

Conference Paper

The Shanxi Grand Theater: The “Renaissance” of Chinese Drama Land

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Taiyuan city, a second-tier Chinese city with a brilliant history that had been gradually reduced to mediocrity. When an ambitious governor took office, he planned to carry out an urban revitalization process in which cultural facilities would become symbols of power and represent the city's identity or define its character. The importation of Western-style architecture and urban design for the performing arts offer a way out. The 'perfect copies' of European lifestyle, through the way of architectural, urbanism transplant, seemed to serve as a potent symbol of China authority's ability to control and rearrange the worldwide intelligence for their citizen. The authors investigated Taiyuan and its performance spaces, examine the Shanxi Grand Theatre in terms of designs, layouts and uses, expectations, and disappointments in spatial terms both within and in relation to urban spaces, which epitomized China's strategy on balancing the elite cultural monuments and social welfare.

Keywords: The Shanxi Grand Theatre, performing art space, importation of design, international architecture.

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Received: 15 March 2019

Accepted: 25 May 2019

Published: 20 November 2019

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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1. Strategy: Taiyuan City, the Culture Industry, and the Grand Theater

The theater, whether referring to stage shows or to motion pictures, has long been a keyword for Chinese urban modernization [23]. After 2000, city administrators became concerned with the relations between cultural infrastructure and urban and regional economic development. Yu Youjun, who governed Shanxi province from 2005 to 2007, was a key figure in this relationship. Mr. Yu was viewed as a reformer who was determined to steer Shanxi toward prosperity. Rather than following bureaucratic tradition, he preferred to get expert advice. (Although every government official in Shanxi emphasized "reproducing the green mountains and rivers of Shanxi" as an official routine, Yu abandoned the inefficient and propagandistic measure of planting trees for the barren mountains every spring and left the task of upgrading the urban environment to professional specialists and companies)

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While he was mayor of Shenzhen, Yu accumulated rich experience in urban construction and the improvement of people's welfare in one of the most developed coastal cities. As a typical central city, however, Taiyuan has lagged far behind Shenzhen and lies in the downstream level of the middle China area. Yu's major policy focus was opening up Shanxi and invigorating its domestic economy. The first Investment and Trade Symposium was held in Taiyuan at the beginning of the Yu administration; many businessmen were invited as Governor Yu's friends[30]. Unfortunately, the infrastructure and investment conditions of Taiyuan failed to impress them. Furthermore, the over-exploiting energy industry has always been the pillar industry of Shanxi Province since 1949. Yu was one of the few who recognized the hidden risks of this industry early on and planned an economic transition to control the consequences [22]. In cases of the economic transformation of cities and regions that are dependent on natural resources, like the Ruhr of Germany, Lorraine of France, and Pittsburgh of the US, success is generally ascribed to the development of the service industry. In Shanxi Province, both the unfavorable investment conditions and the need to develop the service industry called for a massive infrastructure upgrade. The Changfeng Quarter, which occupies a 2.56 square kilometer site, was the center of upgrading construction in the southern part of Taiyuan during the 11th Five-Year Plan period (2006–2010). According to meeting minutes, the Changfeng New Quarter was to be designed and built according to the "modern concept." It would host political, economic, cultural, and exhibition activities that epitomized the character and landscape of Taiyuan for citizens and investors.

On January 27, 2007, Governor Yu chaired an executive meeting that resulted in a decision to begin a new round of urban infrastructure upgrades. Shanxi province raised RMB 0.5 billion yuan (US\$ 65.8 million in 2007) as an investment in public welfare and public infrastructure, including the International Exhibition Center, Shanxi Grand Theater, Science and Technology Museum, Provincial Library, Sports Center, and Geological Museum. The authority believed the lack of those buildings had created a bottleneck that restricted urban development. The "historical outstanding debt" of public infrastructure was to be repaid as soon as possible.

The meeting analyzed the situation of the lag in the construction of social welfare infrastructure in Shanxi Province. Most of the existing social welfare infrastructure in Shanxi Province was built in the 1950s and 1960s. It is in disrepair; the equipment is aging; it is functionally outdated. Some facilities are basically nonexistent. These buildings are unable to support and promote the rapid and healthy development of cities. At present, there is no grand theater,

concert hall, or convention and exhibition center capable of hosting large-scale conferences and exhibitions in Shanxi Province. (The meeting analyzed the situation of the lag in the construction of social welfare infrastructure in Shanxi Province. Most of the existing social welfare infrastructure in Shanxi Province was built in the 1950s and 1960s. It is in disrepair; the equipment is aging; it is functionally outdated. Some facilities are basically nonexistent. These buildings are unable to support and promote the rapid and healthy development of cities. At present, there is no grand theater, concert hall, or convention and exhibition center capable of hosting large-scale conferences and exhibitions in Shanxi Province. [21])



Figure 1: The city of Taiyuan, showing the location of the Changfeng Quarter. Copyright © Arte Charpentier Architectes.

