist the dominant culture's stereotypes. Research on assimilation shows that the pressures to conform often result in psychological stress, emotional pain, questioning, and the gradual abandonment of an individual's home culture and national-origin identity.⁴

The effects of assimilation are most deeply felt as ethnic minorities establish deeper roots within their communities and as younger generations are confronted with the clash of their social lives and familial lives. Professor of Sociology at McMaster University, Vic Satzewich, calls this Segmented Assimilation, the seemingly contradictory process where the offspring of immigrants become assimilated into the dominant culture and begin to resist aspects of their parent's culture, but they may also integrate into ethnic enclaves and become marginalized.⁵ It is important that through this process we become more aware of what is lost and what is gained, so that distinct ethnic cultural practices, beliefs, and values are not unknowingly lost in the process. This thesis focuses on Hong Kong immigrants in Canada.

Known for priding itself as a multicultural nation, Canada's multicultural attitude does not come without a cost - as immigrants establish their roots and interact with the diverse ethnic groups within their communities, the process of cultural assimilation inevitably occurs. The process of assimilation can create not only social withdrawal and isolation, but also painful divisions between generations of a single family. This often results in psychological and emotional stress, leading to the questioning and finally the abandonment of one's home culture and origin identity. While this process can be seen as universal, this thesis focuses on Hong Kong Canadians and the tradition of GuanXi. GuanXi is an intricate relational network that is cultivated informally through social exchanges which govern Chinese attitudes towards long-term social relationships. GuanXi is an important

yet disappearing element within Hong Kong identity, and the ability to recognize these bonds and utilize this network is rapidly being lost through the process of cultural assimilation.

Using the suburban Chinese church, which remains one of the few typologies that bring different generations and cultures together, this thesis proposes employing the principles of GuanXi as a way to focus design intentions. The goal of the thesis is to design a building that helps to foster and preserve the generational ties eroded by assimilation, leaving behind a cultural legacy for future generations.

MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADA

Although many Canadians have an impression of their country as a welcoming nation that celebrates its diverse cultures and languages, the results of a recent poll conducted in collaboration between the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Angus Reid Institute in 2016 finds the opposite. When asked if Canadians wanted minorities and immigrants to do more to 'fit in' with mainstream society (assimilation) or if we should encourage cultural diversity with different groups keeping their own customs and languages (multiculturalism), nearly 70 per

CANADA



UNITED STATES



 **ASSIMILATION**

 **DIVERSITY**

Fig. 1.3

Diagram comparing the results of CBC's poll on Assimilation



Fig. 1.4

Colour Code Episode 4: "The Angel"-Complex

cent of Canadians were in favour of assimilation rather than multiculturalism.⁶ In fact, fewer Canadians today are in support of cultural diversity than they were 25 years ago. Many Canadians would either deny the effects of assimilation or, at the very least, compare themselves to the United States to place Canada on a higher moral level. *The Globe and Mail* podcast "Colour Code," dedicated to the discussion of race in Canada, coined a term that describes this scapegoating of the United States as "The Angel Complex."⁷ Although race relations in our neighbouring country are often dramatic and violent, this does not mean that racism in Canada is also not an issue of concern.

Many Canadians have an incorrect assumption that maintaining or preserving ethnic cultural practices is the role of the government due to Canada's policy for multiculturalism. Although multiculturalism encourages the maintenance of ethnic and cultural identities of Canadians, these self-organized groups remain vital facilitators and preservers of cultural identity for minority communities. In fact, the provisions of these ethnic organizations predate both the policy and ideology of multiculturalism in Canada. According to Satzewich, voluntary ethnic community organizations,

"be they educational, religious, economic or social cater to the cultural and symbolic needs of the ethnic group members."⁸ He argues that "the presence of many social institutions and organizations within an ethnic community generates a social life in the community, not only among its members of these ethnic organizations themselves, but one that extends beyond them to persons in the community who are not members of the organization."⁹

It is an open secret within these organizations that they struggle to find ways of engaging the second and subsequent generations, and their efforts to transmit their language and culture to the native-born members is met with resistance, to say the least.

Satzewich's definition of multiculturalism rests on four interrelated meanings. First, multiculturalism is a fact in Canadian

society, as it is one of the most demographically diverse countries in the world. Yet, Canadian society has never been ethnically homogeneous, although it might have appeared so during periods of British and French dominance. Second, as an ideology, it advocates for cultural tolerance and peaceful coexistence within a heterogeneous society. Third, multiculturalism is also a process of competition among and between ethnic cultural groups for the acquisition of valuable economic and political resources. Fourth, multiculturalism refers to any government initiatives and programs that seek to realize the ideologies of multiculturalism. Interestingly, multiculturalism was never an ideology that was used to address racism, discrimination, or prejudice, but was a policy implemented in 1971 by the Liberal government to gain the favour of “other” ethnic groups (non-English and non-French) who were dissatisfied with the terms of reference of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism of the 1960s. In short, “multiculturalism seeks to accommodate social cleavages, maintain existing social order, and manage social change, all in the context of a culturally diverse society.”¹⁰

Since its inception in the early 1970s, multiculturalism has been criticized as an ideology that maintains the existing social order by overemphasizing ‘cultural’ and linguistic barriers, concealing more fundamental social inequalities within Canadian society.¹¹ What multiculturalism naively proposes is that ethnically diverse groups be organized into neat virtual zones based on their own cultures. As an ideology, it fails to address the frictions generated at the borders of different cultures, thus reducing the social challenges of living-apart-together to a mere slogan. Further criticism arose during the 1990s and early 2000s that claimed multicultural policy helps to reproduce and enforce stereotypes of ethnic groups, which undermines Canadian unity, ghettoizes minority issues, and depoliticizes social inequality. By reinforcing stereotypes, it simplifies and devalues culture as ethnic displays, while multicultural festivals do not promote serious cultural exchanges. According to Canadian novelist Neil Bissoondath, this leads to the commodification or ‘Disneyfication’ of culture, turning culture into “a thing that can be displayed, performed, admired, bought, sold, or forgotten. We have ended up with no culture but theatre, no history but fantasy.”¹² Multi-

culturalism, therefore, is seen to encourage the devaluation of the very thing it intended to promote. The hardening of ethnic stereotypes is also damaging, because it allows the perpetuation of racial stereotypes such as the model minority.

THE MYTH OF THE MODEL MINORITY

A 2016 article from *The New York Times* documents an exchange that Michael Luo and his family had with two women as they struggled to push their stroller down the sidewalk on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Frustrated by their obstruction, one woman shouted, “Go Back to China! Go back to your country!” while shuffling past them. In a fit of rage and confusion, all Michael could do was shout in response, “I was born in this country!”¹³ Despite taking place in America, the incident sparked a massive global response resulting in *The Times* asking other Asian minorities to share their experiences. A few days later, a short video featuring a group of Asian Americans reading the responses they had posted on Twitter was produced. All of them were professionally dressed, spoke perfect English, and the video also indicated their names and occupation, ranging from doctors to media and television personnel. Still, their responses showed that despite their very “American” demeanor, level of education, occupation, or success, they were not exempt from racial stereotyping or discrimination.

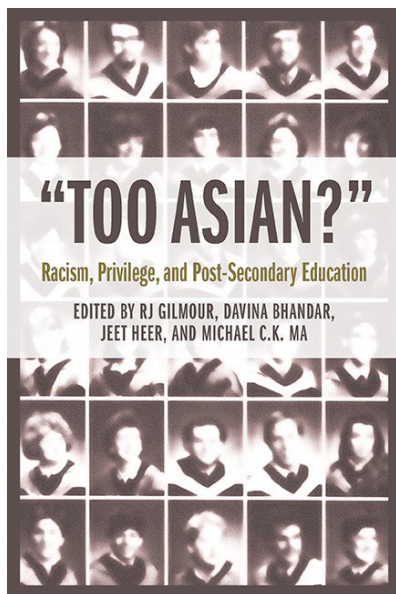


Fig. 1.5

A collection of essays which examines issues of race and exclusion in Canadian postsecondary education in response to the highly controversial “Too Asian?” article published in *Maclean’s* magazine

Similar incidents can be found even within Canada. In 2008, the Toronto city councilor Rob Ford said, “Those Oriental people work like dogs ... they sleep beside their machines,” adding, “The Oriental people, they’re slowly taking over ... they’re hard, hard workers.”¹⁴ When asked about this comment, he refused to apologize and stood by his claims and said his comments were meant as a compliment to Asian people. The 2010 *Maclean’s* annual university guide included a controversial article titled “Too Asian?” suggesting that the high number of Asian students on campus created competition and fueled resentment among non-Asian students.¹⁵ These incidents are traces of a cultural stereotype known as the Model Minority.

The Model Minority myth was first introduced by sociologist William Petersen in 1966 in praise of Japanese Americans

for their perseverance, hard work, and quiet accommodation. Peterson claimed that it was these traits which allowed them to fully participate in American society and reap the economic benefits.¹⁶ The overriding image of Asians as the model minority depicts them as patient, overachieving, and docile people who achieved success without depending on the government.¹⁷ Their success is typically measured based on their level of income and education. However, because of their statistical success in these two fields, there is an incorrect assumption that Asian immigrants do not need the social support and care for their needs. Not only does this myth negate the fact that Asian minorities are a diverse group, but it also renders invisible those members of this stereotype who do not measure up to these arbitrary social pressures. As a result, feelings of being stressed, isolated, and inadequate are commonly felt within these communities.¹⁸ These intercultural collisions between the values of East and West create not only social withdrawal and isolation, but also become the most divisive factor in eroding the relationships between generations of a single family.

Locally born or first generation immigrant children are challenged with meeting the expectations of the Eastern values at home and the dominant Western values within their public lives. This is similar to what American sociologist W.E.B. DuBois referred to as the “double consciousness” of Black Americans during the 1900s.¹⁹ This double consciousness is established when Asian immigrants with their own cultures, languages, and values assimilate into a Western-dominated society such as Canada. Over time, they come to find that their home society is not viewed as important and that their home cultural practices are problematic, inferior, or uncivilized, as viewed by the dominant society.²⁰ In the case of first generation Hong Kong Canadians, they are not perceived as HongKongers, nor as Canadians, and are therefore outsiders from both cultures. This produces individuals who seek acceptance from both cultures, but receive genuine acceptance by neither. Their adoption of the norms of the dominant culture fuels even more intense cultural clashes further distancing and isolating the generations. This in turn, erases the possibility of handing down important cultural traditions and values, which will not be accessible or recognized by subsequent

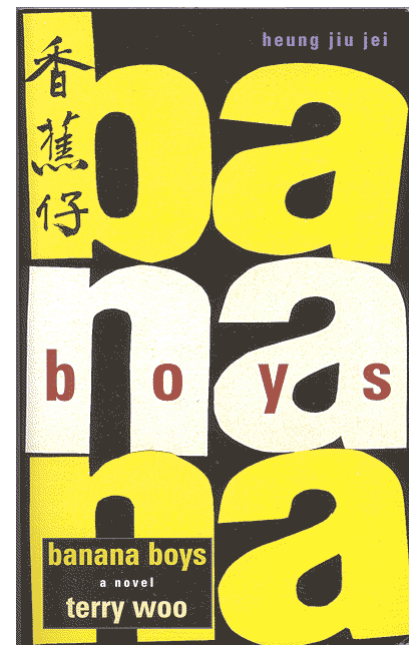


Fig. 1.6

A Novel written by Terry Woo in 2000 about five men struggling over whether to identify themselves as Chinese, according to their heritage, or Canadian, by birthright. It was turned into a play in 2004

generations if not preserved.

GENERATIONAL STRUGGLES

The struggles of cultural assimilation are complex and generation-specific in terms of their social and psychological struggles. Nan Sussman's research reveals an interesting fact about Hong Kong immigrant parents: they are only marginally more interested in preserving Chinese culture than their children, making the preservation of their culture even more difficult. As children struggle to straddle two cultural milieus, parents struggle mostly with making sense of their new environment and dealing with the everyday changes in climate, language, and work culture. Even parents are divided, as husbands are more likely to be in support of their children adopting the local culture, whereas mothers are often more concerned with transferring Chinese culture.²¹ By the third generation, individuals may struggle with their coming to terms with their ethnic identity and cultural inheritance when they possess very little resemblance or understanding of the cultures in which they originated.

CONCLUSION

Cultural assimilation and the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes such as the Model Minority remains a problem even in a multicultural nation such as Canada. For Hong Kong Canadians, this has led to the gradual loss of their culture as external pressures to succeed erode the relationships between the generations of a single family. As voluntary, ethnic community organizations allow for an ethnic social life within the communities, the design of their gathering spaces can present opportunities to enable and pass on aspects of their culture to future generations. The challenge for architects is to gain an understanding of the relevant social and cultural dynamics of these communities rather than relying on ethnic and formal stereotypes. For Hong Kong Canadians, this means thinking more critically about the kinds of spaces that are actually needed to help mend the intergenerational relationships severed by cultural assimilation.

NOTES

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Fig. 2.1

The Mississauga Chinese Centre was developed by Hong Kong investors in 1987. It was one of the earliest Chinese malls in Mississauga and features architecture, gardens, and sculptures from China. The Centre is also home to the largest replica of a Nine-Dragon wall outside of China.

ARCHITECTURE AND

MINOR CULTURE

If the presence of volunteer ethnic institutions creates more of a life for minority communities, the design of their spaces presents opportunities for architects to assist in the passing down of their identity for both existing and future generations. If culture can be defined as the values, expectations, motivations, beliefs, and behaviour patterns of a group of people,¹ then architecture as a cultural practice is a value-focused undertaking. When working with these communities, architects are tasked with developing a holistic understanding of their cultural practices and not simply perpetuating cultural stereotypes through design. Critical Regionalism is a theory that emerged during the 1980s to combat the homogenizing forces of globalization through Western colonization with architecture playing an important role to protect local cultures and identities.²

CRITICAL REGIONALISM

Alexander Tzonis writes that the task of Critical Regionalism was to rethink architecture through the concept of the regional. This approach recognizes the specifics of place and circumscribes a given project within the physical, social, and cultural contexts of the particular.³ This return to the region-

al is not a matter of using the most available local materials or copying forms of construction from the local context. Instead, it acknowledges that embedded within local vernacular forms is distilled cultural knowledge that meets the needs and conditions of everyday life and allows people to feel at home within their environment.⁴ Kenneth Frampton's approach to Critical Regionalism is the most well-known, proposing the navigation of a series of dialectical pairs such as space/place, scenographic/architectonic, typology/topography, and the relationship between local and universal elements to produce culturally specific architecture.⁵ Through a process of deconstruction and navigation of these pairs, the result would be a cultural and formal synthesis to ground a local identity. In theory, this process should not only reveal embedded knowledge of local weather and materials, but also the local cultures and values that bring people together. It is due to these claims that Critical Regionalism gains a reputation as an "architecture of resistance" or a "liberative emancipatory practice."

Critical Regionalism's emphasis on tectonics provides a framework to identify local spatial elements for deconstruction. However, the process of synthesis intended to address and protect local cultures remains secondary. While this process of negotiation instills in the architect the freedom to utilize modern forms, the lack of direct community engagement and deep cultural knowledge also allows the architect to impose subjective values that may not align with those of the community. As commented by Botz-Bornstein, "the problem is that such a historical understanding does not necessarily exist in an identical fashion in all cultures, which means that, paradoxically, though Critical Regionalism aims to help establish local identities that would otherwise be erased by a Western-minded globalization, it is still actively exporting a Western concept of Critical Regionalism that will not necessarily be interpreted by non-Western cultures in the same way."⁶ Critical Regionalism must consider not only the collisions and cultural conflicts of tectonic form but also how architecture, as a cultural act, engages with the local culture.

Japanese architect Tado Ando is cited by Frampton as one of the most regionally conscious architects in Japan.⁷ He is



Fig. 2.2

View of Tadao Ando's Church of the Light from the street



Fig. 2.3
Interior of Tadao Ando's Church of
the Light

known for his use of concrete to stress the stretched homogeneity of its surface in contrast to the material's weight; walls become abstract to include intangible forms such as light and wind to appeal to the senses. The Church of the Light is a prime example of Ando's work. Ando's masterful use of tectonics is why it is often discussed within architecture. However, it is also one of his early works that deals with the confrontation between a western religion, Christianity, and the eastern culture of Japan. Jin Baek, professor of architecture at Seoul National University, argues for the significance of situating Ando's church within the indigenous tradition as an example of inter-cultural phenomena between East and West during the modern period.⁸ Baek's book *Nothingness: Tadao Ando's Christian Sacred Spaces* discusses the significance of Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida's writings on emptiness as a bridge between Buddhism and Christianity with The Church of the Light as a synthesis. The cultural synthesis manifested throughout Ando's design for the church is a multilayered narrative that allows Christian ideas to be understood through an east-

ern formal tradition. These themes are not often discussed within Critical Regionalism, and the lack of engagement with the local social and cultural contexts reveals Critical Regionalism to be only superficially engaged with questions of culture. The theory is criticized for being fixated on considerations of form over the social and cultural practices that give meaning to architecture.⁹

ARCHITECTURE AND BLACK IDENTITY

Similar questions are posed in the writings of Mario Gooden who, in his book *Dark Space* investigates the construction of African American identity through the medium of architecture. He posits that questions of space and experience translate into questions of identity, and such spaces have the power to reveal cultural, political, ethnic, and even Black identity.¹⁰ Gooden's writings display a deep understanding of the historical struggles of African Americans and, like Frampton, utilizes a regional approach to understand the local typologies of the Quaker Meeting House. The building's immersive congregational interior is designed so that the parishioners encircle the preacher to reveal an important value in the local culture. In his most prominent essay, he voices his criticism of modern African American cultural institutions that rely on stereotypes, metaphors, and clichés to communicate these complex struggles of identity through perpetuating stereotypes and the use of shallow iconography.

