“Art Improves the City”

An Art Centre Project proposed in Chifeng, China.

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During the accomplishment of this project, there are many people who have supported me, without their encouragement this project will never be possible.

First of all I would like to thank my supervisors for their dedicated encouragement, guidance and patience,
To my friends, their continuous support and criticisms are much appreciated.
Last, to my beloved family for their continuous love and great confidence in me all through there years.

Acknowledgements
Art has always been treated as nourishment for the mind and a spiritual tool that improves the quality of life. It arises out of the experience of life but is the distillation of life. It can provide aesthetic enjoyment, and it is also a powerful expression of ideas …

This project aims to integrate artistic activity into the urban context of a moderately sized Chinese city where almost no such activity presently occurs. The encouragement of artistic expression is thought to enhance the quality of the lives of the people and the architectural construction necessary to achieve this is likely to improve the city.

When building an art centre in a city that is combining art and architecture, what kinds of energy will it bring to the city and to the urban life of people who live in it? To be more specific: In what way can art exist in an urban context? What strategies can be used to allow art to improve a city and its urban life? How can this be achieved through the architecture?

The project intends to provide a new “art life” for the people of Chifeng in two different but related ways: passively and actively. The art centre will have an active and a passive capacity. Passively it will offer more opportunity to appreciate art, and actively, it will encourage and support people in the urban context to make active artistic contributions to the city. Hopefully, the Art Centre, will bring life and energy to Chifeng by creating an interactive place which will inspire creativity and generate a more active artistic expression in the city.

Abstract:

Art has always been treated as nourishment for the mind and a spiritual tool that improves the quality of life. It arises out of the experience of life but is the distillation of life. It can provide aesthetic enjoyment, and it is also a powerful expression of ideas …
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1. Introduction
Introduction:

“A wonderful life is not merely eating to be satisfied and being comfortably warm...Besides the material needs, we still need a spiritual life, which is art...that is a higher level of life that is beyond the general material life. It is also the direction of the development of human civilization.”

--- Fei Xiaotong

The aim of this project is to create an environment to promote the connections between art and an urban citizen's life, through inserting an art centre and a related "art network" into the city. If people are able to understand and appreciate art more, if they are able to actually enjoy the beauty of the artworks and be energized by them, perhaps even think deeply about life, then art fulfills a role as a public educator. In addition, if it is possible for art to be blended into people's lives, if they can visit an art centre, if they can learn to enjoy art, perhaps then a better culture will have been provided for the people who live in an urban environment.

In China, a highspeed developing society with a vast and growing economy, where everything has been changing rapidly for the past 20 years, art, culture and people's values have been strongly impacted. The fast industrialization and busy lifestyle has made for high intensity, highspeed and highpressure lives. In contrast to the development of society, the development of the identity and individuality of the common Chinese person is becoming increasingly important. At the same time, fast-paced and stressful work has made people's urban lifestyles more isolated, with even less communication possible between them.

More and more people have begun to choose art as a tool to express a spiritual attitude to their lives, where they can use art to find an inner peace, to calm their hearts and to develop a clearer understanding of the world. Providing a space for this will not only give them spiritual tools to inspire their thoughts and open up their minds to thinking about their way of life, but it also will create a place for people to have more opportunities to communicate with each other, while at the same time contributing art to the city.

Outline of Project
The project can be divided into two stages.

First stage
The research objective here is a city master art plan. An “art network” will be set up in the city. The proposal intends to use each local district school as a subsidiary art centre, which will form a whole network of art activity places in the city. The schools are scattered throughout the whole city. They will be used by students in the daytime, while at night and on the weekends, art classes will be provided. Thus the schools will become like “art institutes” for people who live nearby.

Second stage
Here the focus is on the central art centre. The site chosen is located in Hongshan - the Old city of Chifeng. The city of Chifeng consists of four parts: Hongshan (the Old City), the New City, Songshan...
(which is between the Old City and the New City) and Qiaobei (a newly developed area). Because of government policy, the New City has already been developed, and more and more people have moved there. Consequently, the original city area has begun to decline and lose energy. A new art centre, set in the Old City Zone, will inject new vitality and power into the original urban context, and also recall the value of culture and the memories of a city, meaning that perhaps it will become the new icon for the whole city.

This central art centre will be also divided into two parts: which may be called “Passive” and “Active”. In this case, the “Passive” part refers to the art gallery spaces for appreciating art, and the “Active” part to the art workshops where learning about and actually producing art can take place. Under normal conditions, an art gallery contains just the “Passive” part, with perhaps a small proportion for an “Active” part. In this project, the “Active” part is as important as the “Passive” one.

“Passive”
The “Passive” role can be described as the “face” of the art centre. It is intended to be a welcoming place with many attractions to draw the public into art. Therefore, the location is important, as it should be quite bustling but not harsh, so that people will gather and be able to feel comfortable. The “Passive” area consists of a group of new buildings, which will form a “porous” museum. People will be easily able to enter this place to “touch” art. Also, this place could become a casual communication space for people.

“Active”
The “Active” part is the “backer” of the art centre. It is a very crucial part of this project, and a point of difference when compared to other art galleries. This area requires a relatively undisturbed environment so an artist can produce art and so that people will be able to learn about art. In Chifeng, because of the development of the city, there are plenty of old houses, which are in too poor a condition for people to use. Though they bear the weight of history and of memories, they have been forgotten and abandoned by the city, and will be torn down someday. Most of them are used as residential buildings in an unprosperous area surrounded by multi-storied buildings. The Active part of the art centre will choose and reuse a stretch of these as art workshops, refurbishing and reusing them, and recalling the memories of the city; this will set up a positive attitude towards these old houses.

Connections between “Passive” and “Active”

Physical connection:
These two parts will be connected by physical points, some of which will be set between the Passive and the Active. Or, the existing environment will be explored and utilized as the connection between them.

Conceptual (or spiritual) connection:
The Passive part, the art gallery, will house the research and study resources for the Active part. In the other direction, outstanding pieces of art works from the Active part will be sent to the Passive part for exhibition. In this way the virtuous circle and a tighter integration will be formed between the two parts.
2. Research
2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Art Dissemination Issues

Three theories have been utilized in this project as art dissemination and promotion strategies, in order to provide more opportunities and to allow ordinary people to gain a greater access to art……
2.1.1.1 Outreach programme

“Outreach” means: “the activity of an organization, in making contact and fostering relations with people who are not connected with it; the fact or extent of this activity.” An outreach programme can be applied to a variety of fields, such as marketing, education, sports and medical treatment. In general, it is a type of service offered to people as close as possible to where they live instead of getting people to travel long distances to attend a programme.

Usually, cultural institutions provide this kind of Outreach programme to the public as cultural dissemination. Before the last decade, Museums and galleries were created to educate and inspire the general public by example through the interpretation of objects. In recent years, they have increased both the range and type of activities undertaken both inside and outside the walls of the institutions, creating a modern picture of their contemporary capacity to interact with institutions and individuals.

There are a number of case studies and examples that show the ways museums and galleries interact with their audiences and influence the public realm in which they operate.

“Art doesn’t just belong to an artist, it belongs to everyone” is the poster of the AAC (Art Academy of Cincinnati) Community Outreach Programs. It puts this philosophy into practice by promoting creative opportunities for local people to make and enjoy art. “We work with public schools, community organizations, and corporate sponsors to spread the joy around, sharing not only our expertise but also our passion for art.”

