

(To be presented by Mr Meng Yan)

MR MENG YAN:

The name quickly, Urbanus, derives from Latin, urban, and I'm so glad that I speak directly behind Dr Lim, which we have been dealing with Asian urbanism, what you call, for all these years.

Urbanus is committed to the modernist belief that architecture is a pivotal force for the better life and hence architects should push the boundaries of their traditional role and be a progressive force in their society.

Today I only bring two projects. First one is a research study we did two years ago and the second one is what we are doing right now.

These all deal with the low income community in the city of Shenzhen. I'll start with this photograph. You'll see behind this lady, Mr Deng Xiaoping and his creation, the city of Shenzhen as a background. What I heard is this is a very important landmark in the city of Shenzhen. Whenever the economy goes down for some reason, they will redo the painting and the city will go up.

In the past decades, China has been experiencing an unprecedented urbanisation. New cities like Shenzhen are building up so fast while at the same time numerous urban voids are left behind.

From the first sight new Chinese cities are contradictory in all respects. Growing and decaying, contemporary and traditional, Chinese authentic and borrowed foreign, sleekness and roughness, poor or rich. But underneath this sweeping urban development, there exists a very delicate urban life. You will find inside exciting new buildings, on the new urban plazas, on the street or down in the allies.

The first project is what we call the City Village, Village City. As many people might know, the village in the city is a very special urban phenomena in Pearl River Delta area. This is a photograph

you can see in the centre of Shenzhen, there are more than two dozen of these villages. For a long time, they were considered as scars or cancers in the city. This is a closer view -- you can see how dense some of these buildings are, some of these buildings are closer than one metre.

But in all these villages, from one of the numbers I got, there are more than 800,000 people actually living in these villages in the city of Shenzhen right now. They are all low income (indistinct word) community.

For the past five or six years, the city has come to the point where the land value has gone up considerably. From this photo, you can see, in the centre you can see the civic centre which is the centre of Shenzhen and right next to it you will find this village, so this is a very endangered village because the city thought this land is much, much better for new development. For high rise housing, hotel and commercial development. Here is a closer view. Down the street. So these villages are typically seen as places for all sorts of crime. And prostitution.

So seems like the only way to get rid of all these problems is to demolish it and replace it with something beautiful, on the right.

But the problem is, in this kind of village, the FAR is already 4.5 in some places. By replacing these villages, we need to build three times more, at least, to just accommodate the current villagers. Also the problem is, once the villages are renewed like these, all the low income people will be driven out of the city centre.

So this is a collaboration we did with the Urban Planning Bureau starting in 2004. Our proposal is to preserve some of these villages in the down town area by demolishing partially, by refilling with community spaces, parking, green space, more importantly to make it comply with the current urban city building code and let the fire trucks to go in.

This is the area that we're looking at. It's called Gang Xiao village.

Our proposal quickly, because I'm not going to go into a lot of details, quickly, we take out these blocks, demolish some of the buildings to make light and air and also let the fire trucks to go in at certain points by filling some of the gaps, by adding new buildings, by adding escalators at some point and by filling on top of the existing structures. In this way, we possibly could get something like this. Because the village is still lacking ground space, we propose to put all the public facilities, including spaces for the old, the public functions, on top of the building instead of on the ground. The ground level is still for the commercial activities.

So this is the previous street map. This is after. So we're putting new streets and a public open space. This is old and this is new. We're filling some of the blocks to make them, instead of many buildings, like one building that will comply with the current building code. And we're adding on the top. This is before. This is after.

Also we are adding public recreation facilities like theatres and small movie theatres. We're building connections through the top of the buildings to make a roof top urbanism so people can actually use this space to get air and light above these existing buildings. These are some of the models we did.

We showed this project in the first Shenzhen Biennale in 2005 and also in Sao Paulo Biennale in 2005 and this project has drawn attention to the city. What we are glad about is right now the city is talking about to treat these villages differently, while five years ago the saying is the city was trying to demolish all the villages within five years, so it's making progress.

The second project that I'm going to show is called a Tulou commune, which is a given project by one of the leading developers in China. Tulou means dirt building. It's a very popular housing prototype

in southeast China, especially in Fujian and Guangdong province. So these existing buildings are -- the history has been quite long and these buildings right now still accommodate a lot of housing inside.

The form itself is quite strong. In the old time is basically for protecting attacks from the surrounding communities. They are all for the (Chinese spoken), what we call (Chinese spoken), they are immigrant from the north. So this is the shape of the existing buildings.