Taiyuan lies between two long mountain chains to its east and west. The current major districts of Taiyuan are distributed mainly along the east bank of the Fen River. According to the general development plan, the city would expand to the southwest. Much of the “public infrastructure” mentioned above would be located in the Changfeng Quarter (**Figure 1**). In May 2006, an international competition organized by the Municipal City Planning Bureau of Taiyuan invited five architectural firms to submit detailed outlines of their design and planning work. One bidder in the competition, Kisho Kurokawa, is famous for the Zhengdong New Area of Zhengzhou, which is not far from Taiyuan, and Futian CBD of Shenzhen. This double magnum opus is widely considered to be one of the most significant examples of his symbiotic thought. Kurokawa’s plan placed a municipal administrative center in the south and a convention and exhibition center in the north. These centers were envisioned as the poles of a magnet, intended to function as sources of vitality for the quarter. All of the other functions of planning would be integrated into the field generated between the poles (**Figure 2**). In the case of Futian CBD, Shenzhen, a similar prototype can be seen in the multi-layered central

axis of “Lotus mountain (central park)–Civic Center (municipal administrative center)–Convention and Exhibition Center.” As the former mayor of Shenzhen, Yu was familiar with the Futian CBD plan (**Figure 3**), but Arte Charpentier was the eventual winner of the competition.

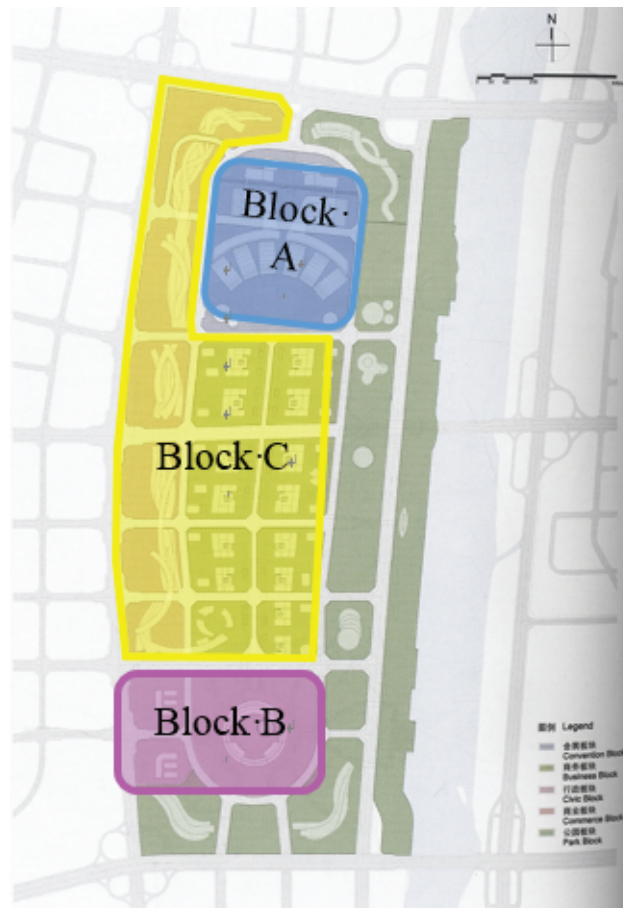


Figure 2: The zoning plan of the Changfeng Quarter designed by Kisho Kurokawa. From Book: Urban Planning Commission of Taiyuan [24], illustrations drawn by the authors. Block A: Convention Block; Block B: Administrative Block; Block C: Business Block.

In contrast to the north-south axis of Kurokawa’s scheme, which is parallel to the bank of Fen River, the first distinct strategy of the scheme from Arte Charpentier was the concept of making the axis cross the river perpendicularly. Arte Charpentier saw the project as both a transitional and an extended area connecting the current urban areas to new areas. Referring to the historical relationship between the Seine River and Paris’s urban expansion, large public buildings and green square were organized through the axis perpendicular to the river bank, so that the urban texture was extended on both sides of the river bank and a complete urban space system was formed (**Figure 4**).