The following relate some experiences from the Outreach programs carried out by Tate Modern and Tate Britain Museums:

“At last my art project is over and I feel absolutely fantastic… I have learnt a lot of art skills. I’ve improved my writing and my drawing skills which I’m very happy about.”

--Kane, Year 6, North Beckton Primary School.

“Through working with the artists in the gallery and back at school the children were able to draw on their experiences to produce descriptive writing with an insight not evident before.”

--Amy Shields, Class Teacher, Sheringham Junior.

These programs highlight the ability of museums and galleries to create social capital, educating and empowering individuals and groups, creating networks and stimulating dialogue. Importantly, they also inspire creativity in their audiences, thereby enhancing both individual fulfilment and, through their contributions to the creative industries and broader economy, the well-being of the nation.
2.1.1.2 “User Friendly” - “Porous” Museum

“User Friendly” is another strategy for art dissemination and promotion. For an art institution, creating a User Friendly environment for its visitors is important so that the museums and galleries can actually make art accessible to the public. Today, a huge number of museums and galleries worldwide advocate and apply the principle of User Friendly. In architectural terms, how to build a User Friendly environment through architecture is a considerable issue.

Some projects involving art institutions or other types of architecture apply the concept of “porous” and these have some useful aspects for reference.

The Getty Centre in Los Angeles uses the concept of a group of buildings to create a “porous” museum that makes people feel easy about entering it. People can travel easily inside and outside and among the buildings, which provides a more relaxed atmosphere for their visit.

Another precedent is a special commercial project designed by Benjamin Wood in Jinan, Shandong province, China. It is a building complex consisting of two lines of three-storey buildings with irregular edges and connections on every floor. The strategy of this project is that through building a pleasant environment people will be drawn into the area. People can easily get into this area through gaps in the buildings and move freely across the connections from one building to another.  

Fig. 2.3: "Porous" circulation of Quanlefang
Fig. 2.4: Birds' View of Quanlefang
2.1.1.3 “Active” part in an Art Centre

Nowadays, cultural institutions seek to create a more dynamic relationship with visitors. In developing these new relationships, “museums and galleries should now be perceived as active rather than passive institutions; producers as well as suppliers of knowledge and experience.” 9 Thus, museums and galleries no longer just have the passive capacity for appreciating and enjoying art, but more and more art institutions have started to create a more active capacity to support people to participate in making art as well.

Located on the mezzanine level of Auckland Art Gallery, there is a Creative Learning Centre which is open during regular opening hours and is free to visit. Learning programmes with a variety of related events are provided there to give opportunities for visitors of all ages to engage with visual art. In the process, visitors can explore how works of art come into being and how artists observe and explain the world that we know and imagine. 10

The “Active” part in an Art Centre plays a very important role by giving ordinary people the chance to interact with art, which involves not only passively receiving information, but also encourages responses to and reaction with art. Thus on the one hand, the gallery allows people to understand art more, and on the other hand, it encourages people to make artistic contributions to society.

In 1964 the international Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites was introduced in Venice with the following words:

“Inbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. People are becoming more and more conscious of the unity of human values and regard ancient monuments as a common heritage. The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity.”

With this aim, Architectural Conservation has been defined as:

“the process through which the material, historical and design integrity of mankind’s built heritage are prolonged through carefully planned interventions.”

These interventions are critically combined with artistic, contextual, and informational values.

There are two schools of thought in this field, which are “Preservation” and “Restoration”.

“Preservation” encourages the idea that historical buildings should be protected and maintained in their current state, in order to be protected from further damage. The proponent of this school of thought, John Ruskin, thought: “respecting national architecture whose importance it is impossible to overrate: the first, to render

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the architecture of the day historical; and, the second, to preserve, as the most precious of inheritances, that of past ages.”

In “Restoration”, the main supporter was Eugene Viollet-le-Duc. He advocated that historical buildings should be improved, using current materials, design, and techniques. The definition in his article on ‘Restoration’ states: “To restore a building is not to preserve it, to repair, or to rebuild it; it is to reinstate it in a condition of completeness which may never have existed at any given time.”

In recent years, although these two schools of thought are in conflict, they have still had a large influence on conservation and reuse projects.

**The situation of Architectural Conservation in China**

In China, the consciousness of Architectural Conservation has been taken increasingly seriously and valued more highly. A large number of building conservation and reuse projects have emerged in recent years. The traditional Chinese Quadrangles-Siheyuan (a courtyard surrounded by four buildings) in Beijing is a significant cultural heritage in the Chinese context. Taking it as an example, there are several ways of dealing with and reusing it. People have said that Siheyuan is so old and shabby that it needs to be transformed or it will be simply torn down. To this question, Liu Thai Ker has answered that: we should seek various methods to preserve it as much as possible, and there are actually many. The first method is to rebuild it according to the prototype, which means rebuilding an exactly similar one as the original building. Then second one involves repairing part of it, using current day materials and techniques to make it look like the original building. There is another way of building reuse and conservation. Ma Yan Song, the director of MAD Architect, introduced a new element to Siheyuan in the Hutong Bubble project, which provides a new perspective on traditional ways of dealing with conservation and reusing projects.

This project will utilize and combine some of these theories and methods to deal with the conservation issue, to respect and respond the local context.

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14 Ibid. 279.
16 Liu Thai Ker, is the Adjunct professor, Honorary Doctorate, University of New South Wales.
17 Jun Wang, Beijing Record, A physical and political History of Planning Modern Beijing. ([Beijing]; Sanlian Shudian publisher2003), 23.
2.2.1 Art Zones

“Urban cultural space is one of the organizational forms of urban space. It is also an indispensable component of public life.” \(^{19}\) The Art Zone is a new typology, in Chinese cities. “The Art Zone or artist village is a kind of specific and new cultural phenomenon arisen in Chinese Mainland in 1990s.”\(^{20}\) The Art Zone is a collection of parts, including an art institute, art galleries, artist studios, exhibition spaces, retails, cafe & restaurant and other spaces. It is not a simple concept of an area, but a symbol with various possibilities that art can provide for the public, combining the pursuit of art as a comment on the state of society and modern life, which begins to actively support the right to find a person’s own voice and individuality.

A number of Art zones were the first to appear in the first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

\(^{19}\) Weidong Li, "From the 798 Art Zone to See the Growth and Function of Urban Cultural Space", SuiHua University Academic Journal 06, (2010), 139.

\(^{20}\) Ibid, 141.
This precedent has set a new idea about what an art centre should looks like. Is it a big box that is a container for art? Is it a serious and sacrosanct palace that makes people nervous? Or, could it be friendlier to ordinary people? The 798 Art Zone creates a new idea and a new attitude. It makes the art centre more accessible to ordinary people. It makes people feel comfortable and relaxed when they get in touch with art. Another “bright spot” of this project is the reuse of the old industry buildings, which is an efficient resource utilization strategy and gives respect back to those old buildings rather than abandoning and destroying them.