The National Museum of African American History designed by David Adjaye, which opened in 2016 and is located in the National Mall in Washington, becomes a case in point. The site itself was primed to serve as a way to bring knowledge, identity, and dignity to the racial and cultural injustices of African Americans through architecture. However, this message as displayed in the architecture rests on two cornerstones. First is its three-tiered "corona" shape, which mimics a traditional Yoruban crown, connecting it to African culture. Second is the ornamental dark painted lattice or "skin," which pays homage to the ironwork crafted by enslaved African Americans.¹¹ The task of "building a community resource that helps visitors learn about themselves, their histories, and their common cultures" is left to the museum's artifacts, while the architecture itself acts as a passive container. The museum should do more than formally referencing



Fig. 2.4

National Museum of African American History, Washington



Fig. 2.5
Dark facade and “Corona” shape of
National Museum of African American
History, Washington

an African artifact or employing a dark painted “skin” to support its vision. According to Gooden, Museums are institutions that can and should participate in the work of constructing better understanding of the cultural, historical, and social issues regarding African American Identity. Architecture should be understood as a form of knowledge rather than simply the display of knowledge through forms and symbols of African heritage.¹²

Gooden cites the exemplary design of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute as an example of architecture that can ground African American Identity without relying on formal stereotypes. The site borders on the historic intersection of downtown Birmingham’s first African American church, the site of a bombing that killed four young girls attending Sunday school back in 1963. (Crowds later gathered in protest at the nearby park across from the Civil Rights Institute.) The architecture of the institute utilizes similar local materials and forms and does not rely on any images or stereotypes to differentiate itself. Instead, through a generous setback, it extends the public space of the park onto the site, connecting to the church, the park, and the institute. Not only is this gesture a public invitation, it embraces the building’s relationship to the events that took place

there. From the sidewalk, the building leads the visitor along a series of exhibition spaces that then frames a view of the historic church across the street. Utilizing these pre-existing historic and cultural narratives adds a richness to the experience and establishes a relationship with the local people and place that could not be achieved through formal composition alone.



Fig. 2.6
Aerial of Birmingham Civil Rights Institute 1993

Gooden's writings call for a deeper understanding of the invisible forces at play within architecture that are centered around people of the community. Careful attention must be given to understand the interactions and social dynamics of those whose lives play out within such spaces and want to pass on their histories and preserve their culture. Aside from the construction of a building, architects must also help in the construction of the resultant culture that would gather within its spaces. This way, both the architects and the community leaders become key agents in passing down and fostering a community's cultural legacy.

SPATIAL AGENCY

In the book *Spatial Agency*, Jeremy Till writes about the importance of architecture to recognize that "buildings and spaces are treated as part of a dynamic context of networks."¹³ Till argues that architecture's standard tools of aesthetics and mak-

ing are insufficient to negotiate and engage with these social, historical, and relational networks on their own. He suggests an expanded definition to architecture in what he calls “Spatial Agency.” The term “Spatial” expands the ability for architects to intervene in the production of social space as a social product. “Social Space” acknowledges the contribution of others and expands the authorship of the work to the community in which it serves. Not only does this process allow for local participation, it also engages with social space as a dynamic process. The architecture’s production continues over time and is not fixed to a single moment of completion. Because of this, architecture is inherently political, and Till tasks architects to be “continuously alert to the effects of that space on those lives.”¹⁴ Like Frampton, Till proposes a critical approach not only in the use of tectonics but also to engage head-on with the social and cultural conditions in which the architecture itself is situated. Agency is “the ability of the individual to act independently of the constraining structures of society; structure is seen as the way that society is organized.” The experience of space should empower its users to change their perceptions and gain knowledge that has lasting effects beyond the building’s physical boundaries. Spatial Agency is more concerned with the consequences of architecture rather than the objects of architecture.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

If architecture as a cultural practice looks to protect minority cultures, it must engage more critically with the specific social, historical, and cultural networks in which it is embedded. Spatial Agency suggests that cultural assimilation as a social problem requires a social strategy that involves not only the architect, but also the community and community leaders. Therefore, design ambition should be more concerned with the consequences of architecture rather than the object of architecture. Gooden’s writings propose that questions of space translate into questions of identity, and given spaces have the power to reveal and preserve Hong Kong Canadian identity. The design of these spaces should not rely on cultural clichés and stereotypes but be the enabler of Hong Kong Canadian culture.

To understand the cultural legacy of Hong Kong Canadians, this thesis turns to an understanding of Hong Kong identity based on the cultural forces that shape the identity of the city and its people. This process interprets and translates Hong Kong's social, historical, and cultural contexts into a space where one can come to terms with their cultural legacy in Canada. This intersection of architecture and cultural assimilation does not look to express Hong Kong Canadian identity as a static symbol. Instead, it facilitates in the mending of intergenerational relationships by allowing for communal participation in constructing a better understanding of the cultural, social, and historical struggles surrounding Hong Kong Canadian Identity.

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Chapter 2

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Fig. 3.1

Neon Signs as a cultural icon are quickly disappearing in the city of Hong Kong

THE FORMATION OF

HONG KONG IDENTITY

Hong Kong gained independence following the first Opium war in 1842 after which it became a British Colony for 150 years until it was returned to China in 1997. During the years of colonial rule, Britain downplayed Hong Kong's connection to China to legitimize their rule, but also downplayed Hong Kong's link to Britain for fear they would become too easily associated.¹ Since Hong Kong was wedged between these two world empires, the region disassociated with thousands of years of Chinese history, while being unwelcomed to take part in British identity. Because of these forces, Hong Kong became an interesting experiment in globalization and cultural assimilation. The gap between Hong Kong and China was driven even further due to two critical factors. Firstly, the rise of communist China in the 1950s forced millions to escape in fear of their country's seemingly alien political path and seek refuge in Hong Kong, which was then a British colony. Secondly, the rise of Hong Kong as Asia's financial center during the 1960s forged its identity around the capitalist global markets. Characterized by a weak state and a strong market, this jump-started Hong Kong's global identity and the consumerist lifestyle that has marked the culture of its people as well as its architecture. Meanwhile, the lives on the mainland were marked by a highly visible state and a deficient market creating a distinct

divide in Hong Kong's and China's lifestyles and values.² It was during the 1970s of Hong Kong's glory years that the term "Hong Konger" or "HongKongese" emerged, completely differentiating their achievements and identity from being only "Chinese," and embracing its global identity while erasing its ties to the mainland.³ Although some claim that Hong Kong's identity is merely a metropolitan identity encapsulated within a national identity such as New York's in the United States, it is undeniable that this is the era that formed Hong Kong's independence.

THE CULTURE OF HONG KONG ARCHITECTURE

The critical writings of Ackbar Abbas provide an important framework for studying Hong Kong architecture within its post-colonial context. The challenge with identifying Hong Kong's architectural identity is due to its complete alignment to the flow of capital and the driving forces of architecture's economic factors. This unrelenting culture that views architecture as a commodity is illustrated in the story of the development of the Ritz Carlton Hotel, located in the heart of Hong Kong's Central district, the company's first hotel in Asia. As the historic hotel was nearing completion in 1983, the new owners seriously considered demolishing the nearly finished building and replacing it with an office tower, simply because of the potential for higher revenue. The Ritz Carlton has now been demolished and relocated inside the International Commerce Center Tower (ICC), completed in 2011. This constant tearing down and building up of the city based on financial gain has generated a culture that renders its inhabitants emotionally disconnected with their built environment and reduced architecture (like Hong Kong's overabundance of neon signs and billboards) to function as a communicative instrument. The resulting culture is part of what Abbas coins as "The Culture of Disappearance."⁴ Disappearance as stated by Abbas comprises three features.⁵ First is Hong Kong's extreme receptivity to architectural styles "from the vernacular to the colonial, from modernism to post modernism." Hong Kong, as an "open city," is exposed and highly receptive to all influences, creating what he calls a "floating identity." Second is the constant anticipation of development, growth, and progress, which places its identity in a time that is yet to come. The third and most noticeable feature of the city is its "Hyperdensity." To further illus-



Fig. 3.2

Exterior view of old Ritz Carlton Hotel, 1983



Fig. 3.3

Aerial view of new Ritz Carlton Hotel, present day

trate this culture of disappearance, Abbas suggests three lenses to view Hong Kong's architecture.



Fig. 3.4

View of Tai O Fishing Village, Hong Kong

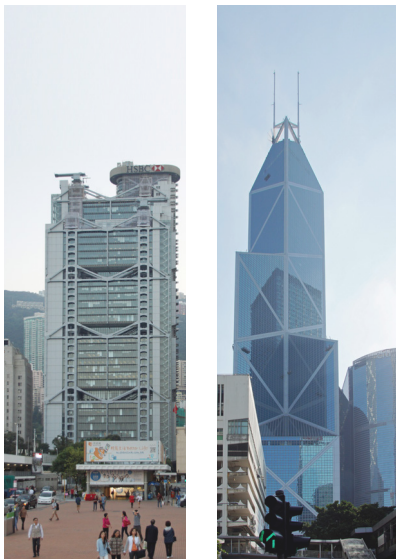


Fig. 3.5, Fig 3.6

HSBC Tower, Foster and Partners (Left)

Bank of China Tower, I.M Pei (Right)

First are the buildings belonging to the category of “Merely Local.” This refers to buildings that largely belong to other historical eras, including indigenous architecture with roots in the Qing dynasty and colonial style buildings remaining from the time of British rule. This category also includes the dwellings built on stilts remaining from the time when Hong Kong was a small fishing village. Abbas comments that “the Merely Local may have been structures rooted in time and place, but it is a time and place that is no longer there. These structures may have interesting stories to tell, but they have no real voice in the present-day life of the city, which has moved on elsewhere.”⁶

Second are the “Placeless Buildings” which play most clearly into the culture of disappearance and tend to receive the most attention. The two most iconic buildings of Hong Kong's skyline, the HSBC building by Foster and Partners and the Bank of China Tower by I.M. Pei, stand as emblems of power embodying the same architectural strategy. Foster's HSBC building, constructed as a modern machine, was then a marvel of technology, communicating advancement and achievement down to the very details of its façade. Standing in direct opposition is Pei's Bank of China. Characterized by its elegant form and sense of verticality (achieved from the rise of four prisms that reach above the skyline constructed with forms resembling local bamboo scaffolds), it communicates a sensitivity to local craft and tradition while rising in success. Together, they stand in grand monumentality as the symbols that manifest the socio-political standoff of Britain and China, with Hong Kong's residents caught in-between.

Third are the “Anonymous spaces”, produced for the flow of capital and consisting mostly of Hong Kong's commercial and residential buildings that do not fit the previous two categories. These spaces are designed to maximize their economic and financial gain, producing repetitive mundane spaces that focus on efficiency rather than quality of space.

The Culture of Disappearance illustrates the difficulty of

identifying Hong Kong culture if it is observed only under a visual lens. Abbas's conclusion also states that if an identity were to be established, "it would not be an identity as the establishment of something fixed and clearly defined, or as a return to something that was there in the past." Instead, it would be "an identity of hyphenation, coming into existence sometime in the future." Based on his writings, I observe that both Hong Kong architecture and its people have developed a unique ability to absorb difference while remaining connected. This ability is illustrated in Abbas's examples of Hong Kong's spaces of pleasure and encounter.

On Sundays, the lower level of the HSBC tower is transformed from a space of capital into a public square for migrant domestic workers to chat, exchange news and information, and even share a meal or a hometown newspaper on Hong Kong's day of rest. This unconventional public space displays the ability of architecture to absorb difference and mediate the social desire to remain connected. The second example concerns the infrastructural elements of the city's Central district. Although designed to elevate and separate pedestrians and vehicle circulation, these spaces have also been appropriated by street vendors, school children playing games, and elderly locals out for a stroll in their pajamas, mixing together. Within this multiplicity of functions, there is a social and cultural acceptance of these overlapping dynamic networks that is unique.

This acceptance is also exemplified by two entries for Hong Kong's Kowloon Cultural District Masterplan of 2010. Rocco Design's submission envisioned "a space not just for the glorification and production of new cultural icons, but to have a place where different programs, different people, different activities can come together simultaneously, in the same space and at the same time."⁷ His view runs parallel to Abbas's observations on Hyperdensity which turns to the multiplicity of functions within the lived spaces of Hong Kong to find its identity. This identity and knowledge is accumulated over time through engagement with the district and its community. Rem Koolhaas of OMA identified the spirit of Hong Kong this way: "The more Hong Kong adapts, the more it becomes itself. Hong Kong is a city able to absorb any influences without compromising its own essential



Fig. 3.7
People walking across an elevated walkway in the Central District of Hong Kong



Fig. 3.8
West Kowloon Masterplan Proposal Diagram, OMA, 2010

culture.”⁸ This paradoxical statement implies the ability to absorb difference while remaining united.

These examples seem to draw from a deeper social understanding of Hong Kong’s identity in its ability to maintain unity and social cohesion when faced with difference. Interestingly, the history of Hong Kong itself has been built between the collision of East and West, of Britain and China, not only in their cultures and politics, but also in very different values. Hong Kong is the result of a people that negotiated various social, historical, and cultural boundaries to form its identity. Within this synthesis, the core values that cannot find common ground arise from the clash of the Eastern value of unity and the Western value of individuality.

EASTERN AND WESTERN SOCIETY

Fei Xiaotong was one of China’s founding fathers of sociology before the cultural revolution dating back to the 1940s. His book *From the Soil* was written to a Chinese audience about the distinctiveness of Chinese society and how it differs from the West by analyzing how each society views relationships through “The Differential Mode of Association.” Fei utilizes two extended metaphors to convey the contrasts between the two societies. Relationships in the West can be seen as pieces of hay within a haystack. Each straw is separate and distinct, having contact only with the other straws it touches and together in this way they form a whole. These relationships are discrete and have clearly defined boundaries, as the relationship between each piece of straw and the whole haystack is relatively equal. In contrast, relationships in the East are as the concentric circles that form when a stone is cast into a pool of water. Individuals stand at the centres of the circles produced by their unique social and cultural influences, which, in turn, reach out to form “overlapping networks of people linked together through differentially categorized social relationships.” Wei-Ming Tu, professor of Humanities at Peking University, says that although the human mind may resemble a tabula rasa, a person is always born into a complex social network. The self is not a static structure or a world of private thoughts and feelings but the centre of a dynamic network of relationships. It needs to reach out, to be in touch with other selves and to communicate through

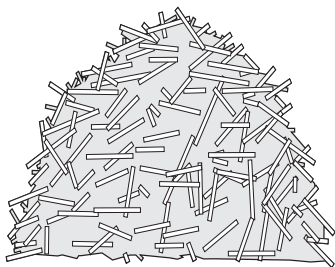
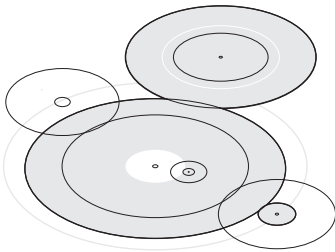


Fig. 3.9 (Top), Fig 3.10(Bottom)
Water Rings and relationships in the East, versus pile of straw and relationships in the West

an ever-expanding network of human-relatedness. This reveals a drastically different level of fluidity with which the Chinese see social relationships.

Three case studies were conducted to reveal how this cultural value that can absorb difference manifests outside of architecture within a social setting (see Appendix). Fei's metaphor is a tool for recognizing the different lenses in which relationships and social encounters can be viewed in the East and the West. The first case study analyzes the song many Hong Kongers refer to as the "unofficial-official anthem of Hong Kong." "Under Lion's Rock" is a song by Roman Lau about Hong Kong's founding myth that was released in 1970, around the same time that the term HongKongese emerged. It illustrates how a song, based on an Eastern or Western cultural lens, can have dramatically different meanings. The second case study is a short story based on the real-life experiences of Edmund Chu, an 87-year-old Canadian Hong Kong immigrant. His typical rags-to-riches story exemplifies the Hong Kong dream, revealing how the bonds of kinship and friends can absorb difference and allow people to remain connected. The third case study is a piece submitted to *The Globe and Mail* by Angie Morris, an 81-year old British Vancouverite. It tells the story of the unlikely relationship she has with her 68-year-old, non-English speaking Chinese neighbor. Through their exchanges, they overcome their respective cultural and language barriers, and through a simple act of kindness a unique kind of relationship emerges.

CONCLUSION

Within what Abbas calls "the culture of disappearance," he illustrates the elusive nature of Hong Kong identity both as a post-colonial city and in its alignment with the flow of capital. Based on his analysis, I observe that the conditions of the city have created certain spaces with the unique ability to absorb difference and maintain a sense of social cohesion within its people. This contradictory ability is explained through Fei's metaphor of interconnected water rings, which illustrates the network of relationships that are still present within Chinese Immigrant communities. The case studies reveal the negotiation of social boundaries and differences absorbed through an unwritten cultural code and

a network of social relations. These relational bonds discourage individuals from turning inward and retreating, allowing them instead to see past their differences and focus on the quality of their relationships. According to Fei, these interpersonal ties are known in Chinese as GuanXi.¹² Richard Sennet, Professor of sociology at New York University, writes that within modern China “although the country is now aggressively capitalist, it maintains a strong code of social cohesion. This code is called GuanXi.”¹³ This social code allows differences, competition, and even offenses to be simultaneously managed within social exchanges while maintaining a sense of social cohesion. As a cultural ritual, not only is GuanXi an important part of Hong Kong identity, it is an effective tool that can be used to help mend the intergenerational relationships severed by cultural assimilation.

NOTES

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Fig. 4.1

Photograph of “Red Envelope” typically given around Chinese New Year

GUANXI: A LEGACY IN CRISIS

Richard Sennett's book *Together* explores how modern society, particularly in the West, has weakened both the desire and the capacity for many of us to work with those who are different. People are losing the skills to deal with differences as social, material, and racial inequalities isolate them. The increasing number of short-term interactions in our daily lives make social contacts more superficial and intensify the anxieties towards "the Other."¹ This phenomenon has created a new character type that desires to neutralize differences, resulting in withdrawal and isolation from the familiar. This condition can also apply to the process of cultural assimilation in Canada, as different ethnic groups have come to live together.