In Paris, several urban axes were drawn perpendicular to the Seine to locate major infrastructure among them. To create public spaces converging on the

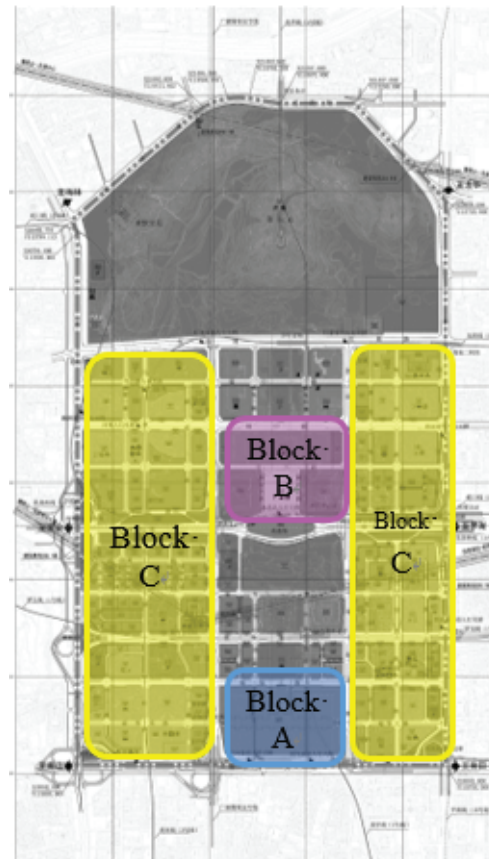


Figure 3: The zoning plan of Futian CBD in Shenzhen. Copyright © Mrs. Chen Yixin, illustrations drawn by the authors. Block A: Convention Block; Block B: Administrative Block; Block C: Business Block.

water in Taiyuan, we decided to bring the Fen River into our site to create a green island from which three axes would radiate. [32]

These axes and avenues provided both a link to the city and extensions along which future growth would be located. Because of the city's geographical distribution, this link could cause the axis to be oblique. In the traditional thought of northern China, the positioning of urban fabric along a north-south axis symbolized legally constituted authority, and it was believed that the articulation of the administration centre dominating north– south axis organized the city in a symmetrical layout, and it is well-known as central uprightness (The squareness, the three gates on the southern front of the Capital City and the symmetrical positioning of the gates and courtyards in this frontal area, the assertive orthogonal structure in relation to the four cardinal points, the use of axes, the domination of the north-south axis, the articulation of the centre, and the elaboration of the southern front of the centre, were eminent in Beijing. [31]). Luckily, however, the authority accepted Arte Charpentier's thoughtful but challenging concept (**Figure 5**).



Figure 4: The urban axes and open space perpendicular to the Seine River.

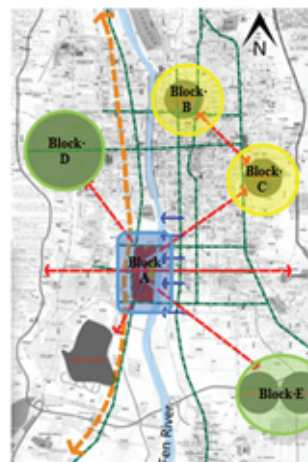


Figure 5: Structure map of the development plan of the Changfeng Quarter designed by Arte Charpentier. These axes and avenues provide both a link to the city and extensions along which future growth will be located. Copyright © Arte Charpentier Architectes, illustrations drawn by the authors. Block A: The Changfeng Quarter. Block B: The administrative and commercial centre of the old city. Block C: The historical and cultural centre of the old city. Block D: The industrial development zone of the new city. Block E: The commercial development zone of the new city.

The second strategy of Arte Charpentier's plan was to regard the cultural complex as the core area of the new city (**Figure 5**). Three axes radiated through the cultural complex, composed of the Shanxi Grand Theater, a library, a museum, an art gallery, and a science center. To further strengthen the position of the cultural complex, the architect dug a water channel in the site to form a cultural green island. Shaped like a port, the cultural green island clustered five public cultural facilities. Because the 6-meter embankment could have interrupted the experience of the waterfront space, buildings were set on the podium with embankments of the same height. As a result, the platform with its immense volume seems to float on the river, which is of special significance in the cultural context of East Asia. (For example, the Japanese prints that were popular among Westerners in the nineteenth century are known in Japanese as ukiyo-e, literally "Pictures of the Floating World", which is a common reference to "the life

one lives.” Contemporary Asian architects often revisit the concept of floating space: ‘By seeing a garden as a metaphor for the process of time interminable, a life of some sort, there might be a chance that I can express a living architecture, an architecture floating amidst time.’ See [1] and [20]) In the practice of an urban designer with a French background, the cultural facilities are highly respected in the architectural hierarchy of the Changfeng Quartier.