798 Art Centre in Beijing

798 Art Centre is the most representative and was the earliest one on the Chinese Mainland. It is located in the 718 factory of Beijing Seyenstar Group, Dashanzi Area, and Chaoyang District. The total construction area is 230,000 square meters, and it brings together many artistic and cultural elements such as art galleries, design studios, art exhibition spaces, artist's private studios, fashion shops, cafés and restaurants. It is a new rising, avant-garde and trendy space for contemporary art and culture, and has become an exhibition centre for Chinese art and culture, an influential culturally creative concentration area of native and overseas art. 21

798 Art Zone reuses the old industrial plant and the old pipelines to create new spaces for art, which are not only inside the old buildings, but also outside between the old buildings. People here, when they walk through the interior and exterior spaces, can appreciate the art, have conversations, and enjoy the artistic atmosphere within the urban environment that surrounds the complex.

As an art village, the form of architecture is a group of buildings, therefore, the scale of the building makes people feel comfortable when moving though the building group. Secondly, there are plenty of small urban roads that run across 798 art centre, so the designer has just used this existing road network, and developed the empty spaces as culture and sculpture squares. When there is an intersection of the two roads, there is a big and impressive gallery, a café or a book store.

Fig. 2.8: Sculpture on the square of 798 Art Zone

Fig. 2.9: Alleyway in 798 Art Zone

Fig. 2.10: Cafes and restaurants in 798 Art Zone
Fig. 2.11: Courtyard space in 798 Art Zone

Fig. 2.12: Gallery space in 798 Art Zone
Tianzifang Art Centre in Shanghai

Tianzifang is another famous Art Zone in Shanghai, China. It is an arts and crafts enclave that has been transformed from legacy residential architecture and factories into an “artsy” area. It is known for art galleries, design studios, small crafts stores, cafes and narrow alleys. It has become a popular tourist destination in Shanghai, and an example of preservation of the local Shikumen (stone-framed-door houses) architecture.22

There are two main points of difference between Tianzifang and the 798 Art Zone in Beijing, which makes the Tianzifang Art Zone a place that is more relaxed and closer to daily life.

Firstly, the reused buildings of Tianzifang were mostly residential buildings rather than factories, which provides the art zone with an atmosphere that is closer to daily life. The reuse and preservation of this local Shikumen architecture also sets an example of the possible kinds of architecture able to be used for an Art Zone project.

Secondly, the existing building functionality, the scale and streets are also very different. Tianzifang features the reuse of a renovated residential area, where the buildings are mostly one to two-storey old houses. In this residential area, the streets are mostly small and narrow alleyways. This kind of scale of building and street makes visitors more comfortable; they are more willing to slow down and even to stay in a small coffee shop, spending the whole afternoon on a visit.

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2.2.2 Art Gallery & Museums

The survey of Art Galleries and Museums mainly focuses on the specific aspect which may have relationships and links to this project. The precedents have been analysed with Plans and Sections in terms of circulation, function and space especially in the foyer, the different types of galleries, and the outside spaces between the building groups.

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

The Auckland Art Gallery is the most direct and touchable research resource for this project. It is the principal public gallery in Auckland, New Zealand, and has the most extensive collection of national and international art in New Zealand. It is set below Albert Park in the central city area of Auckland. The Gallery was established in 1888 as the first permanent art gallery in New Zealand. The New Gallery, across the road from the main gallery, shows contemporary art. It is located in the former Auckland Telephone Exchange Building which was converted in 1995 into a rather daring fusion of Edwardian and contemporary architecture. The new gallery construction was completed in 2011.  

Three things need to be mentioned that are relevant to the project in Chifeng:


The first one is that, this project is a restoration and expansion work, a new building added to the original building, which makes the whole project complex. It lacks a clear route and direct route, making the circulation inside confusing, and leading to a number of “blind spots” on the visitor’s journey.
The second is the foyer space. When you come into this building, you first enter into a one-story height space, which makes people feel oppressed and uncomfortable. However when you turn around the reception area, and go up a series of stairs, you suddenly find a three-story height space which is what you expected to see at the entry, and the hall space is a pleasant place to be in.

The third point is worthy for learning. There are some openings at the higher level of some two-storey height exhibition space serve to connect the corridor spaces, provide a view interlace, which will not disturb the visitor who moves at lower level, but enrich the walking experience of the visitor in the corridor space.
There are three different basic types of space in this project. The large turbine hall for foyer area, which is also the space for special exhibitions is defined as an open and active space, the medium but high exhibition spaces, and some small and undisturbed gallery spaces. “The space is designed dynamically: loft-space, the spacious foyer and exhibition space with a classic look, varied in height, area and lighting, giving an intense rhythm to the colossal dimensions.”

24 This variety of spaces is connected by bay windows, which not only create interactive links between large and small spaces, but also function as light bars decorating the turbine foyer space.

A large entrance ramp, which is as wide as the turbine hall, was created to draw people into the huge foyer space. Without any stairs or other forms of cues, the visitor steps into the foyer where, the large entrance ramp makes a deep impression on visitors. When they start to walk on the ramp, they have already unconsciously enjoyed the experience of the huge space in turbine hall.

There is a park in front of the Tate Modern to make the surrounding environment “softer”. However, as the design does not give a clear guide of the outside route, the main entrance is too inconspicuous to be found by visitors.
The Getty Centre (a group of art galleries)

The Getty Centre in Los Angeles was designed by Richard Meier in 1997. This museum is much like a college campus, consisting of a group of buildings with a series of outdoor spaces between them. Openness, flexibility and transparency are the impressions recorded by the visitors who have been there.

The design treats the outside space as importantly as the inside. The spaces between the buildings have been thought out as carefully as the spaces within the building. The outside spaces have been organized to run through gardens, platforms, ramps and stairways. This has created good rest spaces for visitors, in order to avoid museum fatigue. When talking about how the movement between inside and outside is organised, Meier said: “The existing Getty Museum in Malibu already allowed you to walk from garden to gallery to garden. We transferred that concept here.” 25 The circulation is very flexible, where the visitors are guided by the relationship of the buildings to one another. There is no fixed route, but people “can go one place or you can go another place. Always you have diversity.”26 There are five pavilions in the complex, each of which is accessible from the outside, and the designer has used large pieces of glass to make the inside spaces more open to the surrounding areas.

25 Ibid. 54
26 Ibid. 60
Schaulager

Schaulager is a new and unique art exhibition and storage space in Basel, Switzerland. It was built in 2002 and designed by Herzog & de Meuron. The building includes a public museum, an art storage facility and an art research institute.

“It is a new kind of space for art. It is neither museum nor a traditional warehouse.” 27

The art works are not stored as is usual in dark and unnoticed boxes; instead the collection storerooms are open for viewing by visitors, which make the stored art works play an active role in the understanding and appreciation of art. In addition, Schaulager also focuses on the research and dissemination of contemporary art. It is also a research centre for specialists in the different fields of art, for both students and researchers, and is open for teaching and research the entire year.

This precedent shows an active attitude towards art through a unique Art Centre. It gives a different perspective on art and a different way of thinking about art, which makes the Art Centre a great place for actively and creatively learning about and enjoying art.

2.3 City Research

CHIFENG

General information: Location, Area, Population

Chifeng is located in the southeast of Inner Mongolia in China, which is 480 kilometres from Beijing. It is at the intersection of three provinces, the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Liaoning province and Hebei province. The total area of Chifeng is 90275 km², and the urban area is about 70km²(10km*7km). Approximately 1 million people live within the city boundary and 4.3 million in the greater Chifeng area. It is a famous tourist city, and also where I have lived for 20 years - it is my hometown.

