

Prof. Yung Ho Chang AIA,
Founder, Principal Architect
of Atelier Feichang Jianzhu,
Professor at Tongji University
and MIT

Convention and Invention

Foil 1

I think that it is very important today to discuss the notion of convention. Convention is something that we may not necessarily like to accept or to agree with but it is something we cannot ignore. The practice of architecture is very much built upon conventions. In our work, we would try to push and possibly develop convention. For this symposium, I am not going to discuss housing but nevertheless would talk about where and how we live today and specifically about the workplace as well as the city. There is also a specific design project I like to present. Before I get into that project, I want to talk a bit about city.

Foil 2

In this slide, what you see are the urban conditions in China today, which I call the Chinese urban sprawl. What is the difference between Chinese urban sprawl and urban sprawls elsewhere? Urban sprawl that we are familiar with, especially in the American context, means actually suburban sprawl. It is a kind of low-density urban development on the outside of the city center.

Foil 3

But in China – let me show you one image so that you can get an idea. This is in the very center of Shanghai, a metropolitan city. There are many very beautiful quarters in Shanghai that I am now showing you. Instead, you see here the typically automobile oriented traffic. You see a few bicycles. You do not really see a single pedestrian. That is the reason why I love this photograph because it really shows my point. You see object buildings. You do not see the urban fabric. This is truly urban sprawl that continues into the suburbs. The point is that this is probably the convention or the way to plan and build a city in China. If this is the convention of urbanization in today's China, it has no quality or the quality of urban life here is discounted. For instance, you can imagine from this image that one may encounter terrible traffic. In Beijing, the average one-way commute time to work is about one hour and ten minutes and it is too long.

Foil 4

The question is how convention today is defined? If convention is defined as common practice, we would have some problems with it because it is just something being practiced over and over again. It does not make it right.

Foil 5

On the other hand, if it is a reasonable practice, suggesting there are some collective wisdom behind the practice, then we say that it is probably okay. As a practitioner, I deal with conventions everyday. Each time I have to ask myself if the convention is engaged simply as the most popular way of doing something or rather there are some wisdom behind it.

Foil 6

I would prefer convention as reasonable practice and interestingly I often find it in tradition. In tradition there is always experience, knowledge and lessons accumulated, which could also make a good convention.



Foil 7

After all, convention is a moving target. It changes, it evolves. And now I will bring in architecture. When we practice, we constantly work with conventions and push conventions probably into something different in the end. I like to start by going back to the notion of tradition to talk about the project in question, which is the Novartis Shanghai Campus.

Foil 8

This is a typical Chinese courtyard house. This one is in Beijing. An architectural plan like this is rather abstract. In such a plan, you see buildings enclosing on a court on four sides but other than that, it does not really give you much idea how it works. In reality, that is how the courtyard is occupied: One's life is unfolding inside of it. You can see the plants and the birds in the cages. The person could have tea or a cigarette. It is a living space; it is a living room without roof.

Foil 9

That is what the courtyard is about. The photo must have been taken in summer time because the man is wearing a short sleeve shirt. But the door to the interior spaces is open. You can see life in the courtyard continues inside the room. This life style, which does not rely on air conditioner, is made possible by this very specific spatial structure. At much different scales and for different ways of living, the courtyard may still work.

Foil 10

This is a garden dwelling in the south. It has not a small courtyard as in the picture you saw previously since it is a much bigger house.

Foil 11

In this image, you find courtyards of different scales, and there is a combination of landscape elements as well as architectural ones.

Foil 12

This is the plan of ancient Chang'an, Xi'an is its present day name. You might have heard about the pottery figures from the Qin Dynasty there. The whole city was organized as matrix of courtyards, which were at much larger scale than the domestic courtyards and programmed for public and commercial functions.

Foil 13

Next example: Courtyard became an urban square in this case, a linear one. Actually, it is a very special one. The shape is almost like a boat.

Foil 14

This drawing portrays a rural palace, a palace that is not in the city but in the open landscape with a very complex programming, since it has to be self-sufficient, in a very clear structure of courtyards.

Foil 15

We studied all these different courtyard organizations with different programs and



scales and came up with one appropriate strategy to do the master plan for the Novartis Shanghai Campus.

Foil 16

We started 11 years ago and were presented with a difficult challenge: How to make the work place more livable? We knew that we wouldn't be doing a typical or conventional research park. Later on, the mandate became clearer.

Foil 17

It is really about doing a home for scientists. It is a place where people come to work but also it has to be a place where people feel like they are living.

Foil 18

With that mandate we were given a piece of land in a scientific park outside of Shanghai. It is a peninsula with canals around it.