A 2012 study conducted by *The Vancouver Foundation* asked 275 charitable organizations and over 100 community leaders across Metro Vancouver what they thought were the city's biggest challenges. Expecting answers such as the soaring cost of housing or homelessness, the researchers were surprised to find their biggest concern was the rising loneliness, isolation, and disconnect that people felt in their lives. Despite Vancouver's friendly reputation, respondents said that they increasingly live in communities separated by ethnicity, culture, language, in-

come, age, and even geography. They lamented what they saw as a deepening civic discomfort that has resulted in people retreating from community activities, as this erosion of caring and social isolation hurts their communities and them personally.²

Sennett suggests that cooperation is a skill, and, like any other skill, requires patience and practice through social exchanges to be improved. Exchanges can be understood as the simple experience of give and take, or the exposure to difference within daily interactions. Sennett comments that we often do not understand what is passing in the hearts and minds of those we encounter, and we may never truly understand our differences. A fifth-generation Hong Kong Canadian may never truly understand the struggles of a first-generation Hong Kong immigrant parent. Yet, this should not deter us from engaging with one another to work together. Sennett goes on to study the dynamics of exchanges where the balance between cooperation and competition is found in the middle of the spectrum.

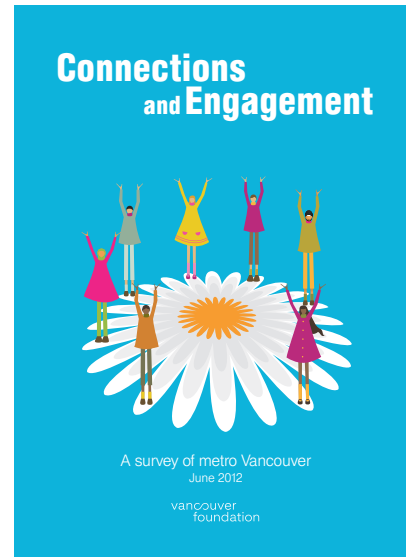


Fig. 4.2

The Vancouver Foundation provides grants to individuals and community groups to organize gatherings from running clubs to knitting circles



At one end of the spectrum is the “altruistic exchange,” which involves self-sacrifice and focuses on gift giving.³ This is followed by the “win-win exchange” where both parties benefit, followed by the “differentiating exchange” in which the partners become aware of their differences, then the “zero-sum exchange” where one party prevails at the expense of the other, and, finally, the “winner-takes-all exchange” where one party wipes out the other. In Chinese culture, the giving of red pockets over Chinese New Year is a symbolic example of an “altruistic exchange,” while the intergenerational cultural clashes of Hong Kong Canadian families can be seen as a “zero-sum exchange.” These cultural standoffs are like the encounter of two apex predators within the same ecosystem where “we meet, we compete, I take everything,

Fig. 4.3

Spectrum of Cooperation, Richard Sennett

and you are destroyed.” The two ends of the spectrum represent the extremes of complete self-sacrifice and competition, while cooperation is in the middle. Mastering the skill of cooperation requires a method of establishing and identifying a constantly fluctuating border between people’s expectations and values. The recognition of social patterns and symbols within exchanges is what Sennett calls ritual.

The role of ritual in social exchanges is “to relieve and resolve anxiety by turning people outward in shared symbolic acts.”⁴ Cultural rituals such as GuanXi are shortcuts for establishing a common ground to enable cooperation. GuanXi and its principles establish and reveal deep relational bonds between individuals, and, through social exchanges, people become empathetic of their differences.



THE PRINCIPLES OF GUANXI

Through a Western lens, GuanXi is understood only within a single relationship. In Chinese, the term GuanXi consists of the characters “Guan”, meaning “to close” or “closeness”; and “Xi”, meaning “system” or “network”. This closeness network reveals an interconnected and fluid boundary of relations rather than a rigidly defined boundary. According to Yadong Luo, Professor of Systems Management at the University of Miami, GuanXi is an intricate and pervasive network that is cultivated informally through social exchanges that invoke a sense of assurance and understanding and governs Chinese attitudes toward long-term social relationships.⁵ The network means a Chinese immigrant feels free to call on a third cousin in a foreign city for a loan. At

home, it is the shared experiences and memories among friends, rather than written contracts or laws, that lay the foundations for trust in the exchange of favours or in business dealings. Within families, it is the relationship bonds between father and son, sister and brother, which allow the giving of time, resources, and emotional support when faced with difference. GuanXi consists of delicate fibers woven into every individual's social life and, therefore, into many aspects of Chinese communities. Luo distinguishes GuanXi into two sub categories of predetermined and voluntary relationships, which occur simultaneously.

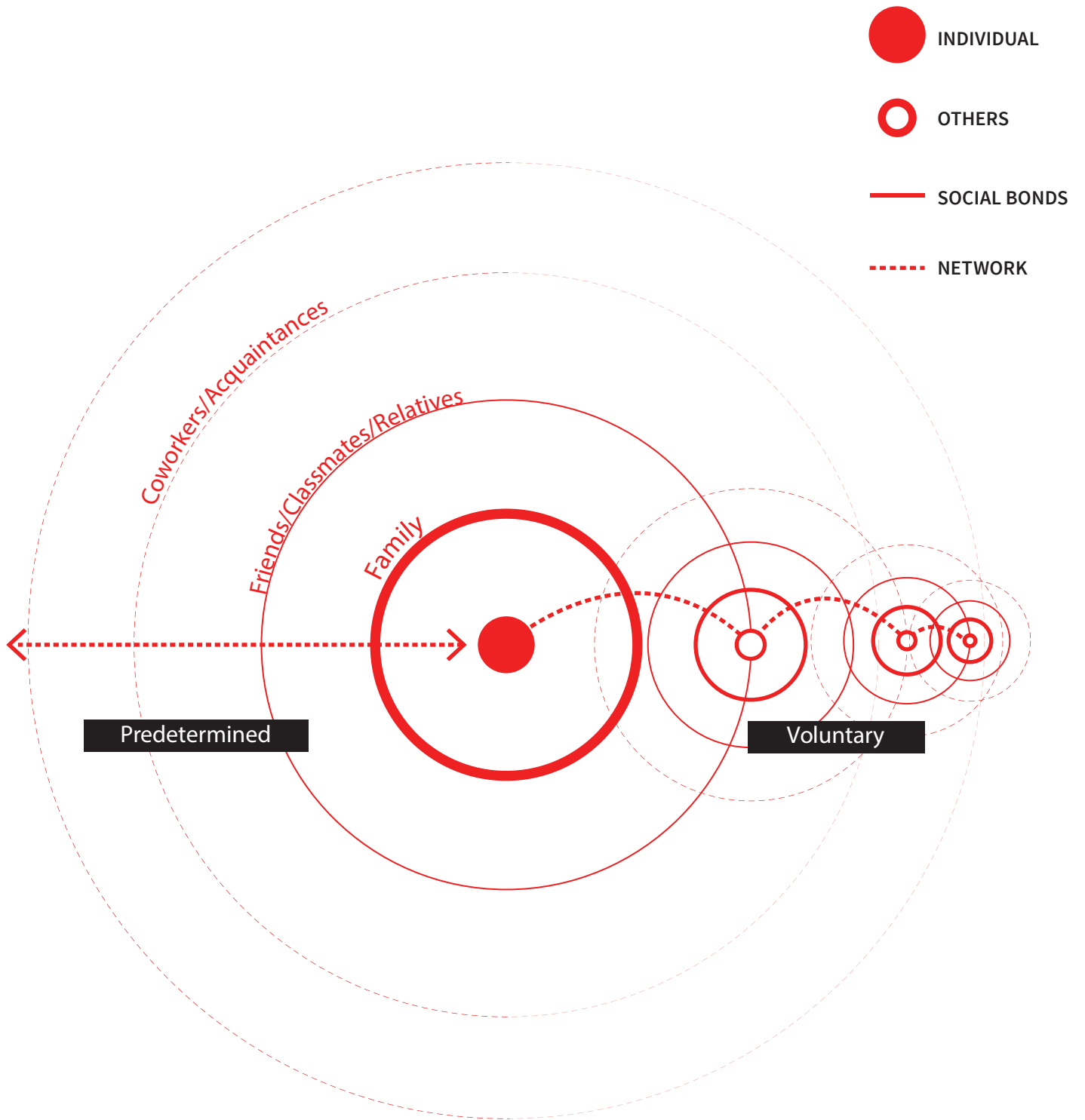
In Predetermined Relationships, behaviour expectations are dictated by one's status and responsibilities within a predetermined group, such as a grandfather and grandson. These existing relational bonds within social and family relationships connect to form the GuanXi network. This network spreads from the individual at the center with family at its core, extending out to friends, classmates, and distant relatives, then further outwards to coworkers and acquaintances, arranged according to the distance and quality of their relationship. Within exchanges, individual desires are downplayed as the focus is drawn on their relationship and the expected behaviour. According to Sennett, GuanXi invokes a sense of duty and honour as key ingredients in social relations and cooperation. One can count on other people within the network, especially when the going gets tough; they are honour-bound to support you, rather than take advantage of your weakness. People in the network may criticize and nag one another, but they feel obliged to be helpful.

In the many relationships that take place outside of family, the individual plays an active role in determining the character and tone of an exchange. These are what Luo calls Voluntary Relationships and are the most commonly associated with the negative use of GuanXi, which involves the exchange of favours, gift giving, or drawing on connections to achieve a goal. This instrumental aspect of GuanXi is most often stigmatized and associated with corruption, manipulation, and "going through the back door." It is due to the individual's dual role as passive follower of predetermined relationships and active initiator of voluntary relationships that make Guanxi interactions complicated and in-

Fig. 4.4

GuanXi Diagram of Predetermined and Voluntary bonds (Right)

GuanXi: A Legacy in Crisis



tangible.

Although GuanXi may be very similar to social networks, its uniqueness comes from the cultural commitment to its unwritten principles when faced with conflict. A key concept related to maintaining GuanXi is the accumulation of a kind of social capital called RenQing. According to Mayfair Yang, RenQing provides the moral and ethical foundations of GuanXi, given its instrumental reputation. RenQing refers to the feelings of affect and closeness as an element intrinsic in human character and interactions.⁶ The Chinese sometimes like to utilize GuanXi for the sake of experiencing the warmth of RenQing within social exchanges. What emerges is the recognition of the deep relational bonds between two people, and a different flavour of relationship emerges.⁷ RenQing refers to the bonds of reciprocity and mutual aid between two people and provides a sense of obligation and indebtedness that is implicit in all GuanXi relationships.

It has been said that true GuanXi always carries with it RenQing and is a precondition for utilizing GuanXi. As the Chinese weave their networks of GuanXi, they are also weaving a web of emotional obligations that must be “repaid.” Sennett observes that GuanXi relationships are connected by an unwritten code of asymmetrical reciprocity rather than equivalent one-to-one exchanges. This asymmetry refers to most GuanXi exchanges where one side is asked to give out of faith, based on the strength of their GuanXi.⁸ A teenager who needs money to go to medical school can feel at ease asking his distant uncle for help to pay his tuition. Although a debt is incurred, it is not monetarized as in the West and may be entirely dependent on the quality of Guanxi between the teenager’s father and the teenager’s uncle. Instead, the debt can be repaid in the future by giving medical advice to his uncle’s friends or by the teenager’s parents taking one of their nieces to the airport. RenQing allows debts to be transferrable through other means and other individuals within the network.

Although the use of GuanXi is complex, the practice of this ritual remains prevalent within Hong Kong Canadian communities. GuanXi is built on principles that emphasizes the quality of the relationship, finds honour in dependency, and is simul-

taneously temporal, yet sustainable.

GUANXI EMPHASIZES THE AFFECTUAL BONDS OF RELATIONSHIPS

Mayfair Yang in her seminal book *Gifts, Favours, and Banquets* traces GuanXi practices back to early Confucian teachings and the times of social desperation during the cultural revolution to subvert the restrictions that the state imposed on daily life. Much of her book is an ethnographic study of GuanXi as it is used today. In her concluding chapter “RenQing over GuanXi,” she argues that the affectual aspects of GuanXi is a more important legacy than its instrumental capacities as the nature of GuanXi continues to develop.⁹ GuanXi exists within a social realm by converting social distance into social familiarity and a sense of kinship. The emphasis is placed on the warmth and feelings of closeness of a relationship even when GuanXi is used to call in a favour. Because of the fluid nature with which the Chinese see relationships, relational networks can extend especially within multicultural societies like Canada. Over time, as kinship ties begin to include intercultural and interracial identities, GuanXi remains an important ritual for absorbing differences and overcoming cultural barriers. Similar to the European way of greeting with a kiss on the cheek, utilizing and maintaining one’s GuanXi network focuses on the exchanges and the affectual bonds within relationships.

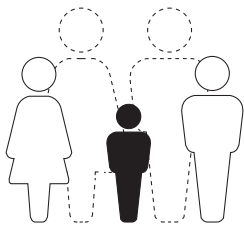


Fig. 4.5

GUANXI FINDS HONOUR IN DEPENDENCY

According to Sennett, people in a GuanXi network are not ashamed of dependency.¹⁰ One can exercise GuanXi with anyone who needs you or whom you need, whether beneath or above you in the social order. When someone commits to GuanXi, they commit to the maintenance of their network, and as RenQing is accumulated, each individual gains access to a highly volatile environment, where they depend on others to achieve far more together than they would apart. In Western culture, dependency is seen as a sign of weakness and a failure of character. The value of individualism carries with it an expectation of autonomy and self-sufficiency, which makes individuals appear free. Viewed from the perspective of GuanXi, a person who prides him or her-

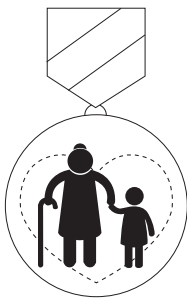


Fig. 4.6

self on not asking for help appears a deeply damaged human being; fear of social embeddedness dominates their life.

GUANXI IS SIMULTANEOUSLY TEMPORAL YET SUSTAINABLE

Sennett also writes that the GuanXi network, although informal, is meant to be sustainable.¹¹ The code of GuanXi dictates that one who gets help will give it back in the future in a form neither party may now foresee, but knows will occur. These transferrable debts are meant to endure from generation to generation despite not being bounded by the standards of a Western contract. The old debt of two childhood friends separated for many years and physical distance can be repaid through their grandchildren because of their grandparent's GuanXi. An act of kindness can far outlive the lives of one generation and touch the lives of many others.

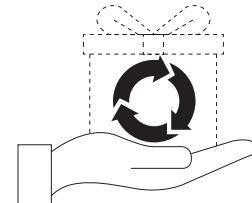


Fig. 4.7

CONCLUSION

GuanXi is an intricate network and a social code that invokes a sense of assurance and understanding that governs Chinese attitudes toward long-term social relationships. It is an important yet disappearing element within Hong Kong Canadian culture. The bonds of GuanXi are an important ritual, but if not consciously exercised the ability for subsequent generations to utilize and navigate this network will be lost through cultural assimilation. Sennett mentions the deterioration of Guanxi even within China, as more and more Chinese begin to adopt Western ways of parenting, working and consuming. For Hong Kong Canadians, spaces with a focus on GuanXi that gather the generations together to cooperate would be crucial in preserving this part of their culture.

NOTES

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10. Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures, and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 136.
11. *Ibid.*, 136.



Fig. 5.1

The lower level of the HSBC building in Hong Kong transformed into a space of gathering every Sunday

DESIGN PRECEDENTS:

FROM GUANXI TO GATHERING

How does one take GuanXi, an ancient Chinese social code, and turn it into a place-making strategy for a specific community? When thinking about GuanXi and space, words such as community, meeting space, or togetherness come to mind, all relating to spaces that allow for people to gather. The role of architecture is to create environments that support specific kinds of gathering, which in this case is for the formation of GuanXi.

The three principles of GuanXi (finding honour in dependency, developing temporal yet sustainable relationships, and focusing on the bonds of relationship) must be kept firmly in mind when designing and utilizing the space. Although these principles are non-spatial, understanding of the necessary social and programmatic ingredients, paired with different scales of gathering, would encourage GuanXi to be fostered.

Although each individual is at the center of his or her own GuanXi network, the relationships closest to the center that allow Guanxi to reach outward are the bonds of family. As daily life becomes more isolated and age-specific, spaces suitable for intergenerational cooperation become increasingly rare. Understanding the needs of a community and finding opportunities for beneficial overlaps are crucial in forming GuanXi between generations.

Few spaces within our communities are designed with a focus to encourage deep social exchanges and to exercise coop-

eration. GuanXi requires a diversity of cultures, generations, and relational bonds for any group to fully understand and experience the interconnectedness of their networks. Community centers or shopping malls may be a possible typology, but the focus on specific programs and the separation of user groups by age, interests, or physical ability, discourages the possibility for building GuanXi. Proximity alone is not sufficient to draw people out of their isolation. Chinese language schools may improve linguistic skills, but they lack the intergenerational bonds and the diversity of relationships that can foster GuanXi. Also, just as children are isolated in their classrooms, their parents remain isolated within their cars losing the opportunity to establish GuanXi even amongst themselves.

A 2016 study reveals that Canadians sixty-five and older outnumber those fourteen and or younger which has created a new awareness regarding spaces that can serve the old and the young. This shift has resulted in a lack of community services and spaces suitable for the elderly and an increase in half-empty schools due to lower student enrollment. There is a new concept called “Intergenerational Community Learning Centers” (ICLC) that looks to repurposes these spaces into learning centers for all ages where,

Within a fully-functioning ICLC, youth sector schooling is just one of an array of activities and services for leisure, health, learning and community-building. The centre recruits volunteers from within and beyond the school community, creates an inventory of what volunteers have to offer, and works with teachers and the ICLC coordinator to deploy them into a variety of roles: as mentors, teacher aides, library assistants, Breakfast Club helpers, guest speakers, presenters and for extracurricular activities (knitting, cooking, sewing clubs, community gardens, etc.). ICLCs are also points of service for health clinics, personal, family and career counselling, library, computer and Internet access, and more. Additionally, they offer myriad possibilities for pairing different participating groups.¹



Fig. 5.2

Ikuyo Kotani, 63, left, reads a picture book to kindergarden children with Toshie Kimura, 77, at Kurumi Kindergarden in Kashiwa City, Chiba Prefecture, Japan.