So the problem we're given is to study the possibility of using similar prototype to accommodate low income housing in Shenzhen.

So we look at all these existing precedents and studied the possibility. We found that it's very similar to the modern time urban geometries right now.

So we did a series of research. We went to the site and studied the size and scale of these prototypes and the life in these buildings. And also we researched the similar types in Shenzhen, which is called Wei Wu. They are typically square but a very similar layout. We found out that a lot of these Wei Wus or Tulous are for the low income right now because the real locals have moved out and rent these spaces for the low income community.

Then we start to study by clay model the possibilities, how big and how to make modern geometry in this type of typology. We made numerous of these, like mooncake. Similar, but different type. We studied the plans and in various different type.

And then we built models like this. This was on of the scheme. We tried to locate the Tulou on top of the commercial area so the ground level is open for commercial. A similar view. So we have to achieve a very high density in order to lower the cost for each unit. And later on we came up with another one. We made the Tulou -- we open it up, we make it open, and then we continue this round shape into the middle courtyard. So we have this one and also for protection,

we used reinforced concrete blocks -- no, I made a mistake. Not reinforced. It's prefabricated concrete blocks for the exterior so it can let the light and air to move in, at the same time to protect the units.

We drew all these renderings to please the client, to please the city. A lot of things can happen around Tulou. We would do these wonderful renderings to show to the city and the clients the ideas to let the city and the developer work together to find a cheaper place to build Tulou, especially around the perimeter of the city, to accommodate the low income housing. And we drew all sorts of different scenarios. Like this. And this is the final scheme that we are working on right now. The diameter is close to 70 metres and it will accommodate 280, roughly, units.

So where will the Tulou be after this research? Our thinking on the Tulou could be somewhere cheap along the perimeter, possibly in the waste land, along the highways. So we're placing Tulou everywhere, basically. We're testing in Google Earth to see where could we put Tulou and we're putting Tulou everywhere. And see which is better. Around the highways? Maybe in a lake? This is waste land here, so we put a Tulou. Another one is a no man's place near the gymnasium. That could be a nice place for Tulou. Could be in the factory area. Like this. Hidden somewhere. Close to the villages, the new development. In the centre, possibly. So we're getting wild, actually. Could be in the centre. Why not? So Tulou is invading the city. In the park. That could be a nice place, to let the low income stay, closer to the high income. But I don't know if they like the idea.

So we showed it. We are promoting Tulou right now. We showed it in the Lisbon Triennale. We built this big ceramic model and we build all these cakes. And we shaped them like cookies and we put it in Lisbon. This is the final Tulou. And this was another portion of our exhibition showing the public spaces we did in Shenzhen.

So we choose this way, to show Tulou. This is the Chinese dinner table, to put all these dishes and people can actually turn the

table and have -- also we did a DVD showing the Tulou and the current use of Tulou. So this is a round table discussion.

And then we used Lego to build a Tulou and showed it Harry Lauder exhibition in Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing and possibly New York, we're promoting it. And see how possible it can work with the existing city. And it's under construction.

But unfortunately, the first site for Tulou is not in Shenzhen, because -- it was planned for Shenzhen and the developer already had a very famous development in Shenzhen called "The Fifth Garden", probably someone heard it. It's a very elite sort of like the Chinese garden-like atmosphere for the very rich. So the first Tulou was planned right next to this Fifth Garden development and somehow the residents knew this is going to happen so they were strongly against it. They have demonstrations after demonstrations. So they decided to move it somewhere else, to somewhere remote. So we found a place in Guangzhou, a place near Guangzhou as the first site for this first experiment. They are doing the construction right now. And it's going very fast. You already see the courtyard is coming out. They're laying in the curvilinear right now. The basement is almost there. And also we are testing the limits of this very dense living, so each unit is like this. We're building a one-to-one mock-up, this is one-to-one, 30 square metres. The idea is actually for this space to accommodate two couples, so basically four people will share this room with a dividing wall in the middle and a shared bathroom and a small kitchen.

The existing living condition for this group of people is they don't have a kitchen, sometimes they don't even have bathrooms, and there are like four to eight people living in one of these rooms and paying RMB800 per month. So the living condition over here, although in our standard is still much, much below, but in order to accommodate, in order to let this happen, I think right now it's still okay for the rent because people only pay RMB600-700 for two families, so RMB350 roughly, that's okay for the kind of earnings that they have.

We are also testing one-to-one of the sheeting protection walls.  
This is going to be pre-cast concrete.

Tulou is going to be built. The first experiment will be built by  
the end of this year. Thank you.