History and the Art Situation now

Chifeng is one of the birthplaces of the ancient Chinese civilization, and it was once the political, cultural and economic centre of the Liao dynasty. It has a rich historical and cultural background. However, today Chifeng is a third-grade city in China. Although this city has a long historical standing, the artistic atmosphere is not well developed, and the lack of relevant art institutions limits the art life of the local people. A new art centre with local distinctive characteristics would be an important addition to the city's cultural heart.

Climate:

Chifeng has a four-season, monsoon-influenced, continental steppe climate, with long, cold, windy but dry winters, and hot, humid summers.

The monthly mean temperatures range from −10.7 °C in January to 23.6 °C in July, with an annual mean of 7.5 °C.

Nearly half of the year’s rainfall occurs in July and August, and even then dry and sunny weather dominates the city.

In most parts of Chifeng, the annual sunshine hours are 2700-3000. During May to September, with cloudless skies, the sun shines up to 12-14 hours a day, and the usual percentage of sunshine is from 65% to 70%.

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<td>Mean monthly sunshine hours</td>
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<td>210.1</td>
<td>254.4</td>
<td>259.2</td>
<td>281.0</td>
<td>263.5</td>
<td>254.0</td>
<td>259.3</td>
<td>281.4</td>
<td>241.1</td>
<td>201.0</td>
<td>189.6</td>
<td>2,875.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: China Meteorological Administration

Fig. 2. 36: Climate data for Chifeng

River systems

There are two main river systems that go across the greater Chifeng area.

The ancient Xilamulun River and the Laohahe River run from West to East like two main veins in the human body. The long and short branch rivers in this land intertwine together, co-existing with mountain ranges and the vast grasslands.
River systems in the urban area

The Xibo River, the Banzhijian River and the Yin River are three small headstreams of the Laoha River, which meet in the Chifeng urban area and form the Yingjin River, which finally joins the Laoha river.

Fig. 2. 38: The map of urban area with rivers going through
The river situation today

Although the rivers cross the Chifeng urban area, and therefore ought to be an important element of the city, as time has passed, less and less water has flowed from the upper reaches, which together with the low rainfall means that the river beds in the Chifeng urban area have become drier and drier. So finally, the city has lost its waterscape.

Fig 2.39: Photos of current river situation in Chifeng.
(1), (2) In Summer; (3), (4) In Winter
Urban Area

City structure: four parts of the city

As already mentioned, the city area consists of four main parts: Hongshan (Old City), the New City Zone, Songshan (which is between the old and new city) and Qiaobei (new developing area).

City Circulation:

There are several main roads across the city. The oldest ones are Hada Street and Zhaowuda Road. They were formed originally in the old city, Hongshan, but now extend to connect with three other parts of the city. Hada Street goes from east to west, and extends to the New City, making a connection between old and new. Zhaowuda Road goes from the north to the south, ending there at Chifeng Railway Station. To the north it is connects with the Songshan district. Yulong Great Street is a new main street formed when the new city was set up. It goes from west to east, connecting to the Songshan district at the east end. At the west end of this road is the Western Gateway to the highway.
History of urban development

Chifeng City has a rich history. As early as in the **Xia** and **Shang**
30 era, in the greater Chifeng area, ancient towns began to emerge. Through thousands of years, across numbers of dynasties, Chifeng city has gone through times of rise and fall.

As a modern urban city form, Chifeng is just about 200 - 300 years old.

It first appeared in the **Qing** dynasty, in the 22th year of the **Qianlong**
31 reign (1757). The rudiments of the city were composed of just nine streets. This type of city form is called “nine streets with three markets”. The area of the city was approximately 3 km² and the population at that time was about twenty-five thousand.

In old China, before liberation, the development of cities and towns was extremely slow. For 190 years, the form and scale of the city experienced almost no change.

Until the new revolutionary China was setup in the 1940s, Chifeng city was still composed of 6 streets running east to west and 3 streets running north to south, with another road leading to the railway station.

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30 Xia Dynasty (c.2070-c.1600 BCE), was the first dynasty in China to be described in ancient historical chronicles. Shang Dynasty (1600BC-1046BC), according to traditional historiography, ruled in the Yellow River valley in the second millennium BC, succeeding the Xia Dynasty and followed by the Zhou Dynasty.

31 Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), was the last imperial dynasty of China. Qianlong, was the third emperor of Qing dynasty.

Around the city, there were six kilometres of cob defensive wall and nine gates to the city. The six streets east to west still exist today. They are parallel to the Xibo River from north to south. The southernmost street, Sixth Street used to be the boundary street of the city and is today one of the main roads--Hada Street, while the road leading to the railway station is another main road-- Zhaowuda Road. All the streets and roads then were dirt roads, with an overall length of street being no more than 12 kilometres.
After liberation, the urbanization process made great development possible. The urban area approximately doubled each decade. Four urban master plans were made from 1950s to the present, and three of them have been carried out.

The first one was in the year 1975, for the planning period of 1975-1985. The urban area increased to 14.25 km², and the population to 150-200 thousand. A big step made then was to use the west bank area of Xibo River and to extend the original street grid south to the foot of Nanshan Mountain.

The second urban master plan, was for the planning period between 1989 and 2010. The urban area increased to 86.5 km², and the population rose to 500 thousand. In 1989, zoning was created in the city. The five zones were the old city zone, the eastern city zone, the western suburbs, Qiaobei district and Qiaoxi district. Each district had different functions and the urban centre was set in the old city zone, which was the political, economic, commercial and cultural centre. This was also residential area.

The third master plan, which is also the latest one, created the urban morphology of today. In 2002, the Government decided to develop a new city zone, a strategy which moved attention to the west to build a new city and also extended it northward, creating a large new area. This finally forms the four main parts of the city: Hongshan District (old city), New City Zone, Songshan and Qiaobei. The government moved to the New City, to become the new political, educational and residential centre of Chifeng.  

Fig. 2. 45: The map and the city zoning of Chifeng Today
Ancient Chifeng’s urban structure originally emerged in the Hongshang District and most of the oldest streets still exist today. The district is especially famous for the six streets parallel to the Xibo river. As the city developed from First street to the Sixth street, the old city zone centre moved in the same direction, from First street to Sixth street. Now, Hada Street which is the original Sixth street, has become the largest of the six and it is one of the main streets in the city today.

Currently, the old City centre is around the central part of Hada Street, with one public square, one walking commercial street and a public park and other amenities.

The pattern of the old city is basically composed of city blocks. Most of the buildings are residential and between six and seven stories high. Some commercial buildings or office buildings are higher than seven stories and are gathered in certain parts of the city. Also, a few 50-60 year old single-storey houses are scattered about the old city. Such is the basic type of the building in the old city.
Functions

Commercial building

Residential building combine with Commercial office building
Fig. 2. 48: The city functions of Old City central area.
Fig. 2. 49: The city functions of Old City central area. (2)
The Traffic

Fig. 2.50: The Arterial, Side and Back Roads in Old City central area
3. Design Process
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Design steps

3.1 STEP1. City Master Plan:

How can art improve the city, how to encourage art so that it enters into people’s lives? Will building an art centre be enough or will it be far from enough?

Firstly, Chifeng, as a third-class city in China, art institutions are utterly lacking. There are only two museums located separately in the “Old City” and “New City”. These however, mainly provide storage for historical relics. In addition, there are a few unsystematic and unorganised small galleries and retail shops scattered in the city.