In Quebec, ICLCs have already been developed in every anglophone school board to support student achievement, but also “offering recreational, educational, social, and cultural opportunities for students, families and the community” — mostly after school hours and evenings. The benefits of these spaces for communities are already well established, their use giving both the young and the old a boost in confidence, self-esteem, and motivation. Also, the “leisure and volunteer activities in a shared site breaks down barriers and stereotypes and helps build a sense of community.”² Spaces like ICLCs would be critical in combating the negative effects of cultural assimilation and mending the intergenerational relationships for Chinese Canadian communities.

The local church remains one of the few remaining typologies within Chinese Canadian communities that can gather the generations together. The ritual use of these spaces provides opportunities for intergenerational interaction and, most importantly, cooperation where the generations can come to serve and be served throughout the week. The lessons learned from ICLCs, the principles of GuanXi, and a focus on gathering will be used to focus design intentions for the design of a new church. Along with a focus on program, there is also a need to balance informal, unprogrammed, and adaptive gathering spaces that allow weak ties to grow stronger. These relational spaces enable people to look past their differences, to be aware of the present, and to focus on the bonds of relationship. The following are a collection of moments in projects that exemplify the fostering of GuanXi.

“AGORA” PROJECTS- ITALY 2014 + BELGIUM 2015

ARCHITECTS: CONSTRUCTLAB

SIZE: SMALL

Two small-scale projects by ConstructLab began as an investigation into how to encourage “togetherness” spatially.³ These projects utilize the two typologies of the Circle and the Agora, which promote not only togetherness but also GuanXi. The circle is a typology used for gathering. Circles greatly aid in creating an atmosphere suitable for discussion, for both friendly encounters and conflict resolution. According to ConstructLab, “the circle can be generated without architecture, but architecture makes it more suitable, more comfortable somehow.” The projects utilize the circle in two different ways. The Minimal Agora places emphasis on the center, with smaller, more tightly placed chairs in the center and taller chairs at the periphery, which draws the focus towards the center. The Agora in Mons is larger in scale in a similar circular formation, but the point of entry is transferred to the center. Gatherings are directed outwards to create spaces that are suitable for a banquet, debate, or celebration.

Although minimal, the projects provide the basic needs of shelter and for gathering. These visible elements allow the invisible relational elements to take center stage. ConstructLab comments that “when you plan without use, people have the possibility to propose one.”

From GuanXi to Gathering



Fig. 5.3 (Top)

Minimal Agora at the Mercato dei Frutti Minori, Castiglione, 2014, Italy

Fig. 5.4 (Bottom)

Agora in Mons as space for collective experimentation, Mon(s) Invisible, 2015, Belgium

ARCUS CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE- KALAMAZOO, MI, USA 2014

ARCHITECTS: STUDIO GANG

SIZE: MEDIUM

During a TED talk in 2017, principle architect Jeanne Gang commented that a role central to her practice is that of “relationship builder.” Architects are crucial community builders and can craft specific interactions and connections between people. An example of this is the Arcus Center founded in 2010 to catalyze social change. The Center’s mission is to develop emerging leaders and sustain existing leaders in the fields of human rights and social justice.⁴

One of the challenges that the project faced was how to create an architecture that could serve diverse user groups in their discussions of sensitive issues regarding social justice. Within this array of social and cultural forces at play, the building utilizes a triaxial geometry that faces residential neighbors, a college campus, and a woodland grove and consolidates them into a central gathering space. Utilizing a central, sunken communal living room, fireplace, and public kitchen, the heart of this project is an informal meeting place focused on fostering relationships and empowering each visitor to be an active participant and contributor in discussions around issues of social justice. The three programmatic elements of a study space, lecture hall, and meeting rooms are pushed to the ends of each axial wing while maintaining a relationship with the central meeting area. The project creates a social space for individuals to focus on the quality of their interactions and the closeness of relationships to serve not only members of the college but also their own communities.

From GuanXi to Gathering



Fig. 5.5 (Top)
Sunken gathering space

Fig. 5.6 (Bottom)
View from a meeting room connected to the central gathering space

OLYMPIC SCULPTURE PARK- SEATTLE, WA, USA 2007

ARCHITECTS: WEISS MANFREDI

SIZE: LARGE

Located between downtown Seattle and waterfront, the Olympic Sculpture park utilizes the movement through the landscape and the transition from city to nature to create an outdoor sculpture park. Although labeled a sculpture park, the project masterfully incorporates many temporal elements and unprogrammed spaces to contrast against the static sculptures of the park. The edge between city and nature is where a museum building is situated as a gathering space for visitors and the community.

The primary gathering space inside the main building is a large unprogrammed area capable of hosting different events and large indoor functions. This gathering space extends outwards to an outdoor stepped amphitheater that offers panoramic views of the city and the water.⁵ As people come to visit the sculpture park, they also experience the temporal and communal events that occur throughout the year. Visitors of the park get to experience spring flowers in bloom, while their paths cross with a wedding ceremony happening in the amphitheater. As a museum concert is being set up indoors, the amphitheater could be hosting a 40-person yoga class, while other community members enjoy the summer sun. The architecture itself dissolves to bring these relationships and the activities of the community to the forefront. By engaging with and allowing these dynamic elements to take over the project, the architecture develops a sustainable yet temporal identity as the space changes over time.

From GuanXi to Gathering



Fig. 5.7 (Top)

Flexible space adapted for a wedding ceremony in outdoor amphitheater with views of the city and landscape

Fig. 5.8 (Bottom)

Outdoor yoga class in amphitheater

FARMOPOLIS- GREENWICH PENINSULA, LONDON, UK 2016

ARCHITECTS: WAYWARD

SIZE: XLARGE

Taking advantage of the unique site and local materials, Farmopolis is a new floating urban garden and cultural space located on a historic, disused coal jetty on the Greenwich Peninsula.⁶ The first iteration of the project features a 500-person greenhouse venue, a full-service, farm-to-table restaurant, a bar, and a garden created from salvaged plants from the RHS Chelsea Flower show of 2016. The project will expand to include programs that involve the community in growing produce and provide lessons on food education which will be utilized by the farmopolis café.

The site's location offers unique views of the Thames and functions as an urban oasis for all ages. The different programs provide a venue for families and different generations to come together, learn together, and participate in forming the identity of Farmopolis. The project is a gathering space which engages with the social and material networks of the community to reach outward rather than turn inward.

From GuanXi to Gathering



Fig. 5.9 (Top)

Aerial view of Farmopolis on the Thames

Fig. 5.10 (Bottom)

Accessible and flexible spaces which focus on gathering

CONCLUSION

The translation of GuanXi to architecture occurs when spaces allow gatherings at different scales. Each project reveals certain strategies which GuanXi can manifest in the design of a new church. The Agora Projects show that GuanXi decisions and the idea of togetherness can be reflected through a simple circle, but impact how people gather within or around a small unprogrammed space. The Arcus Center shows the importance of a central gathering space, while utilizing a fireplace, kitchen, and a sunken seating area, to promote informal interactions to encourage understanding while discussing sensitive topics. The Olympic sculpture park connects the main objective of exhibiting sculpture with movement through a landscape and showcasing the local weather and, most importantly, providing a large-scale community gathering space to host celebrations or other events. Farmopolis engages with the local material and social networks of the community to create a space of gathering and connection for the generations and for the city to nature.

A primary feature that connects all four projects is the focus on spaces of gathering. All the projects are designed to be assessible and allow for intercultural exchanges and intergenerational cooperation. The significance of cooperation is highlighted due to the unprogrammed nature of these gathering spaces, which becomes an invitation for their communities to invent and adapt different uses for them. The central location and the intersection of key circulation paths allow the relationships within the spaces to become events. These events, whether formal or informal, result in a culture that is conducive for building GuanXi.

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Fig. 6.1

Entrance booth of Stouffville Grace Baptist Church on Sundays at their current location

DESIGN

GUANXI-SCAPE

While researching GuanXi and its relationship to architecture, I was approached by an “uncle” (someone within my GuanXi network) to see if I would be interested in helping them design a new facility for Stouffville Grace Baptist Church. After renting a school for nearly 15 years, his church group had recently acquired a piece of land off Stouffville’s Main Street and hoped to build a new home there for their services and activities. Located just north of Toronto, Stouffville is a changing community that saw a 54 per cent increase in its population from 2006 to 2011. The second most commonly spoken language at home aside from English and French is now Cantonese, the dialect spoken by Hong Kong immigrants. As for Stouffville Grace Baptist, its membership of approximately 200 persons consists of a 140-person Chinese-speaking congregation, a 40-person English-speaking congregation, and 30 children who meet regularly on Sundays. From the outset, it was clear that this group of largely Hong Kong immigrant families with a diverse range of intergenerational relationships presented an ideal program and community for exploring and implementing the GuanXi principles underlying this thesis.



Fig. 6.2
Map of Stouffville within the golden horseshoe

The resulting design of a church to serve their needs was largely driven according to these principles, with special attention paid to the proposed site for the building. Located on an odd-sized lot within a business park, the site provides a unique view out towards a flood plain. Although it came with very strict guidelines and limitations, the site provided clear and direct op-

opportunities for applying GuanXi principles to create a special gathering space between the town and the floodplain through the design of a church.

OBSERVING GUANXI

The leaders of the church were aware of the potential for the unique site as a space for members to retreat from their busy lives into the stillness of nature. The site's proximity to water and the significance of water for the Christian faith and its rituals were clear associations for the project. Alongside these themes, GuanXi becomes a way of focusing design intentions to understand how the design of a space can make visible the GuanXi present within the community and allow for it to grow and be passed on between generations. The project began by spending time with the community and observing opportunities for gathering and the fostering of GuanXi.

Like many North American Chinese churches, this community is separated into an older Cantonese-speaking congregation, a younger English-speaking congregation and an English-speaking children's congregation. On Sundays, they spend much of their time apart rather than together. The language and cultural barriers are obvious reasons why the Chinese and English-speaking congregations are separated in different wings of the school. They have little in common regarding the subjects of the preaching and the style of songs that they sing, due to their different cultural preferences. However, many members of the church are connected in webs of GuanXi that are several generations deep, including families where three generations are represented within the community. Despite the obvious cultural tensions, it was clear that GuanXi was present within these relationships and is an important cultural legacy for this community. Every Sunday, there are two specific moments when these relationships and the web of GuanXi are made visible, with the building of GuanXi being seen as the most crucial.



Fig. 6.3
Children's Program

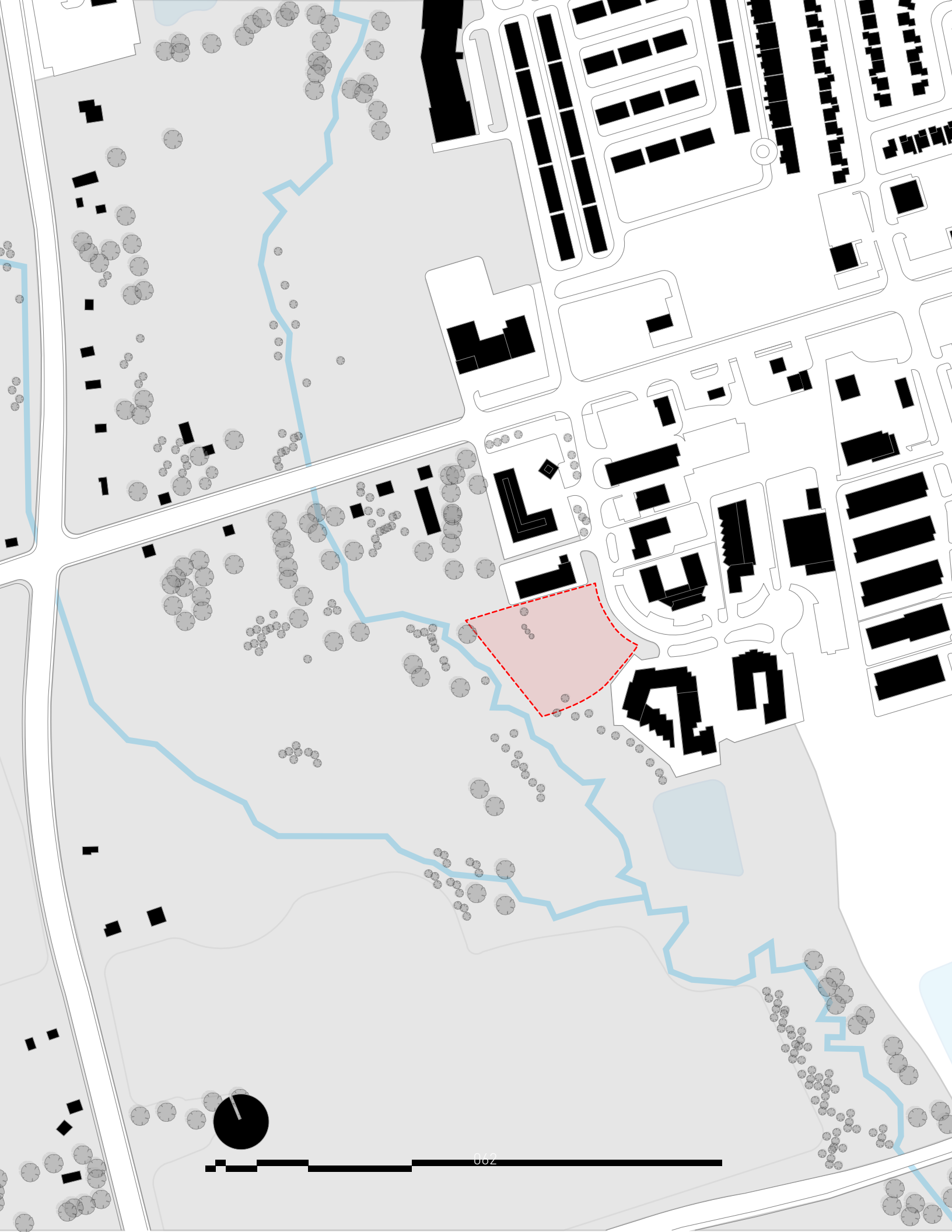


Fig. 6.4
Chinese-speaking-congregation
(CSC)



Fig. 6.5
English-speaking-congregation
(ESC)

Fig. 6.6
Site Location



The church community has been renting a school gym for the past eight years for their Sunday service, so the setting up of the chairs, the stage, and the sound system has become a weekly ritual. Volunteers often bring their children and grandparents along during setup. As sound checks and instruments are being tuned, children are playing tag, while grandparents sit and talk about the old days. After service, even members of the English congregation often stay behind to help the Chinese congregation reverse the setup process, with a friend's father packing sound equipment or perhaps a cousin's mother stacking chairs. These moments, which could seem as an inconvenience, are important for GuanXi formation and provide opportunities for bridging cultural divides within this community.

After services, while some members are tearing down the stage and stacking chairs, others usually gather in the lobby where a snack table has been set up near the main entrance. In this cramped corridor, friends gather to linger and make indecisive plans for lunch, while those enjoying snacks are informally invited to join. Despite having no seating, this is a final meeting space for young and old alike before being piled into minivans to go home.

These informal spaces, which could support a multiplicity of functions and accessible for all age groups, are important both to the culture of the community and the building of GuanXi. As I observed their use, it became obvious that the design of this community's future home would need to programmatically allow for intergeneration overlaps and cooperation, provide spaces for a variety of gatherings, and bring the GuanXi that exists within this community to the forefront.



FROM INCONVENIENCE TO OPPORTUNITY

Fig. 6.7



GATHERING ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Fig. 6.8

DESIGN PROPOSAL

The design of the church has changed drastically over the course of the thesis, despite having the same programmatic needs and site. Discussions with different members allowed a list of programs and expectations for the building to be developed very quickly. An early iteration of the design was produced and presented to the leaders with positive results. But, as the research and understanding of the translation of GuanXi to architecture became clear, certain design decisions began to take precedence over others. Although there was an intention to utilize as many “real life” elements in the final design, decisions around the occupancy of the building and the necessary parking required became very strict limitations. Engaging with the GuanXi networks of the community, addressing intergenerational needs, and enhancing moments for gathering became primary drivers for the final design.

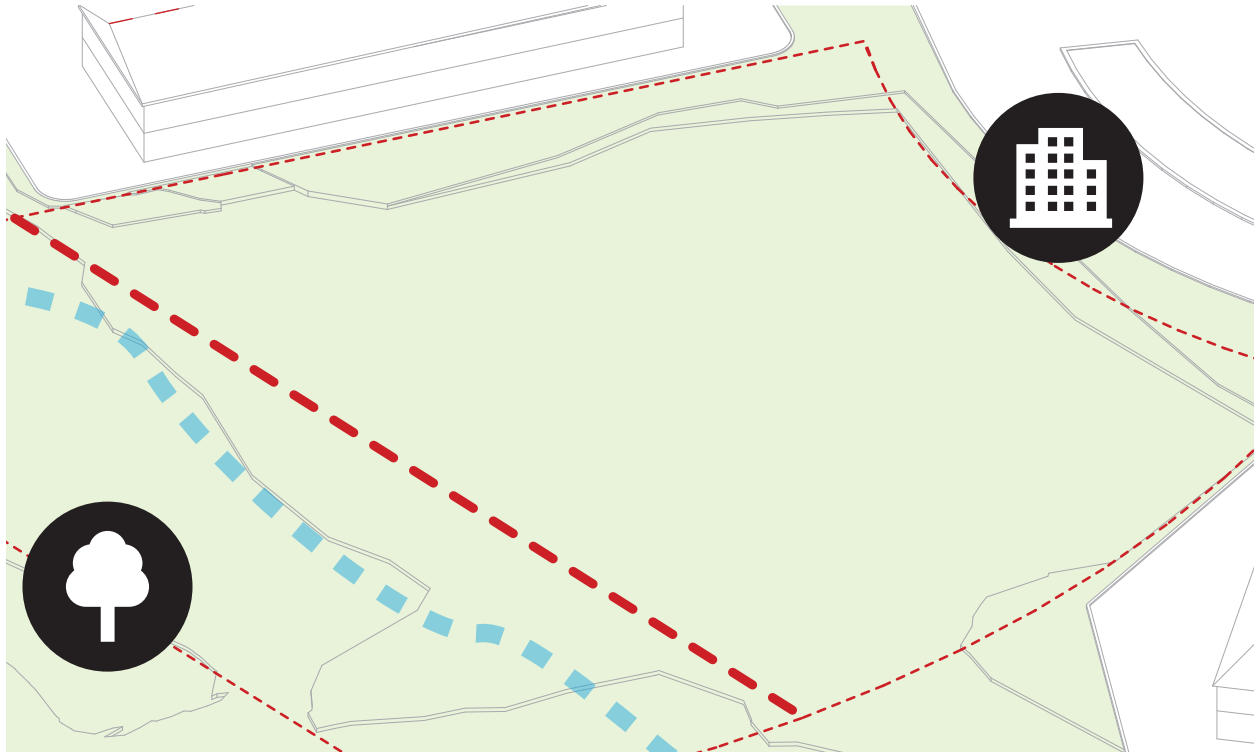


Fig. 6.9

A GATHERING SPACE FOR LOCAL NETWORKS

The selected site is a space that looks to connect and gather different local communities into a web of GuanXi. The proposed church occupies an edge between the town and the floodplain as a point of connection, gathering, and reflection. It is placed to take advantage of the views of the floodplain, with its building footprint set back 40m from the edge of the regulatory flood line. The design also proposes to connect the town's historic walkway along Main Street and its bike trails with a linear park along the floodplain and the church as an important gathering space.

