Contents

Rethinking the Tulou, Lantian, Fujian

About
Collaborators
Workshop Format
Student Evaluation (after the revisit trip)
Impact Evaluation
Project Assessment

Dissemination
Exhibition at PMQ
Videos
Award
Media Coverage
RETHINKING THE TULOU, LANTIAN, FUJIAN
Summer 2019
About the Tulou Interventions

Location: The University of Hong Kong and Lantian Village, Fujian, China

Workshop dates: 17th June 2019 - 2nd July 2019
Revisit trip dates: 2nd November 2019 - 4th November 2019

Over a 1000 years ago, large introverted earthen buildings (tulous) of the Hakka culture emerged in Southern China as a traditional form of collective housing in the rural. Extended families built thick earthen walls for collective defence, while maintaining a shared open space in the centre. As the tulous are now surrounded by a new urban context and are not corresponding with contemporary desires of dwelling, many of them are experiencing individual transformations or becoming abandoned. Responding to the changing relationship between individual/collective and rural/urban, these prototypes, built in 2019 with 40 architectural students from different institutions, radically rethink the tulou through programmatic, structural and spatial transformations towards a new commons - finding new reasons for living together.

We propose two strategies: the Plug-in on the outside and the Tower on the inside of the tulou. The Plug-in project rethinks the defensive wall by taking the tulou inside out, opening it to the new surroundings. Individual transformations such as plug-in of toilets already occurred in the tulou, that was previously renovated into a children school by the Government. This prototype transforms a small window in a new entrance, adding a public reading room to the already functioning school. The funnel staircase plugged into the opening invites people to sit, read and rest in the shadow, while serving as an open amphitheatre for activities in the courtyard. The Tower project rethinks the public space of the tulou raising up the traditional collective courtyard, connecting each floor to a circular stairway to the sky. The upper corridor of the tulou will become a public reading room; the changing rhythm and dimension of the steps encourage people to sit, and read, drink tea, walk on the bridges or contemplate the view from the upper balcony.
Collaborators

LIU LANDSCAPE ENGINEERING LTD.

Small contractor specializing in timber construction. Has an interest in combining modern technology with traditional techniques. Also has experience with similar design and build projects working with students.

Contact Person: Liu An Hai (Owner)

SHIZHONG COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Local government with an interest in renovating Tulous to improve the prospects of the county. They provided assistance in selecting and securing of the Tulous, as well as logistical support throughout the project.

Contact Person: Wan Zhen Zhang (Head of Shizhong County) and Gui Zhu Ren (Officer in charge of Tulous in Shizhong County)

HONG KONG DESIGN INSTITUTE

Partnersing institution for the Jockey Club HKU Rural Urban Design Project. 16 Students from their Higher Diploma in Architectural Design programme participated in the design and build workshop that was held in Summer 2019.

Contact Person: Jason Tang (Senior Lecturer/ Programme Leader)
Workshop Format

There are three parts to the workshop:

**Design Work (Design) – done in Hong Kong**
- Each group has a different design task. Half of the students work developing programmatic transformations for the tulous to understand the relationship between the building and its context, the second group looks at how to turn a massing idea into a structural concept.
- The students take their design ideas to Fujian and get feedback from the local residents.
- The students have tutorials and design reviews at HKU.

**Site Work (Construction) – done in Lantian**
- Working in either Zhenchun Lou or Yude Lou to realise the design interventions for the tulous.
- Working with local carpenters on site to learn about wooden construction techniques and traditional building knowledge.

**Field work (Research) – done in Lantian**
- Surveying local residents and different tulous – learning about the lives of those in less privileged communities.
- Mapping the programs, status, and future plans of the village where the interventions are located.
Design Work
Designing through the making of models and testing ideas. And presenting findings from field work and design strategies after visiting the site.
Site Work (Construction)

Learning to read construction drawings and translate them into reality.
Field Work

Survey drawings produced by students after interviewing the local residents and visiting their homes.
Revisit Trip

2 November – 3 November 2019

The local village government arranged a gathering for students and villagers to celebrate the opening of the library in the Plug-in. The aim is to provide opportunity for students to demonstrate the new public space in the village and celebrate the completion of the two structure.

DAY 1: VILLAGE CELEBREATION AND AFTERNOON TEA TIME
(2 November 2019)
The celebration was set up on the stair of the Plug-In. Villagers and students sat on the step while having snacks during afternoon tea time. The conversations were mainly about exchanging ideas and thoughts towards the two newly-built structures in the village and how to utilize the new public space. Villagers and students were discussing the future development of Plug-in which can become an open theater while Tower will become a museum. Students also danced and sang to demonstrate how to use Plug-In as a stage.
Revisit Trip (Student and Local Resident Engagement)
Revisit Trip (Conditions of the design)
Student Evaluation
*Feedback from students after the revisit trip*

**What did you gain from the workshop? / Did you apply anything that you have gained to your work or design projects?**

“I have known more about Tulou, the village planning in China and wood construction.” - Vivien Lee Chum (BAAS 2, HKU)