Secondly, art for the average Chifeng person is an unfamiliar concept, to the point that a large proportion of them do not know what art really is nor what an artist does.

Therefore, a more amiable and friendly gesture needs to be given to the local people, to make art more easily understood and accessible to them.

3.1.1 Distribution & Connection

Based on the analyses above, the first problem is how to deal with the big question of setting up an “Art-Network” in the city. This should include a big central art centre which would be located in the old city and a number of small, evenly distributed art institutions to be set up all over the city. The relationship between the central centre and the smaller ones will be like a “mother-child” relationship, where the sub-institutions connect to each other as well forming a network.

In more detail, each of the sub-institutions will be like an art-point that will serve the people who are adjacent to it and provide art classes for the public. After working hours and during the weekends, people will be able to find the nearest “art-point” in which to spend their spare time, rather than just sitting at home watching television.

The Art-Network, especially the “art-point” around people will draw art closer to them, and give them a more powerful and practical illustration of art.
3.1.2 Using the local schools

In order to further this scheme, a series of specific numbers are needed to pragmatize the scheme. Firstly, general information about the city, such as the population distribution in the different districts, how many people each living quarter contains and what percentage of the people will look to use it. These figures will determine the number of sub-institutions, and the service radius of each point.

The result shows that sub-institutions are needed far more than initially estimated, and to build new ones will be an enormous undertaking for the city. At the same time, a rational question needs to be asked - what will these buildings be used for when people are working? Are they going to be empty during the daytime, with all the rooms and equipment idle?

Using local schools is obviously a better solution. Firstly, their locations are based on the population distribution, which will fit the service radius and satisfy most of the needs of people. Secondly, from the point of sustainable development, the local schools have ready-made classrooms and equipment for art classes. Finally, the timing is complementary to normal student teaching time. In the daytime, the schools are occupied with daily teaching, while after that and in the weekends, those classrooms can become creative spaces, where art classes will be offered.

This solution will make the Art-Network scheme more practical and allow for a more efficient resource utilization.
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Design steps

3.2 STEP2. Central ART ZONE

The second step of the design will involve concentrating on the central art centre, which is the “heart” of the whole project. The art centre will be designed to have the capacities of “passive” and “active”. The “passive” part will be mainly for visitors to appreciate art while the “active” part will be focused on allowing participants to produce art. An interactive environment that is very receptive will build a comfortable place for people to understand art, to make art and to communicate with each other. This might lighten the presentely dreary city and it might become a place full of creativity and vitality.

Site Selection in the Old City:

The rich and long-standing history of the old city has been mentioned and in order to revive it, the site of the central art zone will be located in the Old city of Chifeng.

There are several choices for the site of the central art zone.

Site A

This is located in the middle part of the First Street. In the 1950s and 1960s, First Street was the most prosperous area of the city. Today, there is still a large stretch of old simple single-storey houses on the north side. The project intends to use an Express transfer station. In this area as the site, which is a twenty-four thousand square metre open space and to reuse a stretch of old houses for workshops.

Fig. 3.3: The location of site A
Site B
The second, site B, is located in the middle of Hada Street. The size is smaller than the A and C sites - approximately twelve thousand square metres. There is a public square, a public park, a commercial walking street and a historical museum nearby. It is in the central area and the most popular place in the Old City. In the morning, people choose the public park as their morning exercise place, while in the evening, the public square is filled with hundreds of people dancing and playing games. In addition, there is another stretch of old houses a short distance along a small busy commercial street near site B.

Site C
Lastly, site C is located at the intersection of the two main roads – Hada Street and Zhaowuda Street. Here there is a piece of empty inactive land, on an area that is as large as site A. This site option is convenient to the centre of the city, and is prominent, with the ability to attract attention so that it might become a very influential place in the city.
Based on a few key factors such as location advantage, vehicle access, pedestrian experience and historical value, and a comparison and analysis of each of the three sites, site B has been chosen as the most appropriate site for this project. There are two main reasons for this.

Firstly, although site A has a long historical background, as the city has developed the centre of the city has moved gradually from First Street to Sixth Street. Today Sixth Street, Hada Street, has become one of the most important streets in the old city. An art centre on site B will easily draw people to it, making the project more accessible for ordinary people.

Secondly, compared with site C, site B does not have vehicle connections that are as convenient as those of site C. However, the environment is not as harsh as site C. When passing by site C, it hardly catches your attention because of the rushing traffic and harried people. Due to the surrounding key elements like the public park and the public square, the environment that site B provides is “softer” than site C. It will have a large number of relaxed pedestrians passing by, and it is likely to become a very relaxed place for an art centre.

There is another, special reason for choosing site B. The original building on site B before the year 2000 was a cultural institute called the Cultural Palace in which it was possible for people to have various art lessons. Therefore, taking site B as the place of the art Centre, will be to some extent, a contextual continuation for this piece of land.
Fig. 3.6: The comparison of three sites.
3.3 STEP 3. Two-Parts:

After making the selection of site B as the “passive” part of the Central Art Zone, which will be located in the middle part of Hada Street, it then becomes logical to reuse the stretch of old houses that is not far from this “passive” site as the site of the “active” part of the project. As a result, the Central Art Zone will be naturally divided into two parts: the “Passive” Centre and the “Active” Centre.

The “Passive” Centre is mainly for art gallery spaces, which will be a group of newly built buildings, while the function of the “Active” Centre is primarily for producing art works, and will reuse a stretch of old simple houses for the art workshops.
3.3.1 “Passive” Centre: “Porous” Art Gallery.

3.3.1.1 Site Analysis:

The site of the “Passive” Centre, is the most popular area in the Old City. It is surrounded by three streets, which are Hada Street to the north, Xinhua Road to the west and a small commercial street – Huayuan Hutong to the east.

Surrounding it are some popular places and famous buildings of Chifeng, where there are always many people gathered. These places are the public park called Changqing Park beside the site on the north, the public square on the opposite side of Hada Street, a primary school on the west side of Xinhua Road and a commercial walking street opposite it beside the square.

The surrounding buildings are a 122.4 metres high office tower beside the site to the west, an old historical museum on the northwest corner of the square and a theatre diagonally across the Hada Street and Xinhua Road intersection.
3.3.1.2 The Design Concept - “Porous”

Because the essence of this project is to build an environment for people to have more opportunities to pay attention to and “touch” art, the concept of a “porous” gallery is proposed. The “passive” centre therefore will use a group of buildings with interactive internal and external spaces, allowing people to easily get access into the gallery, and providing more possibilities for people to understand art and enjoy the artistic atmosphere. This is similar to the “outreach” programme. The idea of a “Porous” Gallery is another strategy to encourage and draw people to touch and feel art.

Fig. 3.8: The sketch of design concept - “Porous”
3.3.1.3 Scheme 1: Initial Design

Understanding the site

As it is an irregular shape, and due to the impact of the tower at the southwest corner of the site that forms the spatial boundary, the site has firstly been divided into two parts, an oblong piece in front the tower and a relatively larger piece to the east, facing the public park. Through combining information from the site analysis with information about the surrounding environment and other natural factors, the small oblong piece has been defined as an open, public space and the large one has been confirmed as the main building block.