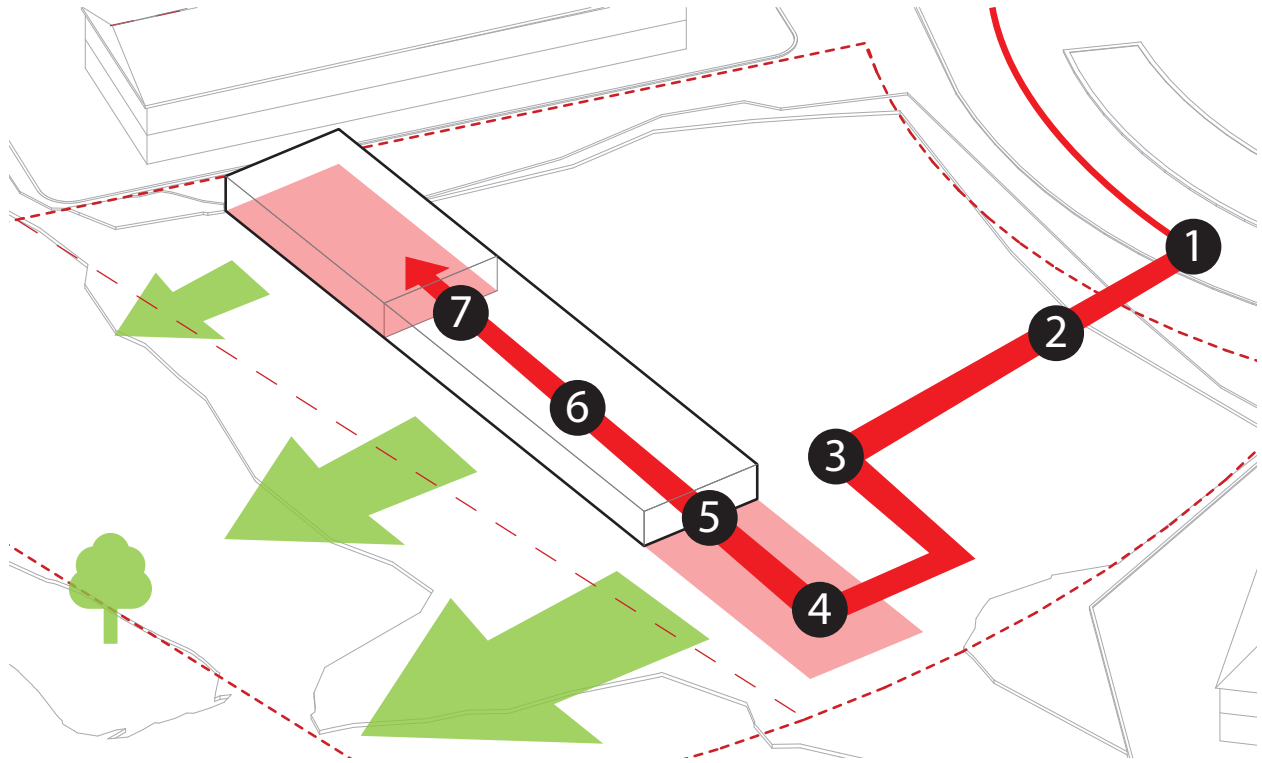


Fig. 6.10

PROCESSION TO SUPPORT GATHERING

The progression from the point of arrival by car, walking towards the entrance, moving through the building, and arriving at the sacred space was designed to support gathering while maintaining a relationship with the floodplain.

1	ARRIVAL BY CAR	4	GATHERING AT ENTRANCE
2	SITE THRESHOLD	5	ENTRANCE THRESHOLD
3	APPROACH BY FOOT	6	PROJECT CENTER
		7	SACRED SPACE THRESHOLD

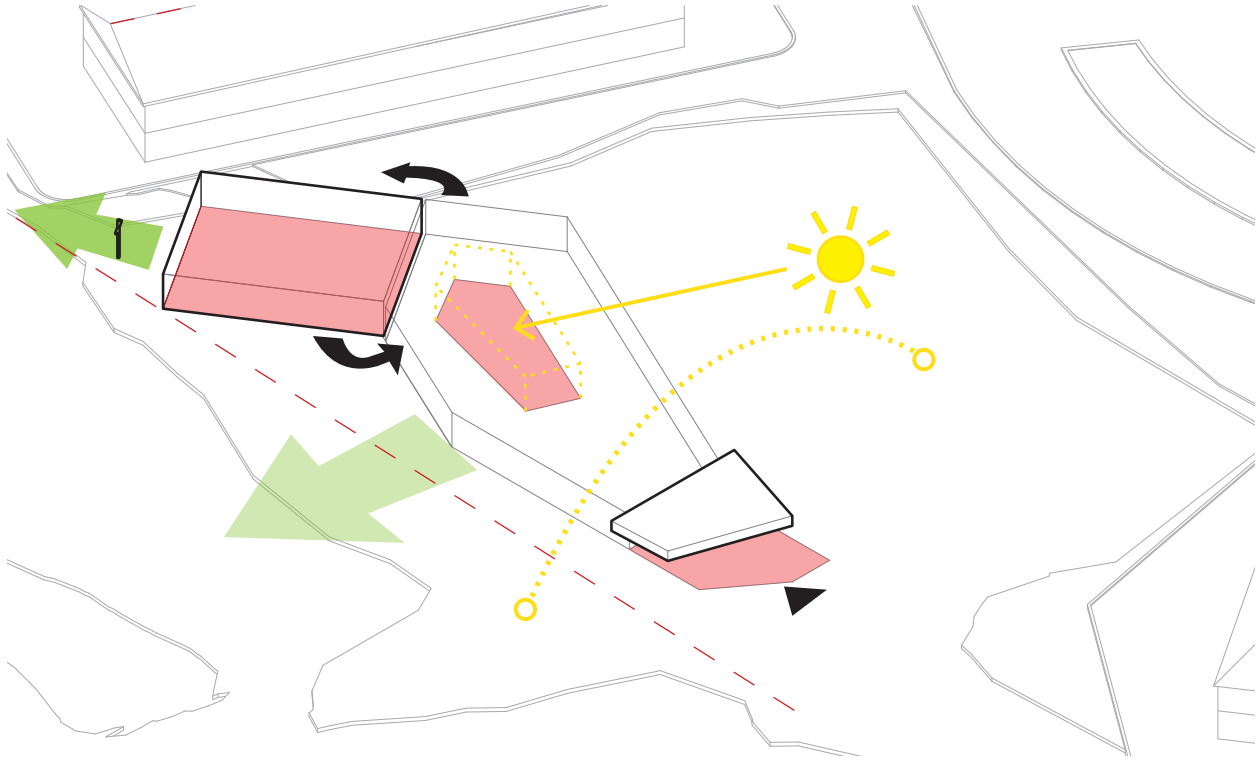


Fig. 6.11

SOLAR ORIENTATION AND VIEWS

The south-facing entrance is covered by a large overhang and becomes an ideal space for informal gathering both before entering and after exiting the building. A central gathering space with a large skylight is positioned at the center of the project where it is visible from all program areas to encourage interaction. The sanctuary is turned towards the north to take advantage of the views and allow for full-height windows to softly illuminate the space.

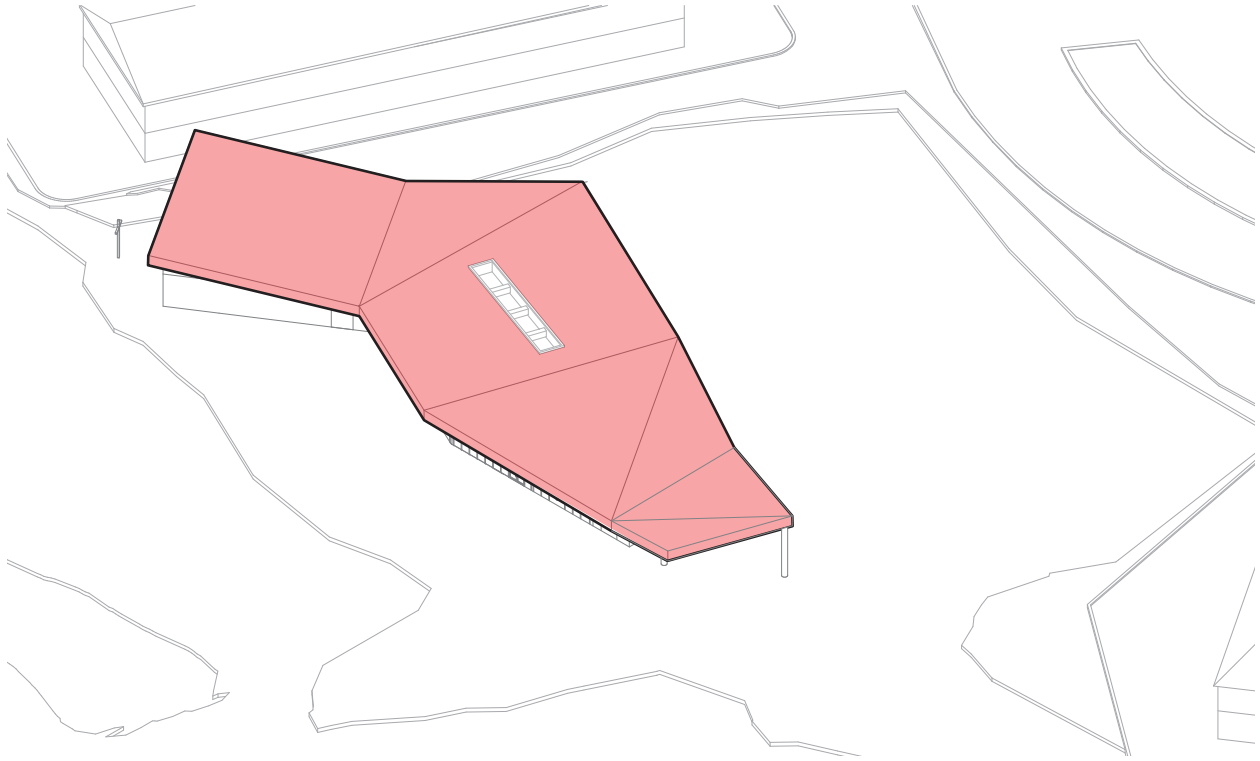


Fig. 6.12

GATHERING UNDER ONE ROOF

A large roof is the main feature of the design, creating shelter to unify the spaces as a gesture to encourage gathering. This undulating roof not only shades the building from solar exposure, but also creates a range of spaces of different qualities suitable for various kinds of gatherings. A continuous wooden ceiling from the entrance canopy to the main sanctuary blurs the distinction between interior and exterior spaces, whether sacred or public. The large spans and overhangs are gestures that invite visitors to engage with the site and the community.

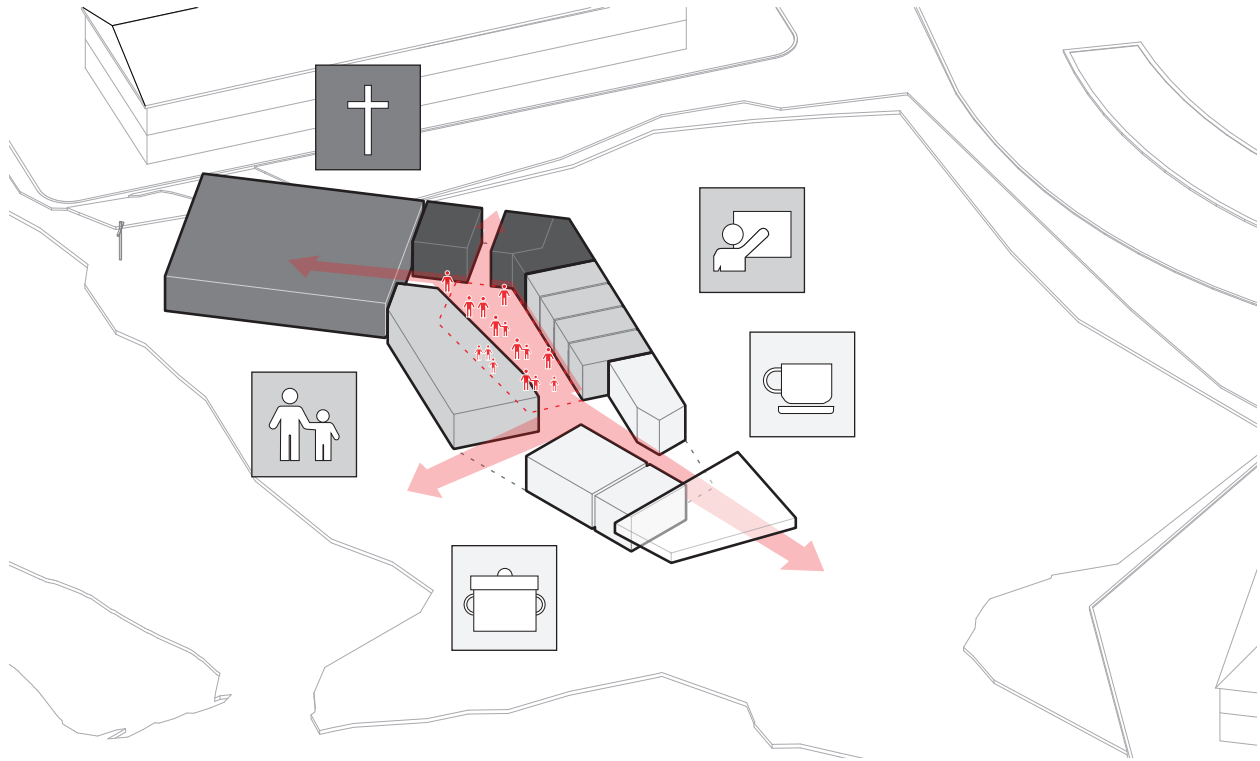


Fig. 6.13

A CENTRAL GUANXI SPACE

Locating all the circulation and main programs around the gathering space allows this unprogrammed mixed-use area to be used as a large classroom, an open space for informal gatherings, or to provide additional seating for the café. Programs are arranged from public to private from the entrance to the sanctuary to encourage interactions between all visitors, regardless of their intentions for the space. The single-story building allows for easy accessibility for all ages and people with disabilities.

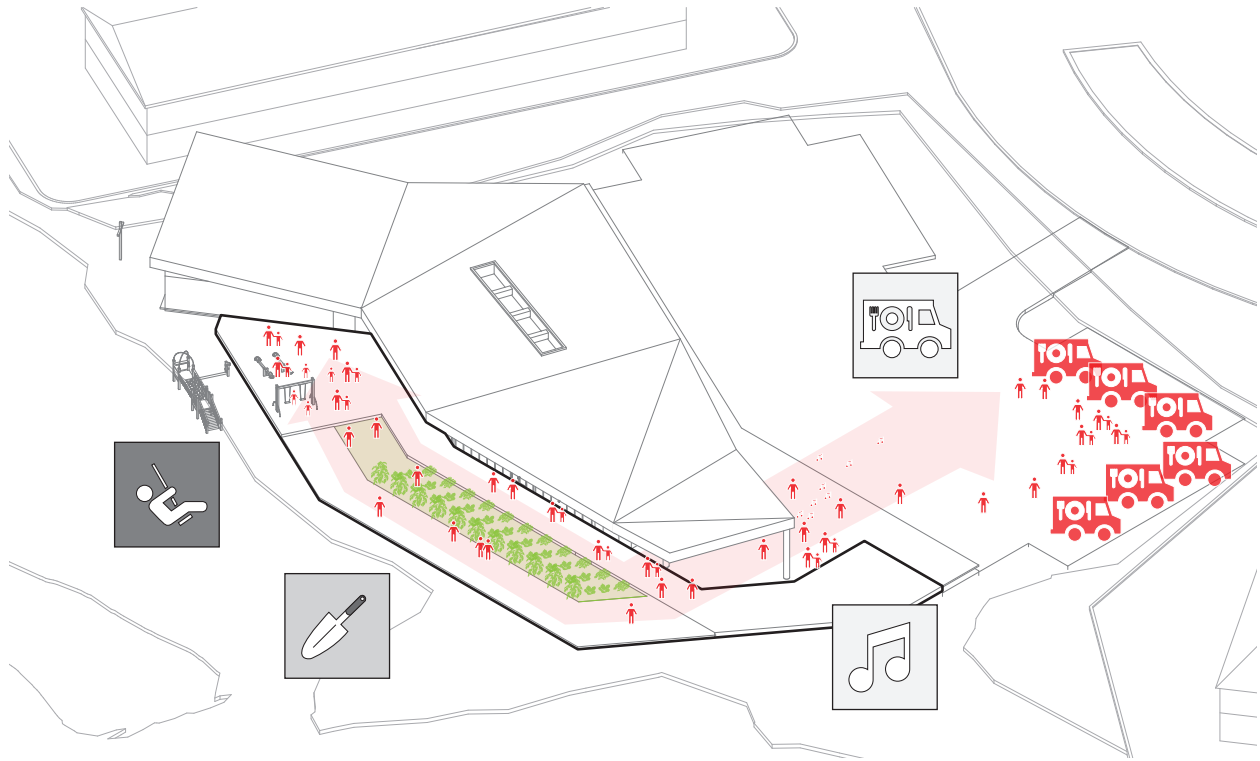


Fig. 6.14

EVENTS FOR GENERATIONAL OVERLAPS

The large overhang can be used as an informal venue for outdoor events with views of the floodplain. This area acts as an exterior stage that extends towards the parking lot and can accommodate different community events such as concerts or farmers' markets. A boardwalk extends along the floodplain and allows access to the community garden and the playground. The interior programs further encourage interaction between these spaces to draw visitors from the inside out and from the outside in.