“Being involved in the process of designing and building and seeing the finished product made me rethink on what design and architecture is.” – Helen Ng (BAAS 1, HKU)

“I experienced about it’s nice to be on a construction volunteer trip. I learned about the process of preparation, construction and also of the relationship and communication with the village, site and residents.” - Jasmin Chan (BAAS 2, HKU)

**Do you think that your design approach or work has changed because of the workshop? / Have you been inspired to do something specific as a result of the experience from the workshop?**

“I have been shown that architecture could be more than just constructing a building.” - Vivien Lee Chum (BAAS 2, HKU)

“I believe interacting with the locals allowed me to value the importance of understanding the context of a place.” – Lily Lu (BAAS 1, HKU)

“I become more open-minded to design. I also learned the importance of site and context considering in materiality with the existing structure.” - Jasmin Chan (BAAS 2, HKU)

**Is the experience of revisiting important? How does it compare to a typical design studio or project at work?**

“It’s pretty important for me not only know about the final design, but the process of carrying out the design is also important, as the designer’s approach could be realized or not.” - Vivien Lee Chum (BAAS 2, HKU)
**Impact Evaluation**


Interviews with local residents (Conducted between 2nd -3rd November 2019)

Do you like the new structure? Its size and design? Why?

- “Yes! It feels nice! It makes the tulous become something like a monument and attract people to visit.”
- “Yes. It’s always nice to have new stairs where we can sit and chat.”
- “I like it very much. It looks very beautiful and attractive.”
- “The structure is well detailed and designed. Much better than before”

Do you think the tulou has improved? How and Why?

- “Yes. More awareness and provide a place to hang out.”
- “Yes and it provide new function and will potentially attract more investment.”
- “The stairs are much better and stronger. Before it was quite dangerous to walk up.”
- “It makes tulou more lively and create very interesting program better than before.”
- “Yes. Before this tulou has some broken part. This structure make it look fresh and will improve tourism.”
- “Yes. It provides a place to encourage kids to play.”

Do you think the area has improved? How and Why?

- “Yes. Tulous feel more alive and more people come to visit them.”
- “More people probably will come to visit this place and it can also become an education base.”
- “More development is happening in village and summer camps also increase.”
- “The new structure has increase the awareness of Lantian and it makes the village more beautiful.”
Impact Evaluation

Impact of providing alternative renovation strategies

• Plug-in is situated in Yude Lou, which is a part of Shanfu Ecological Agriculture Science Base, a venue for experiential educational programmes for elementary school students. Yude Lou has been renovated into a dormitory for the programmes. The Plug-in transforms a small window into a new entrance, introducing a public library to the existing dormitory. Between October 2019 and January 2019, 8 educational camps have been taken place in the Plug-in which offers a space of creative play for 635 students. The Plug-in is also high beneficial to local residents, who use it as a gathering space to site and rest in the shade and also an open amphitheatre for activities in the exterior courtyard.

• Zhenchun Lou has been abandoned for decades until Tower was built. The Tower rethinks the public space of Tulou by raising up the traditional collective courtyard and connecting each floor through a spiral stairway to the sky. New public programs are introduced along the way. The changing rhythm of the steps encourage people to site, read, or drink tea inside the tower. The bridges connect to the upper corridor of the tulou, which becomes a public reading room, whilst the top of the Tower becomes a place to contemplate the view. The Tower is not only provide new public space for the villagers but also repurpose Zhenchun Lou for new function. Shizhong County Government has received a donation of 1 million RMB to continue renovate Zhenchun Lou as a museum for Chinese telegram Technology since Zhenchun Lou was used as telegram station during civil war in 1930s.

Impact of changing views of the local community about the value of their Tulous

• The impact on the inhabitants of the project continues to evolve as more and more people visit the village for study and tourism. A significant impact is the change in perception towards reutilizing the Tulou rather than simply abandoning them. 18 villagers of Lantian Village were interviewed. 18 of them agreed strongly that visitors have increased and their business has been benefited. According to the villager head, the visitor’s number has increased 7500 in two month after the construction completed.

Impact of increasing public awareness towards Tulou

• After completion of two built Tulou adaptations in Lantian Village, the project has created significant impact of increasing public awareness towards Tulou. Since July 2019, the coverage of the Rethinking the Collective in the mainstream media has been extensive, including newspaper, TV and online publication. Yitiao, a Chinese original short video company which has 20 million daily viewing, produced a short video dedicated for this project and its article also has reached more than 100,000 viewers on WeChat. The project is also High Commended for Architecture Review New Into Old Award.

A selection of comments from the general public demonstrates a surprising shift in attitude towards Tulou:

• “(the designs) provide changes during preservation. A new thinking is born from a very interesting conflict, which is similar to the progress of human social civilization.”

• “The project is just like acupuncture. Tulou is active with a finest touch.”

