LETTER FROM THE DEAN

THE USC AMERICAN ACADEMY IN CHINA (AAC) IS THE FLAGSHIP FOR THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE’S GLOBAL AGENDA.

AAC offers design research in the form of studio and creates scholarly exchange through forums and exhibitions. While the former engages urgent issues emerging in the design community worldwide, the latter offers a stable and sustainable academic context in China.

The 2015 theme, China In Flux: Mapping the Middle Zone, is an exploration into the idea of in-betweenness as exemplified by the transformations occurring between traditional urban fabric and ongoing, contemporary countryside initiatives, as well as between the core and periphery of the city. The binary relationship between urban and rural landscapes is changing and in flux, resulting in a new condition that is defined by blurred zones and ambiguous territories.

Clearly, a new model for sustainable environments is a topic of grave importance for our cities today. This year, the focus was on generating new hybrid forms and prototypes for environmentally sustainable building-landscapes, culminating with a design workshop, exhibition, and book, Beijing House Types. The goal was not only to critically examine and analyze past precedents and current examples, but also to offer innovative and alternative visions to current models.

Through design workshops, exhibitions and symposia, AAC continues to collaborate with local practitioners and universities as well as cultivate new global alliances with industry and institutions in order to foster design innovation and excellence. With the ever-increasing growth of China’s middle-class, developing sustainable models for growth that increase the quality of our environment and life experience, simultaneously, hand-in-hand, is central to our mission.

Qingyun Ma, AIA

Founder, USC American Academy in China
Dean, Della & Harry MacDonald Chair, USC School of Architecture
THE 21ST CENTURY IS THE CENTURY OF CHINESE-AMERICAN CONFLUENCE.
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With that comes both challenge and opportunity. Historically, the arts and humanities have been the most powerful language in the world to engage disparate peoples, to inspire, to find universal themes, and to reinforce our shared humanity.

Founded in 2007 by Dean Qingyun Ma of the USC School of Architecture, the USC American Academy in China (AAC) was established as the primary destination for universities throughout the United States and world to study architecture, the arts, and humanities in China. AAC is dedicated to the advancement of scholarly exchange and research in these fields.

The USC American Academy in China is a permanent institute in China dedicated to interdisciplinary exchange, innovation, and research in the arts, architecture, and humanities. Founded in 2007 by Dean Qingyun Ma, it is the first-of-its-kind institution devoted to fostering explorations that deepen understandings of China’s past, present, and possible futures across a broad spectrum of disciplines—all under one roof. This singular institution will bring together international scholars, architects, and artists with their Chinese counterparts for immersive, cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary investigations that seek to learn from China rather than imposing western modes of knowledge upon it.

The American Academy in China seeks to position itself as the preeminent global institution for research and creative production concerning China, one of the most rapidly changing nations on Earth. Just as the American Academy in Rome is important for understanding the legacy of the west, the American Academy in China is vital for understanding contemporary China, its path moving forward, and its significance to the world.
Students and faculty from the USC School of Architecture, in partnership with USC’s American Academy in China (AAC), have been engaged in a summer-long program examining how the “middle zone”, or more rural, outlying areas in between cities, are growing. The program travelled to Beijing, Lushan, and Xian, and is currently in Shenzhen where it is staging the exhibition, *China in Flux: Mapping the Middle Zone*.

The goal of the multi-city research trip, led by USC associate and AAC director Gary Paige, is to examine the ideas and conditions of *in-betweenness* as exemplified by the transformations taking place between traditional urban and rural villages as well as by ongoing, contemporary countryside initiatives. The binary relationship between urban and rural villages is changing and in flux, resulting in a condition that is characterized by blurred zones and ambiguous territories. Yet, in spite of these transformations and the potential for a new rural-urban hybrid, they are often lacking a strategy for social, economic and spatial evolution, and sustainable growth. Consequently, our interest is to initiate a conversation by hosting an exhibition on this rather broad, yet timely and significant topic with colleagues from universities in Asia, North America, and Europe that have been conducting design research and experimental building projects in China.