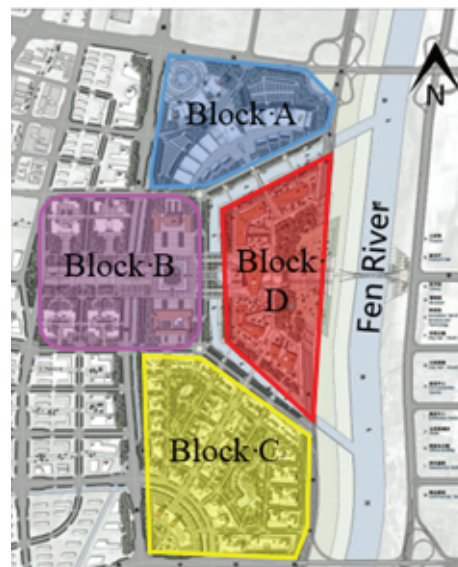


Figure 6: The zoning plan of the Changfeng Quarter designed by Arte Charpentier. Copyright © Arte Charpentier Architectes, illustrations drawn by the authors. Block A: Convention Block. Block B: Administrative Block. Block C: Business Block. Block D: Cultural Block.

Neither Kisho Kurokawa’s nor Arte Charpentier’s plan is a home-grown solution to the grass-roots problems of Shanxi. We wish to emphasize two aspects of this Western-style adaptation in the midst of China’s urban transformation. First, the theoretical means were borrowed from and influenced by the Western mode, which creates conflict with Chinese cultural and social conventions; second, the adaptation made a collective use of architecture that is frequently transformed by changing modes of cultural consumption and that presents a new vision that is diversified and open. [20] As a result, the architectural and urban design is regarded more as a common motif of collective practice than as a matter of the wishful thinking of individual architects. Looking at the beginning of the decision-making process, we can trace several changes in the decision makers’ mindset regarding which building types should dominate the construction and development of the new city. The Changfeng Commercial District was assigned four main functions: it was to be a provincial-level cultural and art exhibition area, a provincial-level exhibition area, a municipal-level administrative center, and a business district. Because office space accounts for a large area, it often becomes the background pattern of urban design. Most of this debate, however, focused on whether the convention

center or the cultural area would dominate the Changfeng Quarter. From the changes in the name of the quarter, we can see that the urban decision makers gradually changed the concept of this area. It was originally named the “Changfeng New District,” serving as the main venue of the “Expo Central China” held in Taiyuan in 2011. The name was later changed to the “Changfeng Business District.” The final official name was the “Changfeng Cultural and Business District.” In conclusion, we can discern a change in mindset from regional development led by the exhibition economy, which pursues short-term benefits, to regional development guided by a culture that pursues long-term benefits.

In fact, the preparation for the Shanxi grand theater significantly predates the Changfeng Cultural and Business District. Since the beginning of Chinese economic reform, the programming of the Shanxi grand theater has been on the agenda. In 1982, the planning commission of Shanxi Province officially approved the project and purchased the seating area at the same time. The project was to be transferred to the Provincial Department of Culture after the early-stage work was finished. Influenced by Shanxi’s ambition, many neighboring provinces joined the surge in the construction of cultural facilities. In 1989, however, the provincial government decided to postpone construction because of financial problems. In 1996, the original site of the grand theater was sold to a foreign investor by the government to “expand the investment.” During that time, there was not a single room for the preparatory office, let alone a site for the grand theater. (In March 1982, to change the backward situation of the provincial capital’s cultural infrastructure, the provincial department of culture applied to the provincial planning commission for a report, hoping to build a new theater in Taiyuan with modern features, complete functions, and advanced equipment. [18]) Ironically, the Shanxi grand theater project received unprecedented attention, which led the theater to become the core building of the new commercial district. In “The Outline of the Cultural Development Plan for the 11th Five-year Plan Period of Shanxi Province,” the authorities asserted,

We should improve the network of public cultural services and implement the cultural infrastructure construction project. The project will focus on large-scale public cultural facilities (including the Shanxi grand theater) and strengthen the network of public cultural infrastructure based on the cultural facilities in communities at the grassroots level. These key construction projects should be designed as one of the most recognizable symbols of Shanxi.

To return to governor Yu: he left his position as governor of Shanxi Province in the middle of 2007 and has since devoted himself to academic research. His most important political achievement in Shanxi has been his efforts to reform and reorganize the coal industry. For example, one housing improvement project was the transformation of a shantytown for 300,000 mineworkers in Datong. In October 2013, he donated a community cultural center for this project with a total contribution of RMB 1.6 million yuan from his publication royalties. One local resident said gratefully, “Now the miners have their own modernized life.” [19]. The Shanxi grand theater and community cultural center in Datong can be regarded as part of the two-pole practice of Mr. Yu Youjun in the public cultural service network.