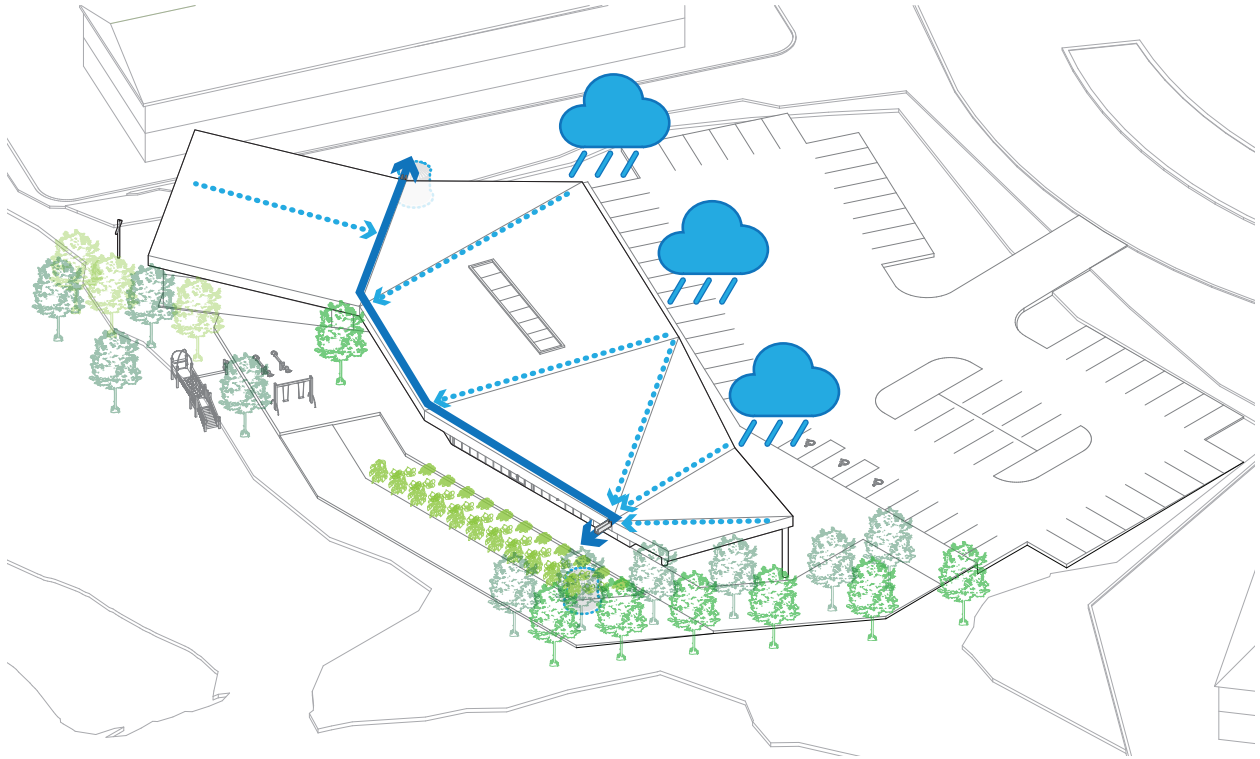
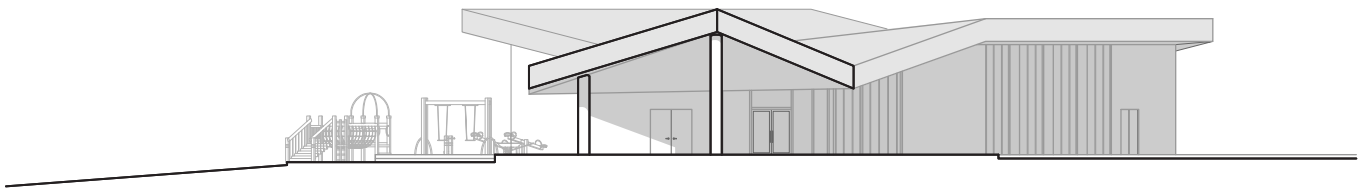


Fig. 6.15

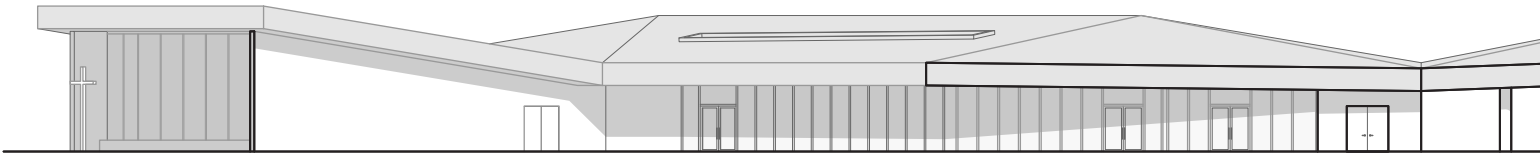
RAINWATER COLLECTION

The large roof funnels rain water into hidden roof trenches that drain into two roof scuppers. The scuppers direct the flow of water into underground cisterns used for site irrigation and storm water management, so that rainwater is slowly returned to the floodplain. Water is a significant symbol for the Christian faith and remains an important element in rituals of baptism and communion. A tree-lined canopy provides additional shading near the building entrance and creates a path for meditation leading to the floodplain.

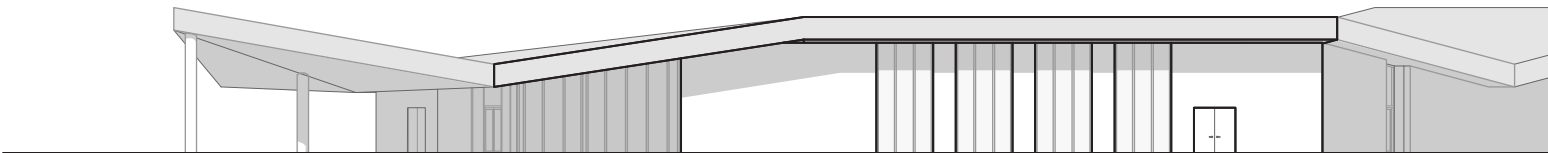


SOUTH ELEVATION
1:400

Fig. 6.16



WEST ELEVATION
1:400



EAST ELEVATION
1:400

ONE ROOF TO CAPTURE THE LIGHT

The south elevation, including the entrance, is shaded with the large overhang, while the east and west elevations are glazed to provide views throughout the project towards the floodplain. The sanctuary's axis is aligned to the north to allow for unobstructed views of the floodplain and provide soft diffused lighting. Above the center of the building is a large skylight, which allows the sun's movement from east to west to be traced as the interior quality of the space varies with the weather. The strategic placement of the entry, gathering space, and sacred space allow light to enter the building for a range of different uses. The quality of light, depending on the time of day and the room's orientation, creates environments that are suitable for specific kinds of gatherings.

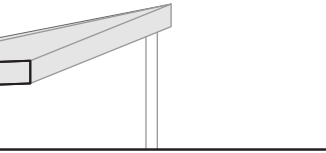


Fig. 6.17

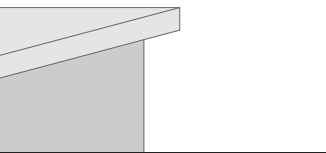


Fig. 6.18

THE SITE OF GUANXI

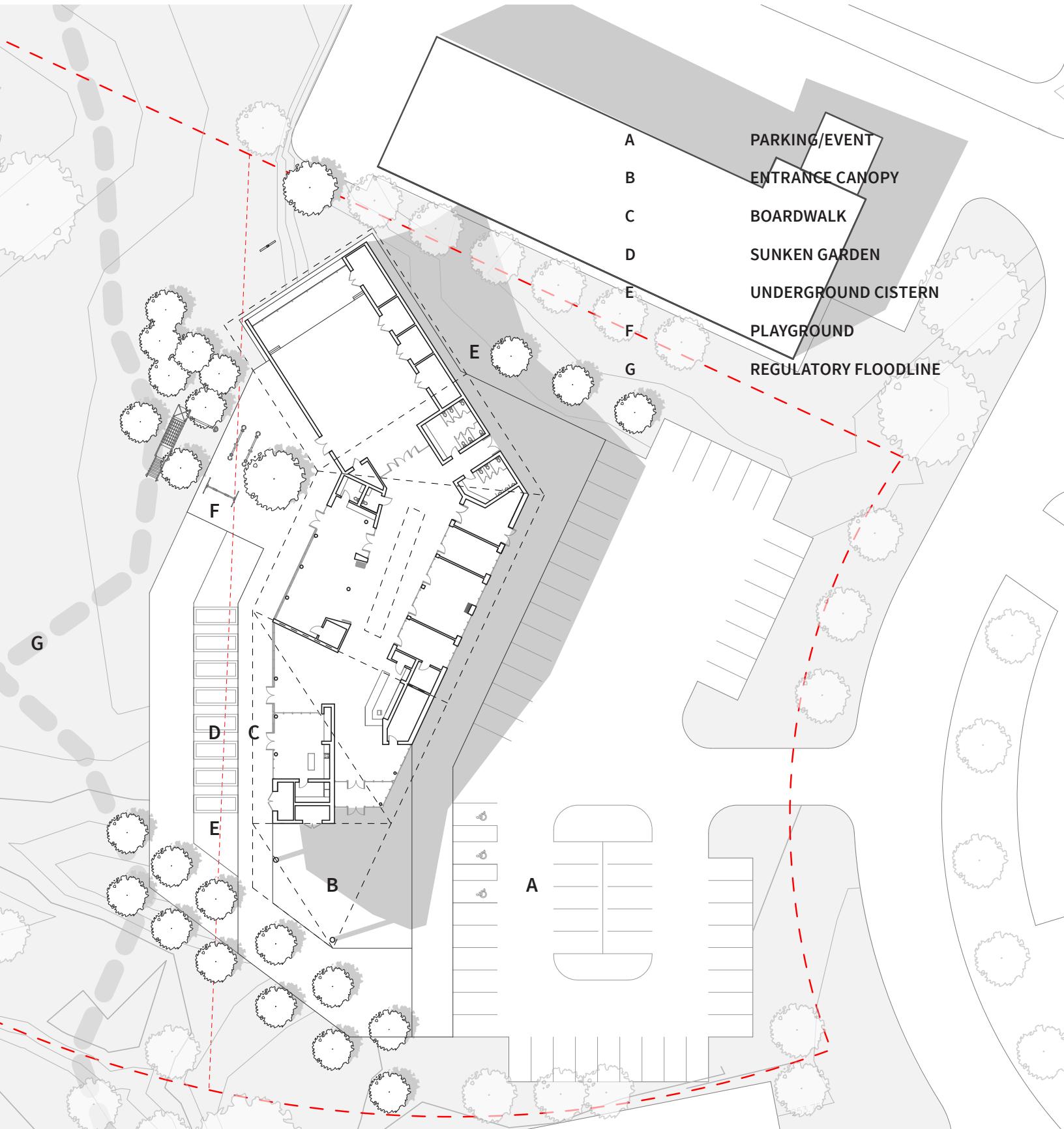
The building's footprint is pushed along the edge of the floodplain not only for the building to take full advantage of the views but also to allow for moments of contemplation at the approach and entrance to the building. After arriving by car, the visitor is confronted with the building and the site; every aspect has been designed to encourage and facilitate different kinds of gathering.

From the parking lot, visitors are guided towards the entrance canopy by the roof and the tree canopy. This area acts as the stage for informal gatherings protected from the elements, and is also an optimal venue for outdoor events. The point of arrival and departure is an opportunity for all visitors to gather.

Although the setback restrictions limit the building's footprint and the usability of the site, this project takes advantage of these restrictions with the strategic placement of a boardwalk, playground, and community garden to occupy the floodplain. These exterior programs utilize the seemingly unusable areas and create a sequence of spaces to encourage gathering and intergenerational interactions. The proximity of the community gardens and the daycare encourage adults and children to work together. The outdoor playground is located at the end of the boardwalk and is the most private of the exterior spaces. This boardwalk loops around the building and back towards the entrance, creating a path for church members to walk and meditate while observing views of the floodplain.



Fig. 6.19
Site Plan
1:750



- A PARKING/EVENT
- B ENTRANCE CANOPY
- C BOARDWALK
- D SUNKEN GARDEN
- E UNDERGROUND CISTERN
- F PLAYGROUND
- G REGULATORY FLOODLINE

RELATIONAL SPACE

During the warmer months, the primary space for both informal and formal large-scale gatherings is the area under the entrance canopy. During the winter season, the central gathering space is illuminated during the day by its skylight, which becomes an important facilitator for these interactions. All aspects of interior circulation of the church have clear views of and access to this central gathering space, which is a point of assembly for all visitors and generations.

The building is organized into three zones from public to private. The GuanXi space is visible immediately from the entrance and is connected to the sacred and most private gathering space of the church. A café and reception desk facing a seating area function together as the most public zone, allowing access to the community garden and community kitchen. This zone is designed for medium-sized group gatherings to encourage informal interaction and would be used most frequently.

Further into the project, one enters the GuanXi space at the center of the project, which is flanked by the main office, three classrooms, and the daycare/children's area. This area would allow for more intimate and private gatherings while remaining connected to the main gathering space. Sliding glass doors can be folded to allow full access for the daycare.

Finally, at the end of the gathering space is the main sanctuary with full height windows that face the north. This area is a large mixed-use space for Sunday services and other activities during the week.

Fig. 6.20
Ground Floor Plan
1:400



⊕ -0.80m
 ⊕ -0.40m
 ⊕ -0.20m

⊕ 0.00m

0 5m 10m 20m

- A CAFE/RECEPTION
- B COMMUNITY KITCHEN
- C GARDEN STORAGE
- D OFFICE/ADMIN
- E CLASSROOM
- F DAYCARE/CHILDRENS
- G MECHANICAL
- H SANCTUARY 180 SEATS
- I STAGE
- J STORAGE



078

GUANXI NETWORKS AND PLACE

The project's unique location also engages with other local networks within the town of Stouffville.

Stouffville has many existing hiking trails which help showcase the natural and historic features of the town. The site's proximity to the floodplain and its location off Main Street would allow the bike path along Hoover Park to run through the site to the heritage walkway along Main Street. The design proposes a new linear park as a continuation of the naturalized trail along the floodplains' edge. This park would be highly visible from Highway 48 and seen as an important entry gateway to the town of Stouffville. The church would be a new destination and gathering point to connect different members of the community.


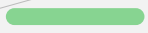



The water collected from the roof used by landscaping and the community gardens is a water management strategy which gradually returns the rainwater to the floodplain. The community garden is an important space that occupies the floodplain setback and provides spaces for food production and food education. The large overhang and the design of the church also allow farmer's markets to take place on weekdays and weekends to allow other members, not only the Chinese community in Stouffville, to be connected to this space.

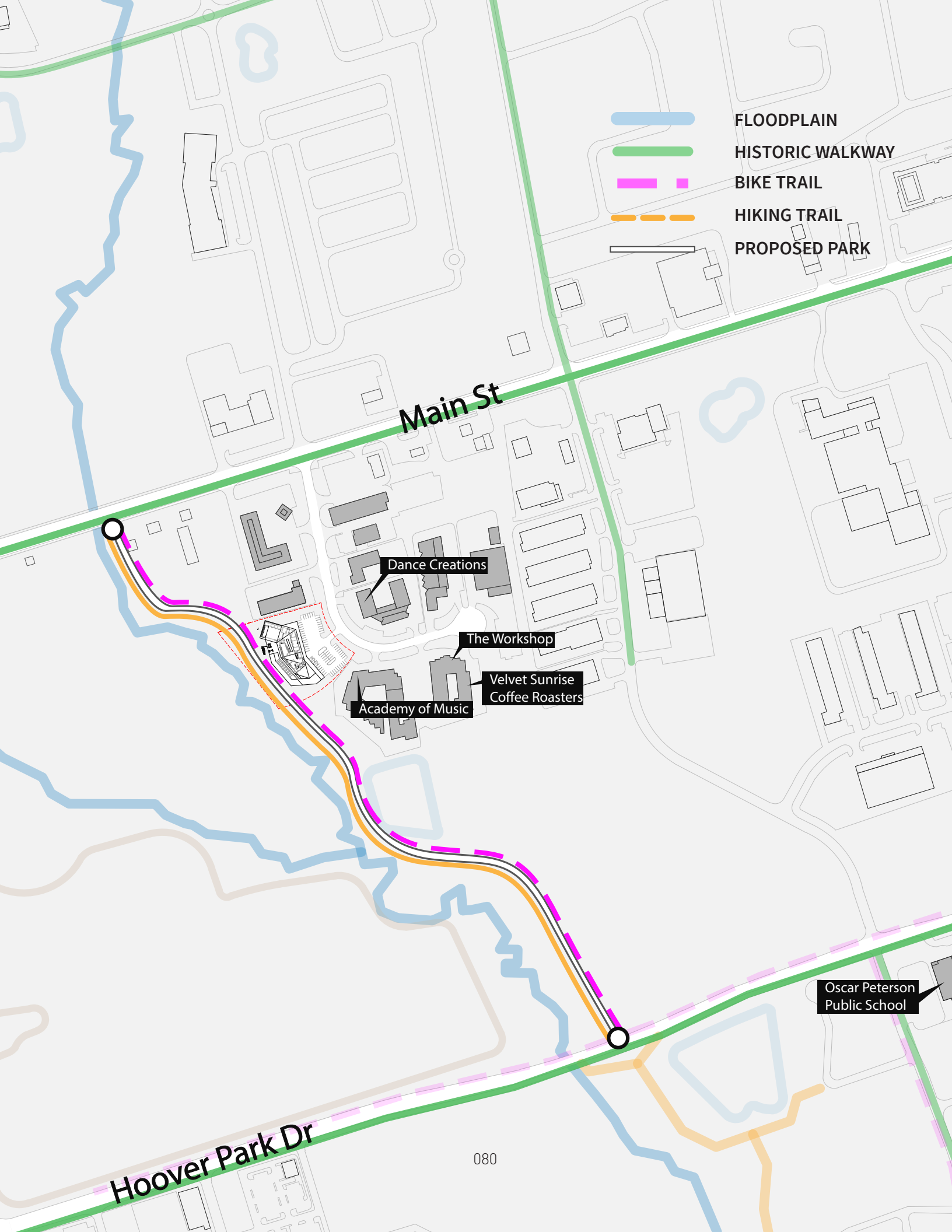
The site is also surrounded by local businesses including two music and dance schools, a local artist workshop and craft store, and a local coffee roaster. The main sanctuary could be used to host music and dance recitals for the music schools. Artworks and different installations could be exhibited in the main gathering space while the café could support the coffee roasters and be a space to exhibit their craft.