In Lushan, a mountainous region in Jiangxi Province, USC students studied and created proposals for the renovation, addition, and transformation of fourteen vernacular dwellings in a remote village. Proposals were presented to AVIC Legend, one of China’s leading construction and design firms, which is currently working to repurpose many of the village’s more “traditional” buildings. Students were asked to develop “innovative and creative ideas” including speculations about new programmatic potentials for the sites as well as architectural and branding strategies. The students’ proposals will be part of the exhibition in Shenzhen.
GSAP OFFICE AND STUDIO VISITS 2015
FIELDWORK: BEIJING

Each year, as part of the GSAP Field Studies Program curriculum we visit a dozen or so leading architects and artists for a presentation and discussion of their current projects. This past summer we had the opportunity to visit and meet with the principal or key figures at their office or studio:
Naihan Li & Co.
Vector Architects
URBANUS Beijing
Turenscape
MAD Architects
Studio Pei-Zhu
Wang Qingsong Studio
FAKE 258/Ai Weiwei Residence & Studio
OPEN Architecture
Drawing Architecture Studio
Atelier FCJZ
Steven Holl Architects Beijing
**Project Title:**
Project Lushan: Rural Urban Prototypes

**Project Description:**
The theme for this year’s AAC workshop, Mapping the Middle Zone, confronts the challenge exemplified by the transformations occurring in the architecture and ecology of the rural Chinese village. Clearly, the binary relationship between urban and rural environments is changing and in flux, resulting in a condition that is defined by blurred zones, ambiguous territories, and opportunities for new identities and points of contact between tradition, modernity, and contemporary culture.

Beginning with an analysis of rural dwelling typologies, vernacular systems of construction, as well as contemporary spatial problems, the workshop focused on developing strategies and tactics that lead to an incremental and informal type of rural agri-urbanism, a hands-on, ground-up approach for sustainable growth and revitalization instead of the *tabula rasa* planning that often characterizes development in China.

**Credits:**
Gary Paige, Academic Director, AAC
USC AAC Design Research Lab + gp/s

**Project Sponsor:**
AVIC Legend + USC AAC
SUMMER WORKSHOP 2015

The ninth annual American Academy in China (AAC) is an intensive 15-day research, design and building workshop examining issues concerning the architecture of the rural Chinese village. Located in the rural mountain district of Lushan, adjacent to one of the most renowned landscapes and mountains in China, Mount Lu, the village of Xingzi will be the site and vehicle for our design research.

The theme for this year’s workshop, Making the Middle Ground, will address the challenge exemplified by the transformations occurring in the architecture and ecology of the rural Chinese village. Clearly, the binary relationship between urban and rural environments is changing and in flux, resulting in a new condition that is defined by blurred zones and ambiguous territories.

BACKGROUND

Today, one in every ten persons on earth lives in a rural Chinese village. And, in spite of the fact that during the last 15 years, an abundance of research has been produced on urban villages and the rapid urbanization of the Chinese city, relatively little critical design research and experimental built work has been produced on rural villages and vernacular typologies—with the notable exception of architects Robert Mangurian and Mary-Ann Ray (BASE: Beijing), John Lin and Joshua Bolchover (Rural Urban Framework/RUF), and a couple of others.

Even a cursory survey of rural environments reveals that there is much to be learned from traditional patterns of settlement, systems of construction, and sustainable design principles that have been developed over hundreds of years.

Project Lushan will not only offer participants an opportunity to live in a rural village for two weeks, but also operate as a laboratory for architectural experimentation by testing, and implementing various design proposals at full scale in real-time.
DESIGN PROJECT: LUSHAN
CHINA IN FLUX: MAPPING THE MIDDLE ZONE

CAN/MMZ
CHINA IN FLUX: MAPPING THE MIDDLE ZONE

On July 23rd, the C.A.N. exhibition opened in Shenzhen, an exhibition of design research projects in China from 17 prominent schools of architecture from around the world. Consisting of two parts organized around a central theme: C.A.N.—Culture, Agriculture, Nature, and China in Flux: Mapping the Middle Zone, the exhibition displayed research and proposals for projects in rural China as well as in the “middle zones” between megacities, suburbs and villages. The exhibition was initiated by USC Dean Qingyun Ma and curated and designed by MAX Office and Gary Paige/Studio. It was hosted and sponsored by Zhonghangli City and Avic Legend.

