The “Ghost City” of Fengdu is located on the western side of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River. Due to the construction of the dam, the original and abandoned city is periodically flooded depending on water captured in the dam. A new settlement had to be built on the top of a wide protective embankment on the earth. For thousands of years, Fengdu has been regarded by native beliefs and in Taoism as the location of the inferno and the final trial, which maintained in Fengdu a duality between the real and the opposite shore, both of which carry a vivid phenomenal model of human being, matter, object, thought and history through an analogical research on the issues of historical custom, social life, public relations, spatial character, place organization and typological composition, to rebuild the vernacular basis of urban culture. It enables the sustainability of daily life that provides a transplanable experience for urban renewal in the era of globalization.

Comment of the Holcim Awards jury Asia Pacific

By taking advantage of rebuilding the city, comprehensive development planning has started that involves authorities and the whole population. The consistent rebuilding process covers a multi-faceted content of urban space and cultural elements, including shape, scale, type, construction, craftsmanship and aboriginal life. The jury has commended this project due to its strong vision to conserve the historical heritage and cultural traditions through a careful rebuilding of the ancient town.

Project description by author

The “Ghost City” Fengdu, was the origin of Taoism and the capital city of the Ba Nation, an ancient Chinese ethnic group. In its 2,000 year-old city history, Fengdu has been constantly regarded by native beliefs and Taoism as the location of the inferno and the final trial. Besides its moral significance, Fengdu is a vibrant township which also constructs a hermeneutic text of the opposite shore, a legendary world of ultimate transcendence endowed by the existent will. This duality between the real and the opposite shore, both of which carry a vivid phenomenal model of human being, matter, object, thought and history through an analogical research on the issues of historical custom, social life, public relations, spatial character, place organization and typological composition, to rebuild the vernacular basis of urban culture. It enables the sustainability of daily life that provides a transplanable experience for urban renewal in the era of globalization.

Relevance to target issues by author

Quantum change and transferability

Instead of an objectified mode of function-technology, this project explores a phenomenological method, restoring a vivid phenomenal model of human being, matter, object, thought and history through an analogical research on the issues of historical custom, social life, public relations, spatial character, place organization and typological composition, to rebuild the vernacular basis of urban culture. It enables the sustainability of daily life that provides a transplanable experience for urban renewal in the era of globalization.

Ethical standards and social equity

This project preserves the indigenous people and their life style as the most crucial resource. Land utilization under the control of Cadastral Unit Control System is conducted to establish a sustainable life mechanism of local urban resource distribution between each spatial (family) unit.

Economic performance and compatibility

Tourism is the major industry for the city for its famous “Ghost City” culture and pleasant ecological environment. A characteristic urban culture realizes its economic value through tourism, establishing a sustainable life mechanism of local cultural renewal.

Contextual and aesthetic impact

This project critiques the non-rooted spectacular architecture fashion by establishing a sustainable and active vernacular spatial culture and aesthetics. By taking advantage of the urban rebuilding, the project restores a proper urban morphology and landscape fabric, reinforces the typographical quality, inherits and optimizes local architectural tradition. Based on the fundamental structure of “Ghost City”, the project integrates various local building types in the adjacent cultural districts, which makes Fengdu become a cultural center and spatial paradigm of the whole region to drive a wider and more integrated revival.

People involved:

Main author

Name: Kai Sheng Li
Profession: Academic
Organization: China Academy of Art, School of Architecture, Dept. of Urban Design
City/Country: Hangzhou, China

Further authors:

1. Peng, Nu, Academic, Tongji University, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Shanghai, China;
2. Xia, Nan Kai, Planner, Tongji University, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Shanghai, China;
3. Jin, Yu Hua, Planner, China Academy of Art, School of Architecture, Dept. of Urban Design, Hangzhou, China;
4. Zhou, Ji Feng, Planner, China Academy of Art, School of Architecture, Department of Urban Design, Hangzhou, China

Further author(s) & legal guardian(s)

Further authors: 1. Peng, Nu, Academic, Tongji University, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Shanghai, China; 2. Xia, Nan Kai, Planner, Tongji University, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Shanghai, China; 3. Jin, Yu Hua, Planner, China Academy of Art, School of Architecture, Dept. of Urban Design, Hangzhou, China; 4. Zhou, Ji Feng, Planner, China Academy of Art, School of Architecture, Department of Urban Design, Hangzhou, China