Fig. 6.21

Site Plan Networks

-  FLOODPLAIN
-  HISTORIC WALKWAY
-  BIKE TRAIL
-  HIKING TRAIL
-  PROPOSED PARK



Main St

Dance Creations

The Workshop

Velvet Sunrise
Coffee Roasters

Academy of Music

Oscar Peterson
Public School

Hoover Park Dr



RELATIONSHIPS UNDER THE CANOPY

The potential for building GuanXi as people interact while entering and leaving the church became clear while observing the community in their current facility. The large roof frames the approach towards the floodplain and the entrance to the church. This space would be an informal gathering space before and after services, and also provide a covered area for other outdoor events during the warmer months.

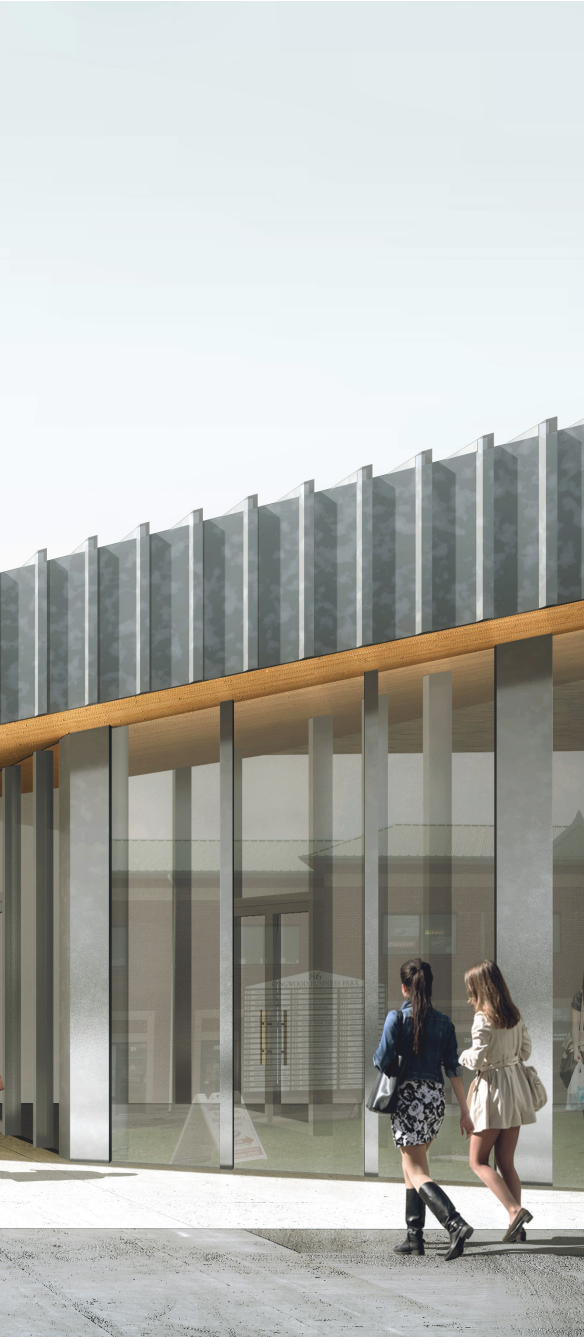
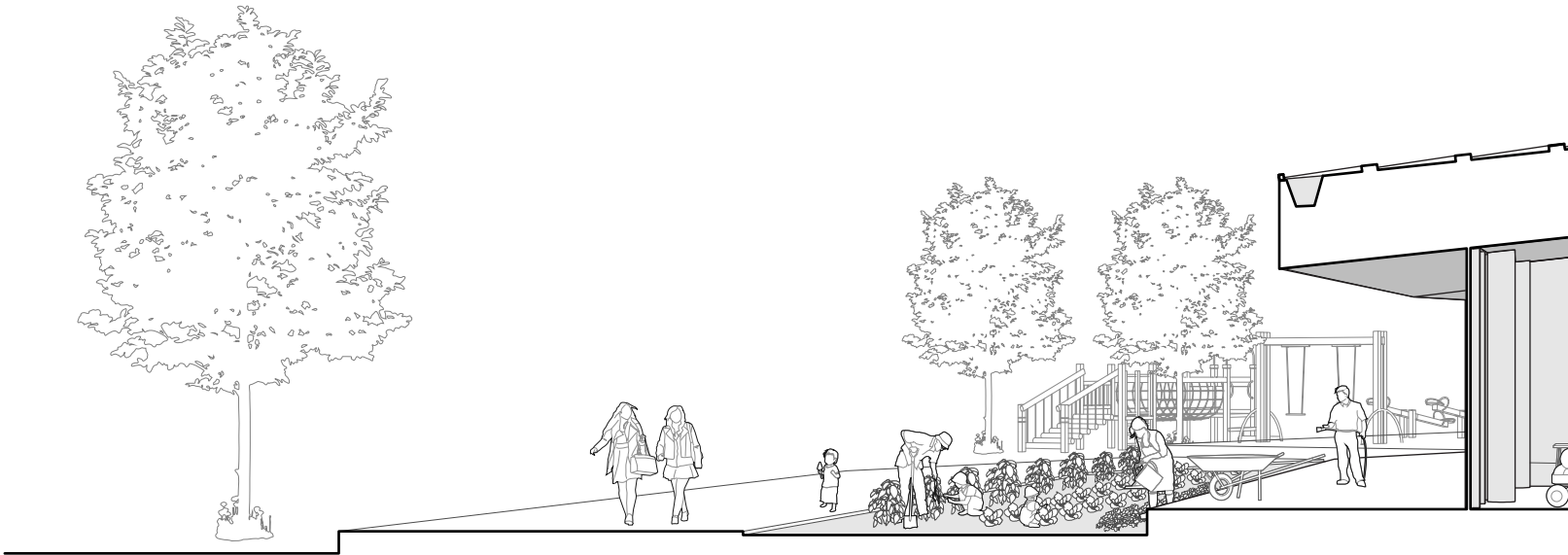


Fig. 6.22



COMMUNITY GARDEN

TASTING AND SMELLING GUANXI

The idea of a community café program came from working closely with the members of the church who saw a need for an informal gathering space for seniors. Members noticed that many seniors and recent retirees were being isolated within their homes and had few public spaces that allowed them the freedom to gather and socialize. A community café and kitchen would not only serve this demographic but also allow for seniors to be actively involved in operating these programs.

During a town meeting, I was approached by the York Region Food Network which was interested in partnering with the church to provide a space for community gardening and food

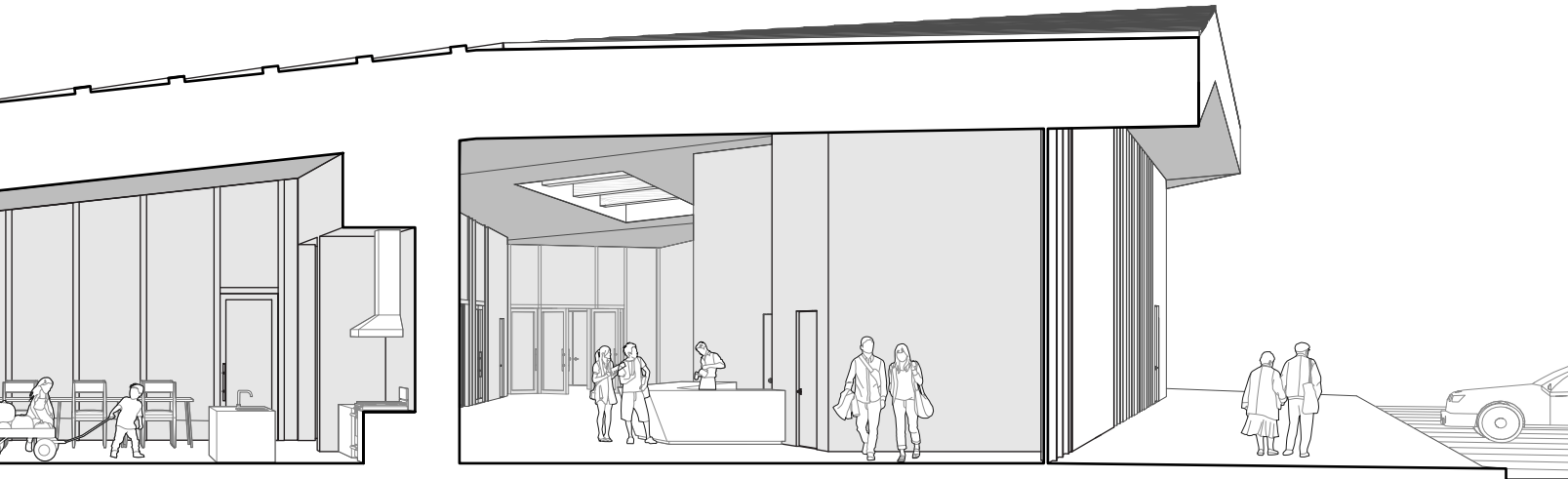


Fig. 6.23

Section A

1:100

COMMUNITY KITCHEN

CAFE/ RECEPTION

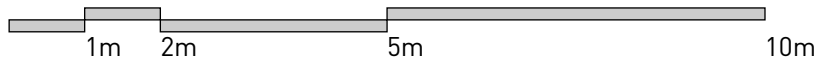


Fig. 6.24

education for the town of Stouffville. This allowed the design to take advantage of the floodplain setback to place the community garden along the west-facing edge of the site. This section (Fig. 6.23) illustrates the relationship between the community kitchen and garden space, which is optimal for opportunities of intergenerational cooperation during gardening and cooking activities.

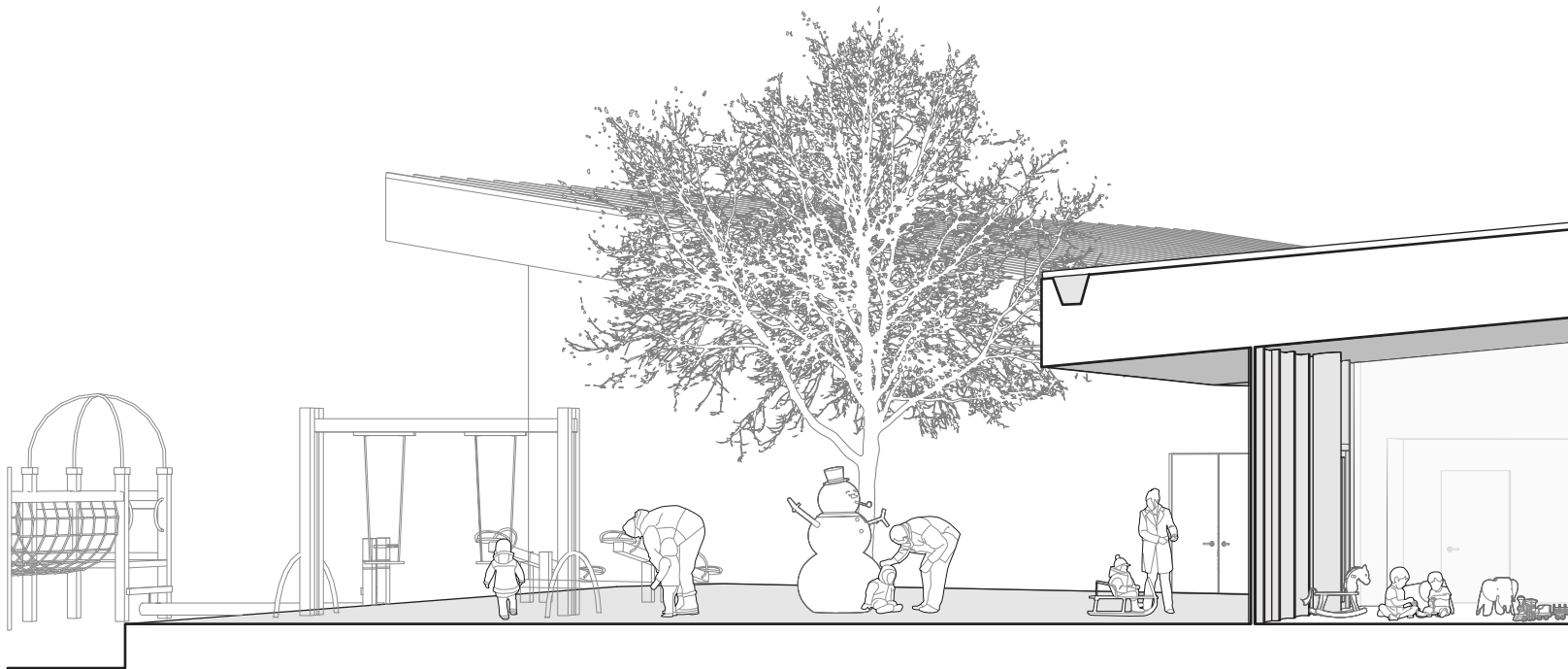




Fig. 6.25

GATHERING AND GARDENING

Following the tree-lined canopy, which acts as a backdrop and extension of the roof canopy, is the community garden and the children's playground at the end of the boardwalk. Incorporating a gardening element within the church reflects one of the principles of GuanXi, temporal yet sustainable within the project. Sustainability in this case is not about environmental initiatives but the act of gardening that allows for intergenerational cooperation. The daycare playground allows open access to the gardens and encourages the sharing of knowledge for those who are gardening and those who make use of the crops in the community kitchen. The plants that are grown and cared for by this community would come and go with the seasons. Yet, the care and the relationships that form because of this activity would continue to live on over the generations.



PLAYGROUND

DAYCARE/CHILDRENS

FEELING AND SEEING GUANXI

Another large demographic within Stouffville and the church community that saw a relevant need involved young parents and their children. Many, particularly stay-at-home parents, cited a lack of community spaces suitable for them and their children to gather and socialize. Providing a daycare and smaller classrooms would allow these parents to come to the church for support and provide a safe space for their children to play. Proximity of the community café would allow the elders who utilize the space to serve and work together with the children by running different kinds of programs in the sanctuary, leading Storytime in the main gathering space, or cooking together in the community kitchen.

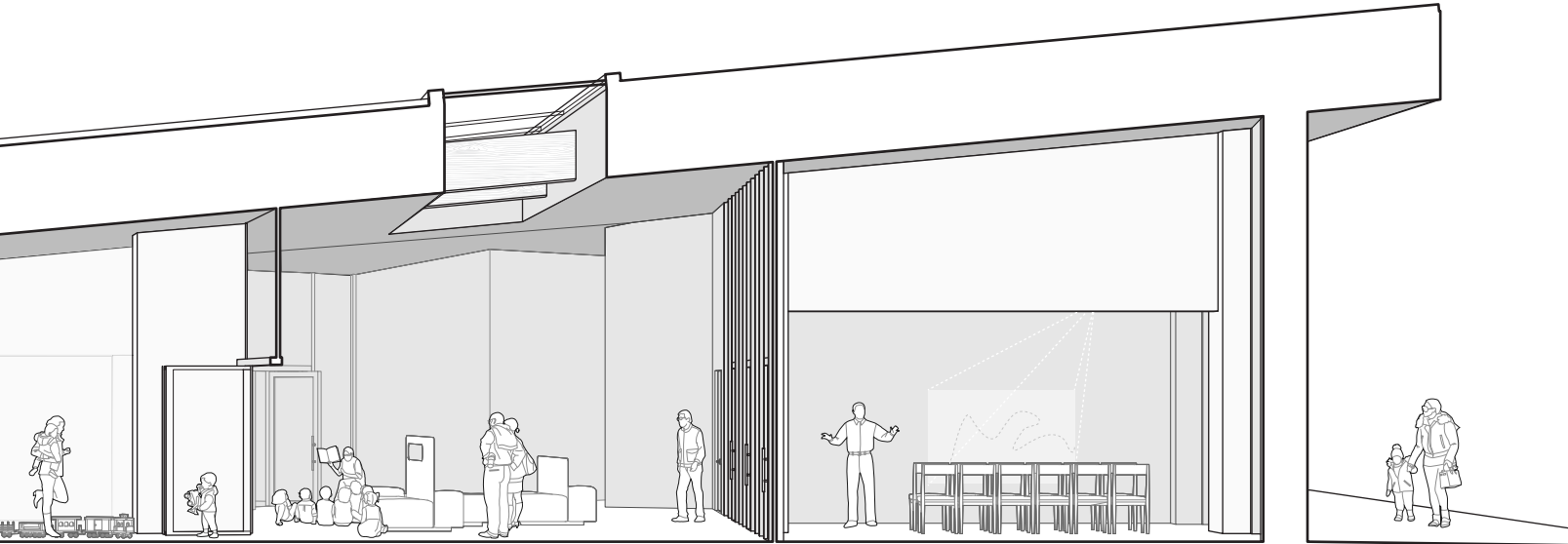
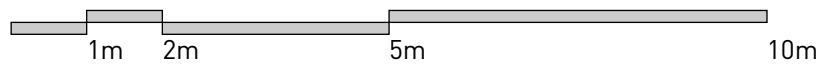


Fig. 6.26

Section B
1:100

CLASSROOM



During the time spent with this community, I met an elderly lady who was very passionate about encouraging “recent retirees” to be an important connector between the generations. This demographic would be key in organizing, supervising, and facilitating activities, and bridging any language or cultural barriers between generations. This space would better enable and encourage these intergenerational interactions to occur.