2. Importation and Adaptation: Arte Charpentier’s Urban Practice in Shanxi

The architectural revolution triggered by China’s economic reform since 1978 drew a large number of international architecture firms into China. Their practices in China inevitably influenced contemporary Chinese architecture [27]. While most of the performing arts centers in the Western world are financially strapped and slow to develop, Chinese grand theaters and other cultural facilities are springing up like mushrooms, making the Chinese market an ideal arena for cultural architecture design. Western architects, who have been immersed in mature markets for years, have perceived the opportunity brought by this development, and they have joined the gold rush in the East without hesitation. Compared with local Chinese architects, who started to build up the grand theaters only at the beginning of the 1990s, Western architects have relatively rich experiences. Western architects therefore dominated the round of “grand theater construction booms” that have taken place since 2000.

Meanwhile, the construction booms are also influenced by external experiences. The last round of massive city revitalization was the Grands Projets of François Mitterrand. The Grands Projets, which included the Opéra Bastille, were described as “eight monumental building projects that in two decades transformed the city skyline.” [14] The architectural program of the project aimed to provide modern monuments for Paris that would symbolize France’s position in politics, culture, and the economy. The relationship between the cultural monuments and the city’s revitalization traces one continuous line. In Haussmann’s renovation of Paris, the Palais Garnier was in the dominant position. The Centre Georges-Pompidou, regarded as the most remarkable achievement in former president Pompidou’s career, was said by the Pritzker jury to

have “revolutionized museums, transforming what had once been elite monuments into popular places of social and cultural exchange, woven into the heart of the city.” [17] These cases were widely reported and discussed in China’s architecture circle in the 1980s. (For example, the review of the Grands Projets written by Guan Zhaoye, Academician of the China Engineering Academy. [12]) In 1998, then French president Jacques René Chirac (who had been mayor of Paris during the Grands Projets, 1977–1995), proposed a cultural exchange program of “150 Chinese architects in France.” This activity gathered a group of talented young architects in China and cultivated their friendship and affinity for French architecture. [2]

Admittedly, it is important to avoid the ‘post hoc ergo propter hoc’ fallacy when examining the reasons for the Chinese preference for French architects. There is no doubt, however, that the cultural exchange between China and France inclined Chinese architects and urban policymakers to approve the ‘French prototype.’ As a result, the ‘French style’ designers became more competitive in the construction boom of China’s cultural facilities in the twenty-first century. There is an essential difference between the form of ‘self-colonization’ and architecture importation. As Ledderose notes, classical Chinese belief that ‘by artificially making a replica of something one wields power over the real object’ [13]. according to Bosker book, the movement might be intended as a projection of China’s power: its ability to control and rearrange the cosmos by metaphorically transplanting Europe and the United States into China’s domain [4]. On the Chinese perspective side, there is wide acknowledgment of the almost miraculous power of cultural facilities in Western cities, especially the grand theatre. Chinese leaders want to follow the example of successful cases by ‘importing’ authentic modern monuments from the Western world for celebrating country’s progress and accumulated wealth after the Chinese economic reform.

As a representative of French architects who have achieved success in China’s market, Arte Charpentier tries to bridge importation and adaptation by understanding cultural differences and identity. The first contact traces back to 1984, when Mr. Charpentier began to participate in the cooperative cultural and technical exchanges that occurred as the Shanghai municipal government conducted architectural seminars to improve the quality of its housing. In May 1994, Arte Charpentier won the international competition to design the Shanghai Grand Theater. The first signature-built project garnered nation-wide appreciation for the firm and for French architects [32]. Later, the firm gained opportunities to contribute to cities all over China. So far, the Arte Charpentier has completed three performance spaces. The Chinese cities in which the performance spaces are located range from first-tier to third-tier (**Table 1**).

TABLE 1: The performance space projects designed by Arte Charpentier in China (Data summarized by the author, accordance with the latest information form official website of the Arte Charpentier. [3]).

Project	Competition winner	Completion	Construction Area	Theater	Concert hall	Multifunctional theater	Remarks
Shanghai Grand Theater	1994	1998	64,000 m ²	1800 Seats	600 Seats	300 Seats	The Architectural Creation Award of the Architectural Society of China (1949–2009)
Shanxi Grand Theater	2008	2012	77,000 m ²	1628 Seats	1170 Seats	458 Seats	Awarded a special prize from UIA–Interarch, 2009
Xinzhou arts center and opera	2012	2015	73,000 m ²	1200 Seats	None	600 Seats	workshops for painting, music, and literature