Embodying the concept

The concept of the “porous” goes through the whole design process, which is firstly embodied in the initial design in order to deal with the main building block. The large area has been divided up as a grid, which forms a group of small masses with four orthogonal streets, which let people move around easily and entre this area from all the different directions.
Combining with the function

After the concept of a group of buildings was formed, the initial design was further developed by combining a consideration of the function and the defining of the appropriate positions for each part of the building, which has created a variety of scale of the buildings and given a clearer route for visitors. At this stage, the best place for the main entry appears to be a location on the northeast corner of the site, which faces Hada street and is also opposite the public park across the small busy commercial street. By facing Hada street the entry will have a more public and noticeable presence, and through facing the public park and the small commercial street, it may provide a better pedestrian flow, a “softer” environment which actually corresponds to the entry to the public park.

Making the mass fit the site

The group of buildings consists of six pieces, which began to take a basic shape and to fit the site after confirmation of the scale and the position of each building. The arrangement of the initial streets has been also confirmed.
Further development of this scheme

The buildings began to have a relationship with each other through being connected by bridges, which makes the group of buildings more integral. An internal square has been formed by raising the central building on to a series of columns underneath. A number of inside sub-spaces has been created as the transitions from outside the building group to the inside square.
Fig. 3.13: The outcome of Initial Design
3.3.1.4 Scheme 2: Building Forms

Regard to the site with an angle

After defining the basic mass, scale and positions of the group of buildings, the design needed to consider the building form and shape. In order to gain more sunshine and respond to the irregular shape of the site, the central building has been rotated to face the south. The surrounding buildings have been modified to respond to this rotation. This arrangement keeps the basic shape of the inside square, at the same time creating a series of irregular sub-outside spaces, which can make these small spaces between the buildings more interesting and alive.

Scheme 2.1: Further development of this scheme
The Outside Circulation in the Building Group

This scheme provides a clearer and more direct route for visitors. The entry is still in the northeast corner of the site with corresponding space to reinforce the entry to the public park. From the Art Centre entry, the stream of visitors will be divided into two main branches, one of which will lead to the internal square of the Art Centre by passing through the sub-space, with the other directly leading to the open public large square in the northwest corner of the site. There are three other sub-entries to the site; they are located at the gaps of the buildings at the edge of the site. Through these gaps, the sub-entries, the stream of people will be just like water infiltrating the Art Centre. It will be porous.
Zoning and the Basic Function

At this stage, it seems appropriate to address functionality. As has been mentioned, the art gallery is composed of six buildings. The large one beside Hada Street has been chosen to be the main entry hall of the centre. Beside it is the largest building in the group, which will become the main hall for the art centre and the large gallery spaces. The function of the three small buildings surrounding the central one at east and south is for quiet, small gallery spaces. The last building, which is connected to the public open area, is the library of the centre.

Connections between the buildings:

There are also connections between the buildings in this scheme, which will be uncovered bridges or covered corridors. These firstly connect the surrounding buildings to embrace the sense of the space inside the building group. Inside and between the buildings, there are covered bridges to connect the central one with the other surrounding buildings, providing more possibilities for the circulation inside.

Building Heights

The building heights are different, however they are related to each other, thus forming a gradient and making the building group more integrated.

Internal Square

In this scheme, the internal square has been more emphasized than the former one. This allows a large part of the central building to come down to the ground so that it forms a screen blocking the views from the outside, thus forming a stronger sense of the inside square, together with the other buildings. Nevertheless, there still remains a small part that rises from the ground to be supported by columns underneath. These columns extend to the open space beside the central building, which makes for diversification of the inside square.
3.3.1.5 Scheme 3: Developed Design

For further development of the design, the functionality has been made clearer. It now includes a foyer space for welcoming, a number of large and small gallery spaces, a library for resources and research, storage space, a number of small art shops providing art supplies and some art works, some cafés and restaurants and more.

**Underground Floor**

The underground floor is mainly for storage space. There are five large storage spaces under the gallery and library buildings, these are connected by passageways to each other so that transportation can be made more convenient.

Another piece belongs to the foyer building. The Art Centre is connected to the Hada Street underpass, which will catch the people flow from the other side of Hada Street through the underpass. The foyer building is more like a distributing centre and lies open to the public.

Fig. 3.17: Underground Floor Plan
Ground Floor

The foyer space, the multimedia room, a part of the gallery space, art shops, cafe and restaurant and the library are on the ground Floor.

The foyer building is a three-storey building, with two “arms” collecting the people from the east entry and the large west external square. People from the two “arms” with the ramps go down into the foyer space, meeting the people from the other side of Hada Street through the underpass; thus the foyer space gathers together a large number of people, and becomes a “knuckle” for the circulation (people flow), with the Art Centre reception desk in the foyer space.

The multimedia room, located in the central building which has no need for light, and a part of the gallery space in the other three gallery buildings are surrounded by the art shops. The art shops will mainly sell art supplies and art works, and mostly face the suboutside spaces and passageways, while the cafe and restaurant are located around the internal square, making the internal square a more communicative and alive place.

Fig. 3.18 : Ground Floor Plan
First and Second Floors

The first and second floors are largely occupied by the main hall and the gallery spaces. There are some connections such as bridges and corridors between the buildings on the first and second floors. From the foyer building, a series of stairs goes up, and people are brought into the main art gallery hall through the connection between the foyer building and the central art gallery building. The main art gallery hall is a two-storey space with a view down through a void, which draws people’s sight and allows a good view of the internal square. This is a second welcoming place and also the actual starting point for the “Art Tour” where some local large art works will be displayed. This main art gallery hall is like the centre of the whole “passive” part of the centre. There are a number of connections linking the central building to the other small buildings. When you first enter this “passive” centre, through the foyer, and stand in the main hall, you can easily get a clear map in your mind about where and which direction to go in, making the “Art Tour” easier for unguided visitors.
Third and Fourth Floors

In the building complex, only two buildings – the central building and the eastern building that have third and fourth floors. The two higher floors are mainly gallery spaces in each building. This provides less disturbance for the small gallery spaces, without complex circulation and busy people disturbing the atmosphere.

Fig. 3.21: Third Floor Plan

Fig. 3.22: Fourth Floor Plan
Fig. 3.23: Perspectives of Scheme 3
3.2.2 Old: “Active” Part - Reuse of old houses for Art Workshops.

Fig. 3.24: The sketch of the old houses
3.3.2 Old: “Active” Part - Reuse of old houses for Art Workshops.

In more usual situations, most art galleries allow a limited proportion of space for an “active” part, which is where people will learn about and produce art. As mentioned earlier, in this project, the “active” part is as important as the “passive” one.

Compared with the subsidiary “institutes” of the art network which have been placed in local schools, this “active” centre is a more intensive and more efficient place for art classes and for the production of artworks. People will be able to listen to the lectures of some famous artists and various kinds of art classes can be centralized here. The most important thing in this “active” centre is that through having classes and lectures and making artworks together, people will have the opportunity to communicate with each other, making the “active” centre more active.

The “active” centre plays a very crucial role in the whole programme. It will connect normal people to “real art”, which means it forms a middle step or intermediary institute between the subsidiary local schools for beginners and the art galleries for professional artists. The subsidiary local schools, the “active” centre and the “passive” centre (the main art gallery) will form a three-step link. Specifically, an outstanding person from each subsidiary school could go to the “active” centre for further study, and the outstanding pieces of artworks could be sent to the main art gallery for exhibition. This will lead people into an art world step by step and also allow art to be integrated into Chifeng people’s lives.