• “Some people advocate the restoration of old buildings as if they were, which an act is focusing on tourism rather than local inhabitants. While those two adaptations take consideration of villagers’ daily lives.”
Project Assessment

• This project addresses the activation of abandoned Tulou in Fujian Province, by implementing new collective programs into the historic buildings. Responding to the changing relationship between individual and collective, rural and urban, a series of possible intervention are proposed that radically rethink the tulou through programmatic, structural and spatial transformation towards a new commons. To transform the old house for collective living into a new house for collective experience, two strategies have been built: The Plug-in and the Tower.

• The impact arising from the construction of two newly built Tulou adaptive structure in Shizhong, China can be demonstrated by measuring the impact of alternative renovation strategies, change the views of the local community about the value of their Tulous, increase public awareness towards Tulou and potentially influence policy on Tulou preservation.

• The Tower rethinks the public space of Tulou by raising up the traditional collective courtyard and connecting each floor through a spiral stairway to the sky. Zhenchun Lou has been abandoned for decades until Tower was built. The Tower is not only provide new public space for the villagers but also repurpose Zhenchun Lou for new function: a museum.

• The Plug-in challenges the think defensive wall traditionally characterized by a small openings by turning the tulou inside out. Opening it to the new surroundings. The Plug-in transforms a small window into a new entrance, introducing a public library to the existing dormitory in Yulou Lou.

• The plug-in and tower were built by students in collaboration with local carpenters. The students from HKU and The Hong Kong Design Institute engaged with both carpenters and local residents to learn about both traditional timber craftsmanship and the challenges that villagers and their Tulous face when confronted with urbanization. Students met with local government and local residents to present their designs to learn directly from the stakeholders.
DISSEMINATION

Exhibition at PMQ - workshop and sharing sessions
Videos
Award
Media coverage
PMQ Exhibition: 
BUILDING A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Exhibition: 2 days, PMQ Main courtyard. October 26-27 2019.
To demonstrate the impact design can have and that the process of building itself is a method to bring people together for collective action.

Showcase of the project and the 2 project videos produced.

Participating students shared experiences with visitors.

Number of visitors: Over 300 people

Engagement event: 4 hours, PMQ Main Court yard. October 27 2019
Public workshop with participating students to invite people to design their own community spaces.
The tulou existed in southern China for over a 1000 years. Extended families built thick mud walls for collective defense.

Over time, the tulou have been swallowed by a new urban context.

How can we rethink the Collective House?

The thick mud wall of the tulou allows for very small openings but people are already extending their house beyond it plugging-in toilets, for example.

What if we start to plug-in collective programs?
A small window can become a new entrance... and give the tulou a new public program.
The open courtyard is the collective area of the tulou.

What if it could be experienced differently...

...raising up the ground to the sky?

Video Screenshots - Rethinking the Tulou (Fujian)
REDEFINING THE TULOU | IMPACT REPORT
Rural Urban Framework

Video Screenshots - Rethinking the Tulou (Fujian)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STILL</th>
<th>PAN UP + ROTATION DOWN + ZOOM OUT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STILL</td>
<td>ZOOM IN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STILL</td>
<td>ROTATION UP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STILL</td>
<td>FADE INTO BLACK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STILL</td>
<td>ANIMATION VIDEO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ROTATING LEFT TO RIGHT
Can we find new reasons for living together?

Rethinking the Collective
Rural Urban Framework
John Lin and Joshua Bolchover
EDITOR Chiara Oggioni MUSIC COMPOSER Vincent Lin
PROJECT MANAGER Sun Yi DESIGN TEAM Lau Bo Yee - Chiara Oggioni
PROJECT YEAR 2019 LOCATION Lantian, Fujian, China CONSTRUCTION
Liu Landscape Engineering Ltd. SUPPORTED BY The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, Shizhong County Government, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Design Institute AS PART OF THE Jockey Club HKU Rural Urban Design Project.
Awards

Mainstream Media (Rethinking the Collective)

Yitiao
Yit, March 4th 2020 (Viewers on YouTube: 56,815)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oa78y5gD4R8

一条 2020年3月6日 March 6th 2020 (Viewer: 100K+) https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/WIV4s99exRWEIu8MjJTodw

今日头条，2020年3月6日
March 6th 2020 https://www.toutiao.com/

澎湃
土楼建筑艺术节 2020年1月04日
Tulou Architecre & Art Festival, January 4th 2020 https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_5428438
Architectural Media (Rethinking the Collective)

G000D.cn
集体生活的再思-福建土楼改造，
October 28th 2019 (Viewer: 14,900) https://www.g000d.cn/tulou-renovation-china-by-rural-urban-framework.htm

Archdaily,
Rethinking the Collective/ Rural Urban Framework,
The University of Hong Kong, June 2020 https://www.archdaily.com/office/rural-urban-framework-the-university-of-hong-kong?ad_name=project-specs&ad_medium=single

In response, RUF has developed two interventions that rethink the programmatic, structural and spatial characteristics of tulou. The aim is to give a new life to the tulou, making it once again center for a new form of collectively living. To transform the old house for collective living into a new house for collective experience, we designed different prototypes in relation to different tulou. Two of these strategies have currently been built: the plug-in on the outside and the lens on the inner courtyard of the tulou.