2.1. A Synchronized Fashion

As the achievements of urban design were recognized and rewarded, Arte Charpentier was invited to the International Design Competition of the Shanxi Grand Theater. Located in the heart of the Changfeng Quarter, the theater had been sketched out during the urban design competition. The architectural centerpiece is in some senses a prolongation of the urban design concept. Architects from Arte Charpentier are adept at working on urban design, architecture, and landscaping in a synchronized fashion. Ms. Zhou Wenyi, the project manager of the team, had received a thorough French education in architecture and urban design. Arte Charpentier holds the view that

A plaza, visual axes, or the landscape have to be worked out in conjunction with the architecture to create a strong sense of place. At the same time, we did an analysis of the site and the relationship between the city and the topography so that the architecture, the city, and the landscape form an integral ensemble as if the architecture had grown out of the site. [32]

The composition and succession made “the Changfeng Quarter and the Shanxi Grand Theater” an ideal project package with which Arte Charpentier could practice its philosophy.

2.2. Entrance-Face (façade)

The architectural work benefited from the synchronized style of the urban design. Because the building is set upon the main axis leading from the City Hall Plaza to the

bank of the Fen River, its axial orientation alone assigns it unmistakable importance, just as Haussmann's boulevards created the ideal site for the Opéra Garnier [6]. A large opening in the Shanxi grand theater was regarded as the passage for the axis (**Figure 6**). All of the axes of the Changfeng Quarter converge on the grand portico under the opening. The grand portico stands on a terrace of steps, which form a continuum. In the center of the design composition, the terrace enjoys the greatest view: from the city hall plaza in the west to the hydrophilic landscape opposite. As an analogy, the Grande Arche in Paris uses the symbolic Roman triumphal arch not only to identify the city's northwestern extension but also to welcome new business interests to La Défense (**Figure 7**). Edelman's discussion of the hierarchy of some public spaces is applicable to La Grande Arche and the Shanxi Grand Theater, a building embodying public investment but accentuating governmental control. (**Figure 8**)

The scale of the structure reminds the mass of political spectators that they enter the precincts of power as clients or as supplicants, susceptible to arbitrary rebuffs and favors, and that they are subject to remote authorities that they only dimly know or understand [11].

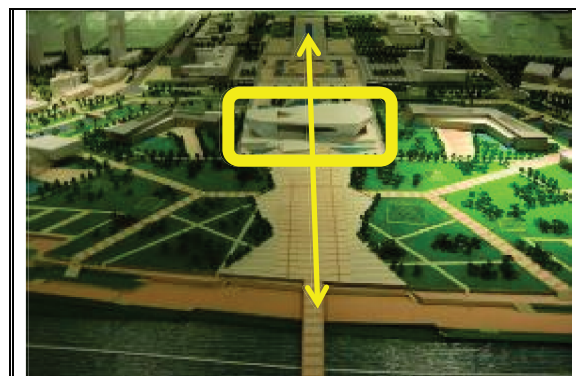


Figure 7: The Shanxi Grand Theater and the axis. Photo by the author, illustrations drawn by the authors.

In traditional architectural thought, the term “entrance-face (façade)” (门面) often associates the entrance of the building with the human face. Literally, “mian” suggests a mask, a painted or sculptured face that is worn by a person to enhance, hide, or alter his or her physical appearance. A face is therefore simultaneously a representation and a means of performance and disguise [9]. Analogously, at the entrance of the Changfeng Quarter, the Shanxi Grand Theater would invite guests, repel strangers, and indicate various relationships between inside and outside. Furthermore, in the traditional Chinese context, people often place more emphasis on the “depth” of such an architectural “entrance-face” than on the vividness of its “facial expression.” [20].

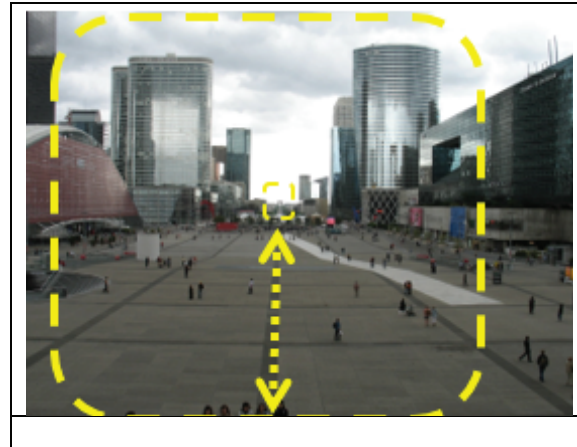


Figure 8: The Grande Arche and the axis. Photo by the author, illustrations drawn by the authors.