In brief, the C.A.N. initiative is a creative platform developed by Qingyun Ma to imagine new forms of sustainable development that navigate the territory between culture and nature and, more importantly, lead to the design and realization of projects where architecture, agriculture and nature can coexist in an interdependent manner. Zhonghangli City, Avic Legend and Ma planned this first C.A.N. event in Shenzhen, whose location and resources provided a thoughtful setting to exhibit and discuss the work and ideas. It should be noted, however, that C.A.N. is not a blueprint for a new Utopia but rather, a set of principles that are grounded in the present and committed to the development of innovative projects.

This past summer, as part of the AAC/GSAP Program, USC students worked on a project with developer Avic Legend in the Xingziguizong region at the foot of Lu Mountain, resulting in a study and proposal for “Urban Rural Prototypes.” In this project, students developed a set of additive and subtractive strategies that looked at ideas of complementary contrast and juxtaposition as a way to conceive of critical and productive relationships between traditional rural dwellings, renovation and new construction.
The Report of C.A.N.@Bauhaus
AAC EXHIBITION AND DESIGN WORKSHOP
C.A.N. in CULTURE AGRICULTURE NATURE AGRI-URBANISM

庐山灿计划 C.A.N. 展览 (深圳站) 暨 USC/AAC“中间地带”国际名校设计展

Manifesto

C.A.N. 灿计划
AMERICAN ACADEMY IN CHINA (AAC)  
MAPPING THE MIDDLE ZONE  
July 23 – August 31, 2015  
AVIC Legend Factory Hall  
Shenzhen  

Curator:  
Gary Paige  

MMZ EXHIBITION PROJECTS LIST  

Participating Institutions and Individuals:  

THE ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION  
Project Title: AAVS Shanghai 2015: Customised Cities  
Prof. Tom Verebes, Director AAVS Shanghai  

CENTRAL ACADEMY OF FINE ART (CAFA)  
Working Project Title: Mapping the Difference  
Prof. Keren He  

YALE UNIV. & COLUMBIA  
UNIV. GSAAP  
Project Title: Building China Modern  
Prof. Amy Lelyveld  

CHINESE UNIV. OF HONG KONG  
Project Title: Background City – A Taxonomy of Hong Kong’s Infrastructural Spaces  
Prof. Peter W. Ferretto  

UNIV. OF PENNSYLVANIA  
Project Title: Villages in the City  
Prof. Stefan Al  

HARVARD UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN  
Project Title: The Countryside as a City  
Prof. Christopher Lee  

LA SALLE UNIV. BARCELONA  
Project Title: Zero-footprint housing prototype for the Torré Baro neighbourhood, Barcelona  
Prof. Jaime Font  

MIT DEPT. OF URBAN STUDIES AND PLANNING  
Project Title: Clean Energy Urban Design in China  
Prof. Dennis Frenchman  
Prof. Christopher Zegras  

BASEBEIJING  
Project Title: Ruralopolitan Documents and Maneuvers: Beijing’s Urban and Rural Villages  
Robert Mangurian, Co-Founder  
Mary-Ann Ray, Co-Founder and University of Michigan Professor  
Robert Adams, Co-Founder and University of Michigan Professor
RURAL URBAN FRAMEWORK
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Project Title: Embedded Strategies for Rural-Urban Architecture
Prof. Joshua Bolchover & Prof. John Lin

THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG (HKU)
Project Title: Altered Estates
Prof. David Erdman

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY
COLLEGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN
Project Title: Acupuncturing Changlong
Prof. Marco Cenzatti

UNIV. OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Project Title: Project Lushan: Rural Urban Prototypes
Prof. Gary Paige

UNIV. OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
PRICE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY/SLAB
Project Title: Mapping Subterranean Urbanism
Prof. Annette Kim

UNIV. OF ST. JOSEPH MACAU
Project Title: New Synergies
Prof. Thomas Daniell

URBAN-THINK TANK & ETH ZURICH
Project Title: Empower Shack
Prof. Alfredo Brillembourg & Prof. Hubert Klumpner

COLUMBIA UNIV.
Project Title: From Megablock to Agri-Block
Prof. Jeffrey Johnson

Exhibition Design:
Max Office & gp/s

Sponsors:
AVIC Legend, Ltd.
USC American Academy in China
Presenters/Panelists:

Thomas Daniell  
Head of the Dept. of Architecture and Design, University of St. Joseph Macau

Peter W. Ferretto  
Assoc. Prof., Chinese University of Hong Kong, Principal, PWFERRETTO

Qingyun Ma  
Dean, USC School of Architecture

Gary Paige  
Academic Director, USC American Academy in China; Principal, gp/s

Clifford Pearson  
Deputy Editor, *Architectural Record*

Tom Verebes  
Director, AAVS Shanghai, Prof., HKU; Creative Director, OCEAN CN

Geoffrey von Oeyen  
Asst. Prof., USC Principal; Geoffrey von Oeyen Design

Nan Xiao  
Chairman, AVIC Legend, Ltd.