The site selection for the “active” centre.
The site of the “active” part is not far from the main art gallery. It is about a five minute walk (approximately 300 metre) from the main gallery and reuses a stretch of the old single-storey houses which are mostly 50-60 years old.

Some considerations in choosing the site of the “active” part:

From the physical aspect, as the whole art centre consist of two parts, the “passive” and the “active” parts, the two parts as a whole should not be widely separated. However, because the functions of each part are different, the two parts require different environments. The main art gallery needs a relatively casual and lively atmosphere to attract more people, while the art workshops need a relative undisturbed and inconspicuous environment for production of art. The current site on Changqing Street satisfies these criteria. It reuses a stretch of old houses, which are surrounded by residential buildings, and it is about 300 metres from the main gallery. Between the two parts is a public park and a small commercial street connects them.
Spatial Requirements

Due to the functional requirements of the art workshops, the space they take up need not be as large as is required for the gallery spaces. Smaller spaces for painting studios, classroom spaces for lectures and training sessions, and relatively bigger spaces for making sculpture can all be satisfied in a one or two storey space. The space available in the old houses meets the requirements of the art workshop spaces.

Historical Aspects

One special point of reusing the old houses is the historical factor. Almost all the old houses are approximately 50 years old, and now this kind of building is disappearing in the city. However, the old simple houses like these which will be selected as art workshops still contain the memories of generations of local people. They have gone through the ages, and still stand in front of us, stating the ir-value, and the old house itself is the symbol of context of Chifeng.

Urban scale

Today, this kind of old house is being replaced by multi-storey buildings, and will disappear someday in the future. At the same time, a type of city scale – single storey with alleyways will also be lost. The feeling of going through or standing among tall buildings compared to walking around single-storey houses with alleyways or being in a traditional courtyard is quite different. When you stand in front of a skyscraper, you can clearly see or feel only the
podium part not the whole building. The scale of the tall buildings is uncomfortable and depressing for human beings, while the small scale of old houses is a suitable scale for people. Hence, to keep and reuse the old houses is to keep a particular kind of urban scale alive in the city, and it also adds to a diversification of the city environment.

Sustainability

Sustainability is also a big issue for the modern Chinese city. In 50 years, China has gone through a rapid urbanization process. Due to industrialization and modernization, millions of modern architectural buildings have arisen in the cities, replacing the old ones, even those with historical value. The consciousness of sustainability has only occurred late in these years of very fast development. This project, which reuses one stretch of the old houses, will set an example for the third-class Chinese city, and create a positive attitude and a new way of dealing with similar old buildings.

Fig. 3.26 : Different kinds of urban scales
3.3.2.1 Scheme 1: analysis of the information about the site and the master design

The site of the “active” part of the design is located at the back entrance of the public park in the middle Changqing Street. It consists of approximately two hundred small simple old houses. When you first look at it in Google maps, it appears as just a group of messy old houses with little to distinguish them from the other buildings surrounding. The basic form of the old houses is of a simple single-storey brick house with a double-pitched roof. The average size is about 12m x 6m by 3.6m high.
At this stage, the design firstly focuses on the master plan of “active” part. Based on the messy, disordered and crowded situation of the old houses, the general idea is firstly to select the relatively larger houses as art workshops and studio spaces, then to indicate the main and subordinate entrances to this area.

The second step is to then create some open spaces to make connections between the larger houses which have been selected as art workshops. Creating open outside spaces, firstly, gives an order to the disordered and messy houses and makes the routes clearer. Secondly, it breaks up the crowded houses and gives this stretch some “breathing” space. This process not only creates outside spaces for art workshops, it also creates connections between buildings, enabling communication spaces for the “art makers”, and making this stretch of houses more integrated as an art zone.

A third step utilizes the large open space beside the back entrance of the public park making it a landscaped space for the “active” centre, so that it not only serves as the entrance to the park, but also becomes the collecting and distributing centre for the “active” centre – art workshops. This also allows more interaction between ordinary people and the artistic activities.
Fig. 3.32: the outcomes of Scheme 1
3.3.2.2 Scheme 2: Rearrangement of the workshops in the master plan with respect to the alleyways
The reality of the situation after a site visit

During the mid-semester break in the research programme year, a further research trip was made to China. The reality of the situation is quite different to the information that had been gathered before. Firstly, the old houses are more intensive than they had appeared to be on Google maps, and a large number of the courtyards are covered by canopies. Secondly, there is a gate at the back of the public park with surrounding brick walls which only allows pedestrians to enter. Lastly and most importantly, these small old houses are ordered by alleyways, which indicate the clear route of people. In addition, a lot of information was obtained during this site visit, such as data, photos, and information about the material of the old houses.

Fig. 3.33: the realistic situation of the old houses
Based on this new information, the design has needed to be modified.

First of all, as an alteration project for old buildings, and with consideration of the value of the old houses, it is best to respect the original texture of the site. Therefore, the alleyways that exist in the site should remain and be rationally utilized. The alleyways will still used as paths between the stretch of houses, and the wall beside them will remain to keep the form and feeling of alleyways.

From the site visit, a lot of useful data and information was gathered. The heights of the old houses are actually diverse. These can be summarized as three basic dimensions: 3.6m, 4.0m and 4.8m, and the form of the old houses can be distinguished as double-pitched roof or flat roof houses. The second step then is to select the relatively larger and higher houses with double-pitched roofs to rebuild and transform them into the art workshops by combining them with the selection that has been made in scheme 1.
Thirdly, as in scheme 1, scheme 2 creates some open spaces in this stretch of houses. This time, knowledge about of what can be removed is clearer. Only newly built and flat roof houses with no historical value lie between or beside the art workshops have been removed.
The last step involves, rearranging the big open area in front of the public park. As has been mentioned, the back gate of the public park and the brick walls that surround them were the big surprises on the site visit. To make the public park more open and to integrate this large open area into the “Active” centre, the back gate has been removed so that people can easily come into this area. However, the brick walls should remain to retain the sense of alleyways and protect the privacy of the art workshops. Furthermore, the surrounding brick walls also form the boundary between the art workshop areas and the public area. Therefore, the brick walls are broken up by a number of large or small openings, which builds the “conversation” between the two areas.
Scheme 2.1: Functions:

This “Active” centre contains several functions. They are:

- **Lecture Rooms**: For having big lectures
- **Classrooms and Workshops**: For painting and making models or sculptures
- **Studio Spaces**: For artist and design ateliers
- **“SOHO” Residence**: For artists or designers who can work and live in one place
- **Small Gallery Spaces**: For displaying the artworks of the “Active” part
- **Retail and Café**

There are some rules for placing and arranging these functions in the stretch of old houses:

- Firstly, approximately 70% of the “Active” part is composed of classrooms and workshops, which are mainly for people to make art works. This requires a relatively undisturbed environment, therefore, most of the classrooms and workshops are located at the end of sub-alleyways or in places that are a certain distance from the public area.
- Secondly, the lecture rooms and the atelier studios are located in more open areas compared to the classrooms so that they can easily be found by people but they still need for some protection from noise.
- The “SOHO” residences need greater privacy and lack of disturbance. They can be located among the residential houses remaining in this area, but furthest from the public.
- Lastly, the gallery spaces and the retail and cafes need to be located in the open public spaces. The gallery spaces are the “passive” part of this “Active” centre, which means the art workshops cannot be completely isolated from the public. People can come here and have conversations with artists, and furthermore, through these small galleries, people may become interested and curious about how art works are produced. It is therefore the window of the “active” centre to the public.
Scheme 2.2: Developed design about building scale

Materials, structure and interior spaces

The old houses are basically made of brick and timber, with all the outer and interior walls made of bricks and the roof of timber framing. The structure is the most common and simplest one in northeast China, a brick-wood structure. The load-bearing walls are simply the outer walls, where the east-west walls support the triangular timber roof frame, and the gable walls and timber frame together support the large timber beams. Under each of the triangular timber frames, there is an interior wall, but this wall is not load-bearing, it is just divides the space. Usually, the interior space of the brick house is divided into three sub-spaces, of which the middle one is the entrance and kitchen, and both the side ones are bedrooms.