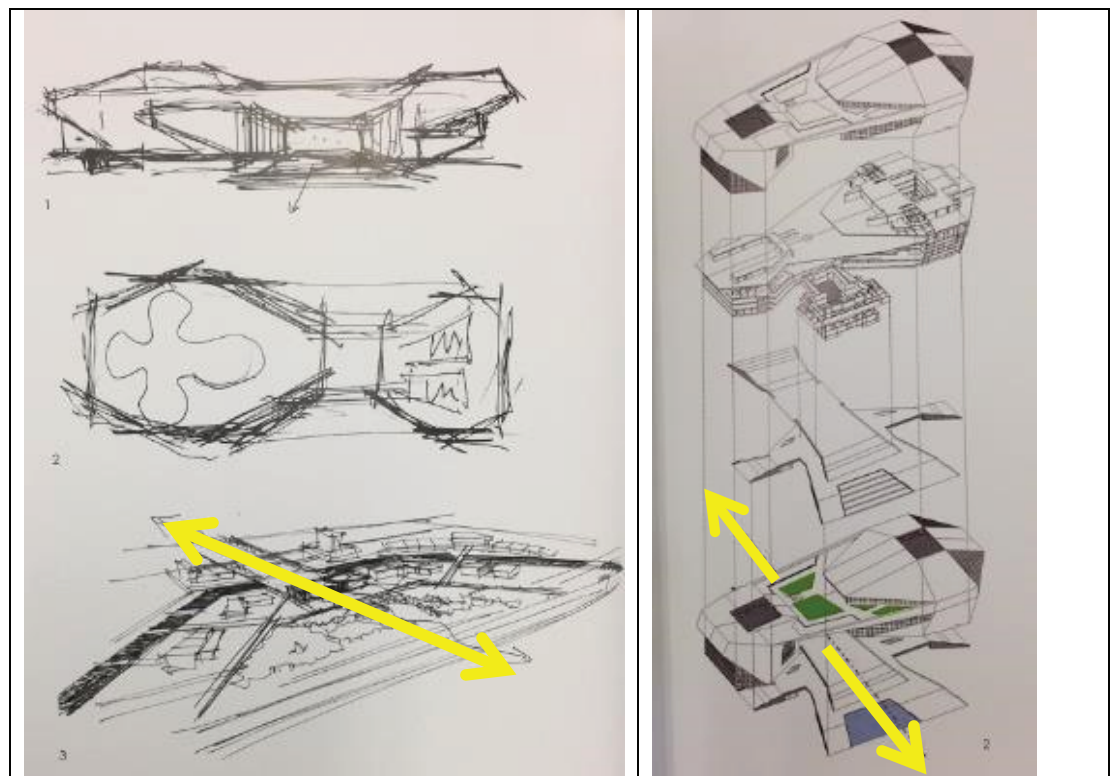


Figure 9: The axis within the design of the Changfeng Quarter and the Shanxi Grand Theater Copyright © Arte Charpentier Architectes. **a)** Sketches of the urban design and architectural form of the Changfeng Quarter. **b)** Volumetric exploded view of the Shanxi Grand Theater.

In conclusion, the homoplastic buildings of the Grande Arche and the Shanxi Grand Theater have taken on different meanings in different social contexts. In premodern Chinese society, such positioning or contextualizing was often associated with the art of governance [25]. Following the construction of the Changfeng Quarter, a newly designed shopping mall occupied the former plaza that links the administrative center and the terrace of theater steps. The immense volume of the five-story building unreasonably obstructs the original axis between the administrative center and the cultural



Figure 10: The plaza link to the administrative center and the terrace of steps. Copyright © Arte Charpentier Architectes.



Figure 11: Rendering shows a newly designed shopping mall occupying the former plaza. Copyright © Arte Charpentier Architectes.

center. The axis was disregarded by the consumption capital, presenting the cultural empathy between France and China as evidence (**Figure 9–10**).

2.3. Axes that reach/ Paths that wander

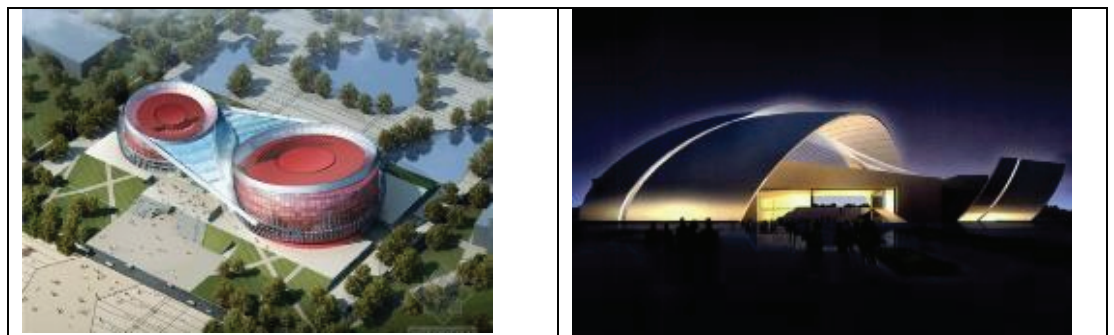


Figure 12: Competitors’ design of the Shanxi Grand Theater. a) “Pair of Drums.” Copyright © Urban Planning Commission of Taiyuan b) “Winds of Shanxi.” See [15].