Moderator:

Clifford Pearson

2:00 Gary Paige – Introduction
2:10 Nan Xiao & Qingyun Ma – Welcome
2:20 Qingyun Ma – C.A.N.
2:30 Nan Xiao – Project Lushan
2:50 Gary Paige – “Notes on the Middle Zone”
3:00 Gary Paige – Introduction: Panelists & Moderator
3:10 Clifford Pearson, “The Radical Middle”
3:15 Peter W. Ferretto, “Background City: How We Read Our City”
3:20 Thomas Daniell, “Macau as a Middle Zone”
3:25 Tom Verebes, “Customised Cities”
3:30 Gary Paige, “Case: Project Lushan; Strategies & Tactics”
3:50 Panel Discussion (Moderated by Clifford Pearson)
5:00 Exhibition Opening & Reception
5:15 Song Tao – Master Craftsman Demonstration
6:00 Dinner in OCT
BOOTS ON THE GROUND: THE AAC IN ACTION
By Clifford Pearson

Hundreds of millions of people have moved from China’s countryside to its cities during the past 25 years. So it is not surprising that most contemporary research has focused on the country’s burgeoning metropolises and what can be done to make them better. The inverse of this steep urban growth curve, however, is the precipitous drop in the number of people living in China’s villages and small towns. Once the cradles of the nation’s cultural identity and inspiration for poets and painters, these rural communities are now being abandoned by working-age people, who leave their small children in the care of their aging parents. Using counter-intuitive logic, the 2015 AAC program turned its attention to the places being left behind by China’s rapid urbanization. Instead of running with the academic herd, it charted a different path—one that asked students, faculty, and outside participants to examine the predicament of a de-populated countryside and the gray areas between cities on steroids and the mostly agricultural communities that are withering away.

Flip sides of the same coin, rapid urbanization and rural decline are connected processes with one influencing the other. But a loss of population in the countryside does not necessarily mean economic and social deterioration there. If treated properly, it can create new opportunities for rural businesses and communities. Exploring these possibilities was a key theme of the AAC’s 2015 program. Entitled China in Flux: Mapping the Middle Zone, it offered students the chance to study the vernacular architecture and existing social fabric of Lushan, a small town in the mountains of Jiangxi Province, and to propose strategies for reviving the community. Talking with villagers and analyzing Lushan’s current stock of buildings, the students learned about China’s heritage and the challenges the country faces as it continues its rapid transformation from a rural-based society to a mostly urban one. The students then developed proposals for the renovation, expansion, and transformation of 14 of these dwellings and presented them to AVIC Legend, one of China’s leading construction and design firms, which is looking at the town for a possible eco-tourism resort.
The students also spent time in Beijing and Xi’an, before going to Shenzhen, where they helped put together an exhibition that showed their work and that of 18 different institutions and practitioners—including Columbia; Harvard; MIT; Yale; the University of Pennsylvania; the University of California, Berkeley; China’s Central Academy of Fine Art, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the ETH Zurich; the Architectural Association, B.A.S.E. Beijing, davidclovers, and Rural Urban Framework.

In Shenzhen, the students attended a symposium on July 23 organized by USC School of Architecture professor and AAC director Gary Paige. Following the summer’s theme—Mapping the Middle Zone—the event addressed “the ideas and conditions of in-betweeness, as exemplified by the transformation taking place between traditional urban and rural villages,” said Paige, “as well as by on-going, contemporary countryside initiatives”. Presenters included Paige, Dean Qingyun Ma, Nan Xiao of AVIC Legend, Thomas Daniell from St. Joseph Macau School of Architecture, Peter Ferretto from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and myself.