Foil 19

We then applied on the site our research on courtyards, called our idea "courtyard urbanism," and produced a master plan organized with different courtyards and a certain level of density which we believe would achieve certain level of livability on this campus.

Foil 20

Basically, it is a big garden courtyard in the middle with café and restaurant, tea house, etc. Office and research laboratory buildings on both sides of it. There is also a convention center. Almost every building has its own semi-private courtyard. That is the spatial structure of the campus.

Foil 21

In a typical scenario of urban sprawl, there are pieces of land that are residual and wasted; however, we thought all the urban or public spaces should be structured and connected. We were trying to say: "We don't agree with the kind of the urban development in generally in China, we want to do something different, hopefully better."

Foil 22

This is Phase One, which is completed and fully occupied.

Foil 23

This is an overall view.

Foil 24

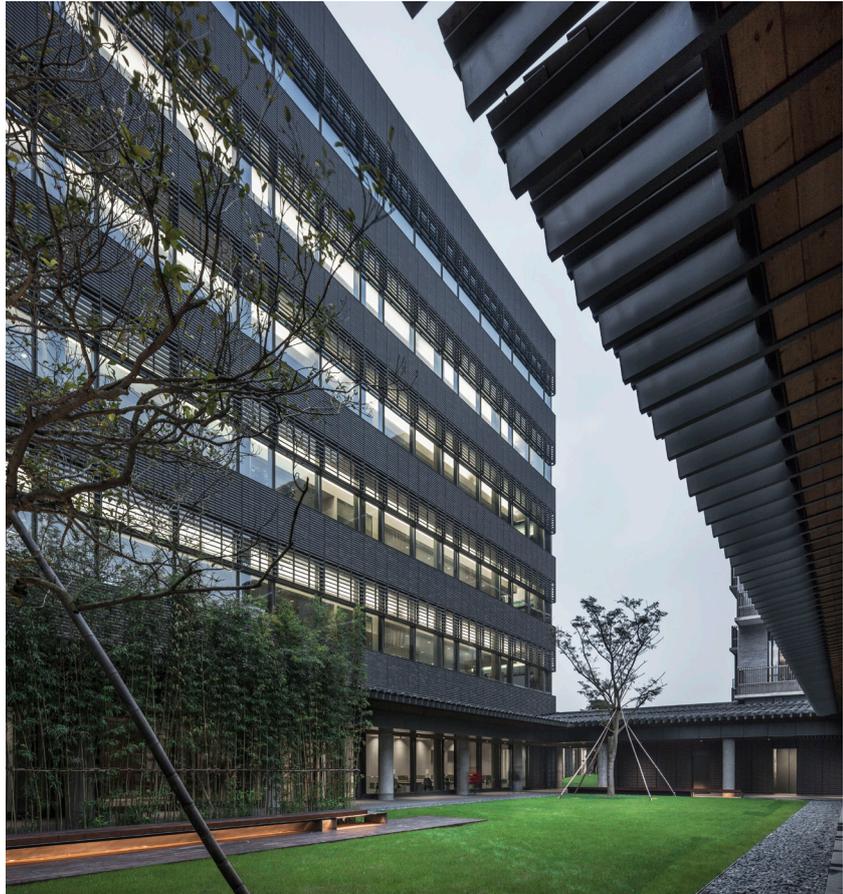
We also designed one of the laboratory buildings.

Foil 25/26

Our lab compound design is also centered around a courtyard, with a lab tower on one side and a single-story restaurant on the other side.



1 Exterior view of one of the laboratory buildings
Source: LV Heng Zhong



2 The building by night
Source: LV Heng Zhong



Foil 27

We have quite a few restaurants on the campus, which makes the campus more like a place to live rather than just a place to work.

Foil 28

This is our courtyard, simple in form but with subtle traditional flavor.

Foil 29

You are entering it from the big garden courtyard. Here is the restaurant on your left and then you enter the lab building on the opposite side.

Foil 30

Here is another view of the courtyard. Now you stand in front of the lab looking back to the restaurant.

Foil 31

We also did the interior design for the restaurants.

Foil 32/33

You can see from the inside of the restaurant the big common courtyard on the right. The individual smaller courtyard is on the other side.

Foil 36

These photos were taken at an earlier date and now people are really using these buildings.

Foil 37

Contemporary buildings in China are much bigger than the traditional ones. However, I believe that there is still a way to carry on the kind of material sensibility in the traditional Chinese architecture in the new one. We have used clay products, clay tiles and clay bricks, for hundreds or thousands of years. These materials defined Chinese architecture.