In fact, the grand steps” continuum has been acknowledged since the period of the Changfeng Quarter’s urban design. All of the participants in the design competition applied the steps motif. In contrast to its competitors (**Figure 11**), Arte Charpentier showed its proficiency in the language of modern architecture without the imitating

a cultural symbol. The theater building contains an opera hall, a concert hall upon the terrace, and a small theater under the belvedere platform. On the opposite side of the portico, the opera hall and the concert hall shape the solid appearance of the building. The carefully folded roof allows sunlight to shape the more dynamic form of free plasticity, which reminds visitors of the Casa da Musica designed by Rem Koolhaas. The plaza, the steps, the esplanade, and the halls are treated as a continuous visual sequence. By using stone of the same shade, the sequence achieves an immersive experience of purity and serenity. Near the performance halls, the red color in the interior space emphasizes the heart of the structure and activates spectators' emotion (Figure 12).



Figure 13: Photographic view of the Shanxi Grand Theater **a)** The façade. **b)** The side foyer. **c)** The interior of the theater. Copyright © Arte Charpentier Architectes.

3. Conclusion

This paper focuses on Taiyuan city, a second-tier city with a brilliant history that had been gradually reduced to mediocrity. When an ambitious governor took office, he planned to carry out an urban revitalization process in which cultural facilities would become symbols of power and represent the city's identity or define its character. The leaders of this process found, however, that the majority of cultural spaces nourished

by local traditions had been eliminated by the tide of market forces. The importation of Western-style architecture and urban design for the performing arts seemed to offer a way out. We examine the Shanxi Grand Theater in terms of designs, layouts and uses, expectations, and disappointments in spatial terms both within and in relation to urban spaces.

From an optimistic perspective, the extensive discussion of the construction of the grand theater could be the beginning of public participation in the architectural criticism of public buildings. Before this change, unique representations of buildings were propagandized to the public: glorious palaces, splendid great halls, and soaring skyscrapers. Unlike administration buildings, which are linked to national dignity, cultural facilities vary widely and are rarely politically sensitive. Although market economic entities in early stages like to display skyscrapers symbolizing the wealth and glamour of the metropolis, cultural facilities display more creative freedom in their architectural modeling because their architects face fewer structural constraints. The grand theater is an appropriate example of public discussion and vision. During the building boom, the public gradually participated in comprehensive and thorough architectural criticism, and eventually formed its own aesthetic criteria.

From the authority's perspective, the construction of large-scale architectural projects served as a gesture: when an outstanding building appears in a traditional area, it must have a significant meaning. After several years of large-scale construction, the authorities have already learned to release special information through the construction of a grand theater. The opening-up policy, that is, allows the government to present cultural wonders to the Chinese people through the integration of global intelligence. In this way, people "silently" enhance their sense of national identity and pride. Talented architects, moreover, are attracted from a wide field to develop the city to its utmost architectural potential.

In view of the overall situation of China's urban modernization, large public cultural buildings have been placed in a dominant position in this urban revitalization movement. All levels of government have carried out this consensus: influenced by the grand theater boom in the capital and in first-tier cities in China, the provincial capitals started a new round of competitions for such urban spectacles, and third-tier cities have made less pragmatic urban planning decisions because of the weight of this criterion for "modern cities." When the mass media focuses on the construction of large public buildings like grand theaters and exhibition centers, buildings devoted to minority groups' welfare are inevitably neglected. Because Paris can no longer afford to carry out "Grands Projets" like those of the 1980s, massive urban construction represents a precious "historic

opportunity” for contemporary China. China must, however, select a course for its urban development with limited time and complex options.

Funding

This paper is part of a study supported by the Research Grant Council, Hong Kong Government, under Grant Project No. [CityU 11658816].

Acknowledgement

The authors thank the constructive comments and suggestions from Dr Zhang Liang, Mr. Cai Wenyue, Mrs. Zhou wenyi, Mr. Pierre Chambron, Ms. Liang Jia, Dr Tang Keyang, Dr Xiao Ping and Mr. Xiao Ying.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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