“The binary relationship between urban and rural villages is changing and in flux, resulting in a condition that is characterized by blurred zones and ambiguous territories,” explained Paige. “Yet, in spite of these transformations and the potential for a new rural-urban hybrid, they are often lacking a strategy for social, economic and spatial evolution, and sustainable growth.”

Dean Ma talked about a program he calls C.A.N.: Culture, Agri-culture, and Nature. “We need to devise a form of agri-urbanism,” said Ma, “one that applies radical solutions to the particular problems of the countryside.” Ma has been doing exactly this in his family’s home village of Lantian, outside of Xi’an where he is developing a winery and resort called Jade Valley. During the past decade, he has designed a set of buildings there for wine production, entertaining, and tourism, and is currently working with other architects to add villas and cultural facilities to the complex. The architecture combines modern and vernacular principles to create a
21st-century interpretation of traditional building forms. “Jade Valley may not be easily replicable in other parts of China,” said Ma, but it demonstrates one way of revitalizing a small rural village.

In Lushan, AVIC Legend is exploring another way of preserving the character of a unique location, while finding new economic opportunities for the people who live there. “Lushan is an iconic place, both culturally and historically,” stated Nan, the chairman of AVIC Legend. Buddhist and Taoist poets and monks made the area famous centuries ago. Stressing the importance of protecting Lushan, Nan explained, “Not all damage is physical. Sometimes it can be done by just changing the way we experience a place.”

China, of course, is not the only country experiencing large-scale migration from villages to cities. In my presentation, I showed projects in different parts of Africa and Asia where innovative architecture is activating rural towns and improving people’s lives. The work ranged from an artists’ residence and cultural center in Senegal to a vaccination center in Kenya to museums and art spaces on Naoshima Island in Japan.

What made the student work, the exhibition, and the symposium so important was the potential impact all of this can have on the lives of people in China and elsewhere. As I assume the role of AAC director in 2016, I see the pressing need to study, research, and explore what is happening in China and then translate that into strategies that will improve the way people live, work, play, and learn. The AAC is a place for people who want to make an impact.
PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS:

To date, over 50 institutions worldwide have participated with the AAC in different scholastic engagements, forums, exhibitions, and workshops in China. Following institutions are included:

Architectural Association School of Architecture  
B.A.S.E. Beijing  
Bartlett School of Architecture  
Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture (BUCEA)  
Beijing Forestry University  
Beijing Jiaotong University  
Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA)  
Chinese University of Hong Kong  
CITA: Center for Information Technology and Architecture  
Columbia University GSAPP  

Cuikai Studio  
Dessau Institute of Architecture  
Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture Paris-Malaquais  
ETH Zurich Urban-Think Tank  
Feng Chia University, Taiwan  
Harvard University Graduate School of Design  
Hebei University of Technology  
Hong Kong University  
INHA University, Korea  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  

Dept. of Urban Studies and Planning Peking University  
Princeton University  
Rural Urban Framework, University of Hong Kong  
Sichuan University  
Southern California Institute of Architecture  
Seoul National University
Nanjing Southeastern University
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Royal Melbourne Institute of Architecture
Shandong Jian Zhu University

South China University of Technology
S. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia
Tianjin University
Tongji University
Tsinghua University
TU Delft
Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, Argentina
University of Brighton
University of California at Berkeley - College of Environmental Design
University of Edinburgh

University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign
University of Michigan – Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning
University of Pennsylvania
University of Southern California Price School of Public Policy / SLAB
University of Southern California School of Architecture
University of St. Joseph Macau
University of Stuttgart – Institute for Computational Design
University of Tennessee – Knoxville
University of Toronto
Woodbury University
Yale University
FUTURE FUNDING

USC AMERICAN ACADEMY IN CHINA

The USC American Academy in China (AAC) is an international program of the School of Architecture at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Programs of AAC are enabled and enriched by support through private philanthropy—individual, corporate and foundation gifts. Gifts to the University of Southern California in support of AAC provide funding for faculty, research, symposia, workshops, exhibition along with scholarships and traveling fellowships for students studying in China. As a private non-profit 501.c3 institution, USC is able to accept gifts from any country and in any currency. A gift may be composed of cash, appreciated U.S. securities, real estate, trusts, bequests or a combination of devices that best suits the donor. What is more, cash and gifts of appreciated assets may provide considerable tax advantages to the donor. To learn more about making a gift to support the USC American Academy in China, you may contact:

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