Fig. 3.43: The original structure of the old houses

Fig. 3.44: The original plan of the old houses
After analysing the original structure, the interior spaces and the material of the old brick houses, a steel portal frame, as a structural element has been introduced into the structural system for strengthening the old houses. As has been mentioned, the original structure is that of the east-west walls supporting the timber frames together with the gable walls supporting the roof. As 50 years have passed, the triangular timber frames that are the crucial structural elements have become the weakest point in the system. The steel portal frame replaces the role of the triangular timber frame that directly supports the roof, and sets the east-west wall free of load-bearing. While transferring the load directly to the ground. At the same time, the frame will also strengthen the east-west brick walls, making the whole structure firmer. From the point of view of functionality, as the function of the space is transferred to art workshops or classrooms, the portal frame can set the whole inside space free, so that all the interior walls can be removed to form a large space inside. The triangular space in the roof is now available and people can feel the large roof space above them.
Scheme 2.3: Kang – the heated brick beds of Northeastern China

The heated Kang is the highly sophistication creation of people in the severely cold areas of Northeast China. It is made of brick, the width of it is as wide as the room, one end beside the kitchen stove through another room, the other end next to the chimney, with a smoke channel connecting the kitchen stove and the chimney. When cooking, the smoke carries the heat through the channel, so that the brick bed is heated. In cold weather, the Kang is the most comfortable place for people to stay. Therefore, in the past and today, people spent most of their daily time on the Kang, sleeping, eating, visiting friends, making things and spending their leisure time there.

Fig. 3.47: The photos of the “Kang”
In combination with architecture.

This project will retain the form and the heating function of the heated brick bed and utilize the Kang as a design element to diversify the space inside. To be specific, some of the art workshops will still remain on the heated brick bed, such as classrooms and workshops. Now however the heated brick bed is no longer a bed, it becomes a large half metres high platform, a place where students will spend most of their time making art and practicing painting and other things. It will still lie at the two ends of the room, while the central space is available for giving small lectures by teachers.

All the northern cities in China have a central heating system, although this mostly applies to the newly built multi-storey buildings built after 1970s. Obviously, there is no central heating in this stretch of old houses, therefore, the design keeps the brick bed and utilizes it as a method to resolve the heating problem.

Fig. 3.48 : The combination with architecture
Scheme 2.4: Canopy

Canopies are temporary constructions usually covering the upper space of a courtyard. They are scattered throughout this old housing area to provide a transition space between the inside and outside. They are an important element of the local lifestyle.

Currently situation, most of the canopies are in an old and shabby state of disrepair. They are made of prefabricated steel tiles, which block sunshine into the courtyard. As a consequence, the areas that have been covered by these canopies are overlooked and used only for storage.

This project is about reusing these old houses, while at the same time, providing a new solution by creating better transition spaces between inside and outside with the canopies.

To be specific, there are some principles involved in rebuilding the canopies:
Firstly, with respect to the old houses, and as far as attaching elements to them, the canopies should be build without any intervention into the original building fabric. They exist mostly beside and attached to the old houses that have been selected as art workshops. Some are located between two houses and provide a connection between them; some are set at the corner of the house with a corresponding shape that varied the outside courtyard spaces.
Secondly, allowing sunshine into the courtyards. The material of the canopies will be glass, which will make the outside space less dark and gloomy, and allow them to become like “lighthouses” in this area at night.
Lastly, the canopies must be harmoniously related to the surrounding old houses. According to the arrangement of the traditional Chinese courtyard – Siheyuan, the form of the canopies is a subordinate element, but one which can be utilized in a double-pitched roof of variable size and height, giving a harmonious picture of a staggered roof.
As has been mentioned in the last Scheme, the large open area could be utilized as a more public area. On the one hand, it is an extension of the public park beside it; on the other hand, it draws life to this area of old houses.

Further to this thought, Scheme 2 develops a more detailed exploration.

To slow down the pace of the visitors, the landscape firstly creates a sinuous route in this open area, which can gather more people together, so they have a chance to notice that there is a “Active” centre beside them.

If there is a park in a Chinese city, there are usually several small groups of people chatting to each other. Therefore, secondly, according to the local customs and the method of communication, having provide a general path, the design creates a group of small sub-spaces that allows people to have conversations next to the walking route.

Thirdly, the design of the small landscape elements not only creates paths and green areas, it also provides a seating place with a slight slope that people can sit or even lie on the grass to enjoy the sunshine.

With the slow pace, gathered people, and the relaxed visit, the whole area will be filled with life, creating a more comfortable and receptive environment so that people can enjoy passing the time and noticing the art.
Fig. 3.58: The layout of landscape
4. Critical Appraisal
Critical Appraisal:

This project intends to provide a more abundant life through art for the people of a moderately sized city in China, by utilizing a series of art dissemination strategies with conceptual and physical methods, to create a more “art accessible” environment for the public.

This aim can be achieved through the setting up of an “art network” for the whole urban area and by building a special art centre with two different but related capacities, which will passively provide more opportunity to appreciate art, and actively encourage people to make artistic contributions to the city.

The “art network” will be supported by the strategy of an “outreach” program provided by the central art centre. The success of this will be dependent on the actual implementation process.

The Central Art Centre consists of a “Passive” part and an “Active” part, where the “Passive” part of the Centre provides a group of buildings with an acceptable form that will be integrated with each other. Providing a comfortable space for people to easily access the art galleries, thus becoming an example of a “Porous” Museum. The “Active” part of the Centre which is not far from the “Passive” part, will have an undisturbed environment and be of a moderate urban scale, creating a suitable place for people to learn about and to produce art.

As a “Porous” Museum, the “Passive” part, will have a security issue, which needs further and more detailed design work to resolve.

Perhaps an interchangeable circulation, combines with the concept of “Porosity”, could be researched as a further study on this topic.

This project offers a new lifestyle for the people of Chifeng, which works towards the idea that art improves the quality of an urban life. If this is successful, it could become a cultural strategy that might be applied to other cities in the Chinese context to realize the essence of “Art improves the City”.
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7. Appendix
Final Presentation

ART IMPROVES THE CITY

CHIFENG

BEIJING

SHENYANG
ART IMPROVES THE CITY
ENTRANCE SQUARE
SECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE
1. Entrance Foyer
2. Reception
3. Underpass
4. Storage Room
5. Multi-Media Room
6. Mechanical Room
7. Shop & Retail
8. Exhibition Room
9. Cafe
10. Library
11. Gallery Main Hall
12. Deck
13. Office
14. Bookshop
MAIN ENTRANCE OF "ACTIVE" PART
SMALL COURTYARD IN "ACTIVE" PART