Fig. 6.27

Photograph of church Leader at SGBC during open discussion about the initial design





Fig. 6.28

A CULTURE OF GUANXI

The programs and arrangement of spaces are meant to encourage a culture conducive to the building of GuanXi and the strengthening of intergenerational relationships. The central gathering space would reaffirm the significance of GuanXi by attracting different generations and those that come to the building for various reasons, seeking a space for meeting or contemplation.

The spatial quality of the central space would change with the weather and time of day. The orientation of the skylight allows sunlight to move from one end of the gathering space to the other. This highlights the temporal and dependent nature of the space, which allows for specific gatherings at specific times. The scale of this space also allows for different configurations of uses. From informal conversations to daycare story time, visitors will constantly be drawn towards this space.





Fig. 6.29

SUNDAY MORNING SETUP

It was important for the sanctuary as a sacred gathering space not only to turn inward, but also reach outwards. The sanctuary remains a large mixed-use gathering space, but features large, north-facing windows with views out towards the floodplain. This allows soft diffused light to illuminate the space and, during services, the local weather to be part of the experience. The rituals of setting up and cleaning up the sanctuary for worship would remain from their existing facility. As the generations pass, there may only be an English-speaking congregation using the church one day. What remains will be the GuanXi that was fostered and passed down from working and worshipping together in this space.



DEPENDING ON WATER

One of the principles of Guanxi is finding honour in dependency. The project embraces its natural context and incorporates moments that allow for the seasons, the weather, and landscaping to be an active part of the experience. Along the floodplain setback is a boardwalk where visitors can enjoy a moment of repose between the church and the floodplain. When it rains, the metal roof amplifies the sound of the raindrops, while rainwater is funneled towards the underground cisterns. The sounds of water and rain fill the senses, while one remains shielded beneath the large overhang.

CONCLUSION

The translation of GuanXi to the design of the church was a focus on spaces that allows for all generations to gather at different scales. Observing and listening to the community during the design process helped to best propose different programs such as a daycare, café, and community garden that would allow this community to serve but also to be served. Understanding the diverse Guanxi relationships of the community and listening to how the older generation had a heart to be involved gave the design confidence that the programmatic frictions generated from the spaces would be positive in building GuanXi.

I was surprised at how simple decisions such as fixed seating in the sanctuary could eliminate an important moment for building GuanXi for this community. Rather than relying on formal gestures or stereotypes, GuanXi provided a centering element to imagine the resultant culture that would emerge from these spaces.

The large roof is an important unifying element to help create an inviting gathering space at the entrance for the warmer months, and a central gathering space with a skylight for the colder months. These two spaces became centering elements for the design as visitors would gravitate towards these spaces. Not only is the roof a gestural invitation, it is a productive element that harvests rainwater as a resource and turns the process into an event. The building's relationship with the landscape and natural elements embraces the temporal aspect of GuanXi while allowing the building to be rooted in place.

At its core, I believe architecture is concerned with the shaping of these relationships between building and nature, and the GuanXi between people. The architecture allows GuanXi to be the focus and allow the community to take part in shaping and addressing issues surrounding their cultural identity. As the generations pass along their cultural practices, the building's uses and the language spoken will inevitably change. What remains will be the church's ability to gather the generations, allowing GuanXi to take centre stage and be passed on from one generation to the next.

CONCLUSION

Cultural assimilation remains a pressing issue even in a multicultural nation like Canada. The assimilation of Hong Kong Chinese-Canadians and the perpetuation of the model minority stereotype have eroded the intergenerational relationships necessary to pass on important aspects of their culture. The design of volunteer ethnic organizations, such as the local church, present opportunities for architects to engage with immigrant communities to address the struggle of cultural assimilation, as well as to create spaces for these minority cultures to thrive. As such, the design of these spaces may need to be more concerned about the consequences of architecture, rather focusing solely on architecture as a symbolic artifact. The design of ethnic institutions should then strive to be spaces that aid in the mending intergenerational relationships to allow for a better understanding of the social, cultural, and historical struggles surrounding their cultural identity. This approach orientates the architecture as a setting to best support the ongoing issues of cultural assimilation.

Writing this thesis has deepened my understanding of architecture's ability to engage more directly in the cultural and social aspects of being a first-generation Hong Kong Chinese-Canadian. The rediscovery of GuanXi as an important yet disappearing element within Hong Kong Canadian culture was critical to this thesis because it was something I have personally experienced, but had never consciously considered as part of my cultural legacy. While discussing GuanXi with members of the Chinese-Canadian community, many were excited to share their

stories and the remarkable reach of their network. Their excitement gave me confidence that GuanXi was of critical importance when trying to decide what needed to be passed down to the next generation.

This renewed awareness of GuanXi has changed how I participate and interact with the different generations within my own community. As a Chinese-Canadian about to start my own family, I began to see the importance of designing spaces that brings a committed community together to resolve their differences. The thesis' final design is a place for individuals to build, foster, and be a part of a GuanXi community. A church designed according to the principals of GuanXi, creates spaces that encourage participation from all walks of life regardless of ethnicity. I have been careful to stress the significance of GuanXi for the Chinese community, but also how it can apply to other cultures. The practice of architecture is a way of preserving minority culture, making visible the invisible forces of relational networks that draw communities together.

I began this thesis as a graduate student who was approached by a community to help design a church, unaware of the journey that was about to unfold. This thesis was a way back into my own culture through the lens of architecture. The more I understood GuanXi through my research, the more I began to see the effects of this network even as I began designing the church itself. This research has been a process of negotiating of my own

GuanXi with the community at Stouffville Grace Baptist Church and then utilizing the insight gained in their culture and community as a centering element for the design. Learning how the older generation has a heart to serve the younger generations was a turning point, because it stood against the principles of hierarchy indicated from the research. This experience ensured that the programmatic frictions and intergenerational interactions in the design that were central to the building of GuanXi would be moments of asymmetrical reciprocity for cooperation rather than only hierarchical obligations. GuanXi itself is best thought of as a changing and evolving ritual. Within the community of Hong Kong Canadian Christians in Stouffville, these changes seem necessary for the preservation of GuanXi.

The translation of GuanXi into architecture has its limits and challenges. The design has avoided the use of formal “Chinese Architecture” stereotypes and relies heavily on architecture as place making and the resilience of the community to foster and preserve GuanXi. Although the architecture creates interactions ideal for the building of GuanXi, there are no formal building elements that represent GuanXi. It is this avoidance that allows the GuanXi within the church to be universal, so that other cultures that do not know GuanXi by name can still experience these kinds of relationships and relational bonds. Because of this, the design methodology indicated in the thesis can be applied to a number of different typologies. However, GuanXi and its principles might not hold the same relevance for other ethnic groups, which may find deeper meaning in other rituals. Understanding GuanXi was natural for me because of my cultural background and first-hand experiences with its principles. Designing for another community would require another level of patience and empathy to understand their cultural practices and to suspend any external cultural biases.

This research has instilled in me a deep appreciation for GuanXi and its significance for present and future Chinese-Canadian communities. My hope is for readers, particularly Chinese-Canadians, to reflect on the GuanXi in their lives and how they can appreciate, construct, and participate in preserving this cultural legacy for future generations to come.



Fig. 7.1
The Principals of GuanXi

Bibliography

CHAPTER 1- HONG KONG CANADIANS AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

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APPENDIX

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APPENDIX

CASE STUDY 1- HONG KONG'S UNOFFICIAL ANTHEM

The Cantonese pop song “Under Lion Rock” highlights the journey that thousands took when they fled Communist China in the 1950s. Coming together as refugees in the valley of Lion Rock, they overcame their differences to form what is called “The Spirit of Under Lion’s Rock.” Under a Western lens, this is an anthem to celebrate the extraordinary efforts of those individuals who, against all odds, found success, with their unrelenting spirit of hard work and dedication then being handed off as a legacy of success to the next generation. In this view, the focus is clearly on the individual who is valorized for such efforts and placed on a cultural pedestal. Under an Eastern lens, however, the song states that Hong Kong’s successful legacy is not only due to the individuals who formed it but to also their ability to look past their differences and succeed together. This double meaning acknowledges the efforts of individuals but also recognizes the interconnected relationships of those who together created Hong Kong’s success story. Similar to Fei’s water rings analogy, success was achieved by the individual’s ability to work together and the strength of those interconnected relationships¹.

These two readings, as understood under the lenses of East and West, show that Hong Kong’s identity remains rooted in the Eastern value of unity. This value has allowed people to



Fig. 8.1

A Banner which reads “I want real universal suffrage,” appeared on Lion Rock as an important symbol during the umbrella movement in Hong Kong, 2014.

maintain a level of social cohesion and connection despite their differences or inequalities. The second case study further illustrates how these interconnected bonds and networked relationships function in Eastern society and how they differ from similar relationships in the West.

獅子山下

曲：顧嘉輝
詞：黃霑

人生中有歡喜 難免亦常有淚
我地大家 在獅子山下相遇上
總算是歡笑多於唏噓

人生不免崎嶇 難以絕無掛慮
既是同舟 在獅子山下且共濟
地棄區分求共對

放開彼此心中矛盾 理想一起去追
同舟人 誓相隨 無畏更無懼

同處海角天邊 攜手踏平崎嶇
我地大家 用艱辛努力寫下那
不朽香江名句

IN THE VALLEY OF LION ROCK

Artist: Roman Tam
Composer: Wong Jim

In life, there will be joy, unavoidably there will also be tears.
We have all met in the valley of Lion Rock.
Surely, there will be more laughter than sorrow.

In life, trials will be unavoidable, harder still, it will be filled with worries.
Since we are in the same boat, in the valley of Lion Rock, let's throw away and surrender our differences to help one another.

Lay down and let go the contradictions in our hearts, and chase this dream together.
People on the same boat, vowing to follow one another, without fear, without hesitation.

No matter from which corner of the world you have come, with joined hands let's face these struggles.
Through our hard work and dedication, we will write Hong Kong's successful legacy.

Fig. 8.2

Lyrics to "In The Valley of Lion Rock"

CASE STUDY 2- THE HONG KONG DREAM

Born and raised in the province in Dong Guan, China, Chu came from a wealthy family that had owned and operated a fish farm and farmed the land for many generations. He was a boy during Japanese Occupation and, despite witnessing the brutalities of war, remained in his village and stayed with his family, as he continued in the footsteps of the generations before him. However, Communism's rise to power in 1950 saw an end to his family's farm and his way of life. Generations of relationships were severed with the political uprising, as the people of Chu's village picked sides, turning a culture of unity into one of hostility. As the government began to conscript men to join the army, Chu was told by his father to flee to Hong Kong. The next day, he boarded a train with nothing but a suitcase of clothes, 30HKD, and the address of an aunt, as he embarked on what millions saw as the Hong Kong dream.

This was the story of many of the refugees from the Chinese Revolution who began to rebuild their lives in Hong Kong. As time passed, Chu began to develop his own identity and a life that was very different from anyone in his family history. He was a Hong Konger now, one of the millions who worked long hours in close quarters to eventually build one of Asia's most powerful market economies. Despite his success, however, he often wondered about his family back home. Whenever he encountered people from his village he would graciously give them his time and whatever he could, just as his aunt had done for him when he first arrived on Hong Kong's shores. Knowing full well the challenges that others faced back home, he would send resources back whenever he could, but, despite his efforts, there was a lingering sense of abandonment and an overwhelming feeling of helplessness about not being able to do more to support them. One day, Chu overcame these fears and risked taking a trip back to his hometown, while it was still under Communist rule. Upon his return, however, a member of his family motivated by jeal-



Fig. 8.3
Photograph of Mr. Chu

ousy, resentment, or allegiance to the communist party, reported him to the authorities, accusing him of being part of opposing forces during the take-over. A trip to reestablish family relationships quickly became a fight for survival, as his family and others betrayed his trust and threatened to have everything he had achieved taken away. Fearing that he would be arrested and made captive in China, Chu fled, to the only place he could now call home, vowing never to return.

Chu possessed a sense of duty and honour to his relationships back in his home village that allowed him to share even with strangers he did not know, simply because they came from the same village. As he gained success and independence, he continued to share with others just as his aunt had done when he first arrived in Hong Kong. Within his exchanges, he experienced a richness through both in his life in Hong Kong and his relationships back in his hometown as he continued to give. This deep cultural bond drove him to unfailingly send resources back home despite not receiving anything in return. When he was betrayed by his own village and his own family, I felt that the greed exhibited could have easily broken his trust, and that he had every right to live his life peacefully on his own terms in Hong Kong. His story, continues to reveal a commitment to his familial bonds that I find unique.

Over the years, Chu has encountered others from his village asking for supplies and assistance. Surprisingly, he has continued to respond generously to their requests, despite the betrayal he experienced, simply because of the shared relationships with their village. To this day, his donations continue to fund a room at the local school, earning him a plaque with his name on the door, that he has never seen. I asked him why he continued to give when he had every right to leave his past behind him. It was difficult for him to reason why, but this unfailing commitment seemed to stem from a deeper cultural bond.

Chu's story illustrates the power of interconnected relationships as mentioned by Fei in his water rings metaphor. The collision of Eastern and Western values in Hong Kong and the process of cultural assimilation into a capitalist Western influenced society was resisted because of an unwritten social code even when Chu was faced with difference and conflict. The third case study illustrates how these bonds can extend outwards, even in a Western-dominated culture such as Canada's.

CASE STUDY 3- SOCIAL BONDS IN CANADA

One summer morning, Angie Morris answered her doorbell to find on her doorstep an elderly Chinese lady holding the hand of a little boy, and carrying a paper bag. Angie recognized them as the mother and son of her next-door neighbor, Nicole, who had moved in a few months earlier. Nicole, who speaks fluent English, was away in Asia for the summer, while her parents stayed in her house with her son. Nicole had mentioned to her mother that Angie was about to have heart surgery, so her mother decided that Angie needed to be supplied with meals. Inside the paper bag was a thermos of hot soup and a full meal that included rice, vegetables, and a meat dish. This supply of food became an almost daily occurrence and sometimes included a special type of Chinese pancake, the ultimate home-delivery service.

Communication between Angie and this elderly Chinese lady was impossible since she did not speak any English, and the only word Angie knew in Chinese was “hello.” One day, the Chinese lady brought along an iPad with the food. On the screen was a message asking if the food was alright, as she was anxious to know if it was too salty considering Angie’s heart condition. Angie had never used an iPad before and struggled to type a response. The lady then led Angie next door and handed her husband the iPad. With a few taps, Nicole appeared on the screen.

“Your mother just can’t be bringing me meals like this all the time,” Angie said. “I can hardly reciprocate by cooking something from my native land, like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.”

“Oh, no,” Nicole said. “She doesn’t like Western food. Don’t worry about it; she has to cook for the three of them anyway, and she wants to do it.”²

In the encounter, both Angie and her neighbour’s mother underwent a process of negotiating social and cultural boundar-

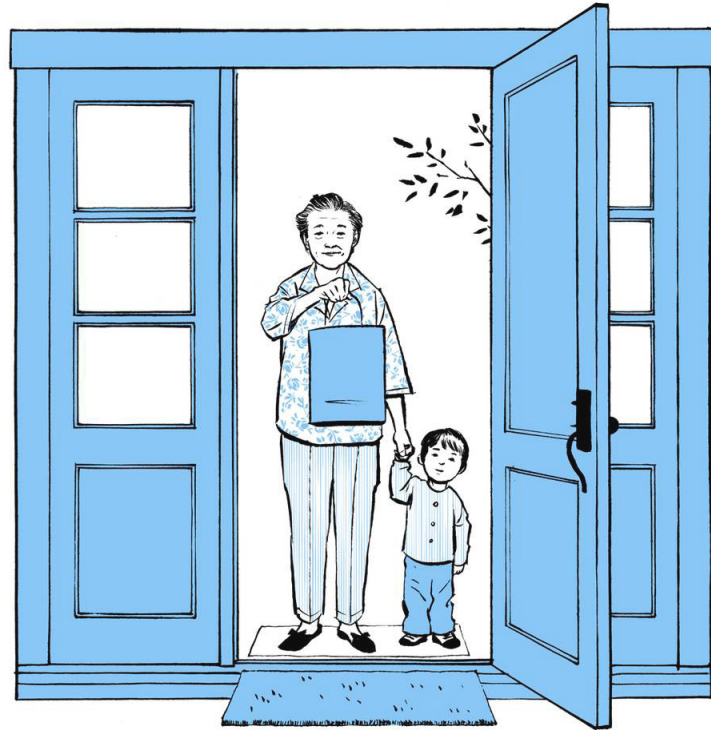


Fig. 8.4

Drawing of Angie Morris's Neighbour. Jori Boldon for *The Globe and Mail*.

ies. Her neighbour's mother decided, rather rudely perhaps, that someone needed her assistance. However, as with the concentric circles of water rings, this elderly Chinese lady saw that Angie was a part of her relational network who could benefit from her care despite their language and cultural differences. Angie, in turn, needed to learn to accept this intrusion, which ended up bringing them much closer together.

NOTES

1. “Sing 羅文 (Roman Tam) - 獅子山下 (Below the Lion Rock) on Sing! Karaoke.” Smule: Sing! Karaoke. Accessed August 18, 2017. https://www.smule.com/song/%E7%BE%85%E6%96%87-roman-tam-%E7%8D%85%E5%AD%90%E5%B1%B1%E4%B8%8B-below-the-lion-rock-karaoke-lyrics/506852990_341445/arrangement.
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