Foil 38/39

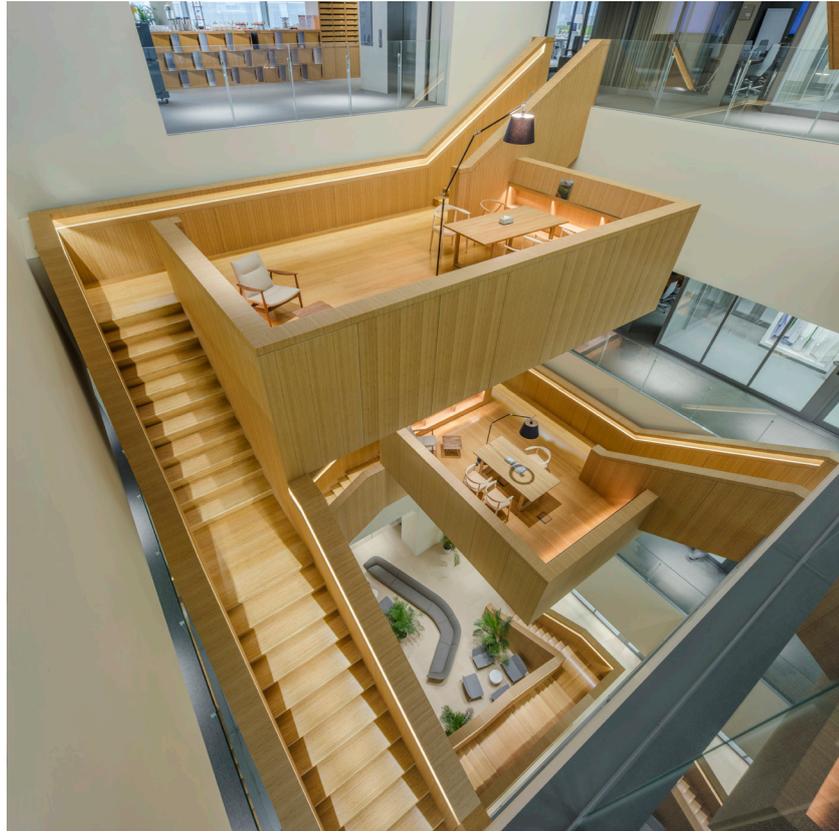
Today we still use some clay product but also more industrialized material such as terracotta. For our Novartis building, we used the terracotta product as the main material to convey the idea of clay tiles. Since we picked four different shades of grey for the terracotta component on the exterior, the color and texture of our facades has a similar richness of the traditional brick architecture. The terracotta piece has a profile like a baguette. You can see the “baguette” is vertical here and you see how it is rotated a bit and starts to open. Gradually the “baguettes” open more and make a louver.

Foil 40

We are now inside of the building. The question for the interior design was how we can carry the quality of public spaces outside to the inside. The shared public space should be always near the scientists.



3 Interior: the "tea houses"
Source: LV Heng Zhong



Foil 41

After discussing with Novartis, we got the idea of treating the common areas in the lab like a tea house in the garden, but in a very contemporary way.

Foil 42

In the middle of the labs, we have a stack of "tea houses" going all the way up while connecting different levels. The "tea houses" serve as lounges, reading rooms, or places where people can meet for a tea or coffee.

Foil 43/44/45

People are encouraged to walk up and down the stair cases rather than taking the elevator. For the lab building, each floor is 5 m high. We did not know if people would take our invitation to walk up and down. Later on, when we went back, they were climbing the staircase very much. You can see the different levels from the central staircase and have visual connections with other labs.

I was talking about city because that is what the theme of this symposium was calling for and it was a very important subject. I also wanted to say, we should understand that



architectural spaces are very much extensions of the city. City does not stop at the door of a building. It goes in and it brings people in.

Foil 46

I hope that such an understanding could also be a convention for city making. The conclusion: We need to work very much with conventions, to improve upon them, and may eventually come up with new conventions.

Thank you very much.

Karin Salm:

Thank you very much. May I ask one question? You told us about these courtyards and in house tea houses. How does it function? Are people using these rooms?

Yung Ho:

Yes. The medicine industry and the way they work is very much like architecture and the way architects do. They work in teams and the work environment is very important in terms of exchanging ideas. The best place is not in the lab or in a conference room but in a relaxed place where they could enjoy a coffee or tea. This was the idea for these tea houses, although they are not really designed specifically for anything. Maybe some colleagues haven't seen each other for a while, they run into each other on the staircase, and they sit down and started talking.

Thank you again.

Herzlichen Dank unseren Projektpartnern



Medienpartner:

TEC21 espazium ≡

