Architectural Education and Accreditation in the People’s Republic of China

Gregory S. Palermo
Iowa State University, gpalermo@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_conf

Part of the Architectural Technology Commons, Cultural Resource Management and Policy Analysis Commons, Environmental Design Commons, and the Urban, Community and Regional Planning Commons

Recommended Citation
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_conf/122

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Architecture at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Architecture Conference Proceedings and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Architectural Education and Accreditation in the People’s Republic of China

Abstract
The following comments were made at the plenary meeting concluding the 1994 accreditation visits conducted by the PRC National Board on Architectural Accreditation (NBAA), under the auspices of the Architectural Society of China (ASC), and the Ministry of Construction (MOC). Four architecture programs first accredited by the NBAA in 1991 had midterm revisits: Tsinghua in Beijing; Tongji in Shanghai; Tianjin University; and South East University in Nanjing. Four were visited for initial accreditation: Chongqing Jianzhu University; South China Polytechnical in Guangzhou; Harbin and Xi’an Universities.

Keywords
architectural education, architecture education in China, architectural education accreditation in China

Disciplines

Comments
This is a proceedings from PRC National Board on Architectural Accreditation at Xi’an University of Architecture and Technology, Xi’an, People’s Republic of China. 15 May 1994.
Architectural Education and Accreditation in The People’s Republic of China

GREGORY S. PALERMO, FAIA
President, National Architectural Accrediting Board
USA

Prologue

The following comments were made at the plenary meeting concluding the 1994 accreditation visits conducted by the PRC National Board on Architectural Accreditation (NBAA), under the auspices of the Architectural Society of China (ASC), and the Ministry of Construction (MOC).

Four architecture programs first accredited by the NBAA in 1991 had mid-term revisits: Tsinghua in Beijing; Tongji in Shanghai; Tianjin University; and South East University in Nanjing. Four were visited for initial accreditation: Chongqing Jianzhu University; South China Polytechnical in Guangzhou; Harbin and Xi’an Universities.

Each visit included international observers. The international observers were asked to present their comments regarding the accreditation standards, accreditation process and the visited schools in the plenary sessions. Closed NBAA discussions regarding those same topics followed.

The meeting was chaired by Professor Gao Yilan, Director of the NBAA. Attendees included NBAA Board members, representatives of the ASC, The Office of Scholastic Degrees Committee of the State Council, the Department of Education of the MOC, and these international observers: David Jackson, president of the Commonwealth Association of Architects, (CAA) from Sydney, Australia; Rocco Yim, HKIA, Hong Kong Practitioner; Ron Herron, professor, FRIBA, London; Oliver Willmore, architect, FRIBA, Hampshire, UK; John Maudlin-Jeronimo of NAAB, USA; and G. Palermo, president of NAAB, USA. Barry Will, dean of architecture at Hong Kong University, also representing the CAA and HKIA attended the visit to Chongqing.

© G. Palermo. Originally delivered as remarks at a plenary session on accreditation of the PRC National Board on Architectural Accreditation at Xi’an University of Architecture and Technology, Xi’an, People’s Republic of China. 15 May 1994. Limited distribution; not previously published. KEY WORDS; “architectural education” “architecture education in China” “architectural education accreditation in China”

Thank you very much for this opportunity to present my observations regarding accreditation and the schools that I visited: Tsinghua University School of Architecture on a revisit, and Chongqing Jianzhu University on an initial accreditation visit.

Deputy Chairperson of the NBAA Shi Xuehai chaired the visits to Tsinghua and Chongqing. He and his team prepared complete reports with specific recommendations for each school. They reflect an in-depth understanding of the history and nuances of each
school, and accreditation standards as they are being
developed in China. My observations here must be con-
sidered as “impressions.” These are based upon the de-
sign work I saw, the conversations with faculty and stu-
dents, the facilities and atmosphere of the schools.

The diagrams I have drawn on the chalkboard will
serve as an outline for my comments. However, I would
first like to recall a few points which David Jackson, Ron
Herron and Oliver Willmore made earlier based upon
their visits to South East, Tianjin, Harbin and Xi’an Uni-
versities:

- You have great potential to build on present
courses – to ensure latent creativity and inventiv-
erness be drawn out.
- There is sympathy, desire and support of China to
develop its own architecture – it will not be
achieved by copying ideas from other countries.
You need to draw out the creativity of the students
in the curriculum.
- The historic architecture of China has a design
quality and integrity that should be looked to – but
not for stylistic reasons. Look to culture, climate,
place and construction – these are the common
central issues to other traditions of long history
and outstanding architecture.
- There are many good technology courses and good
history courses. Stress integrating these into
the design work.
- Incorpor energy technology, studies in ecology and climate in the curriculum.
- Keep to the course of total architecture – do not
become “designers” without the knowledge and
skills for construction leadership.
- Expand areas of creativity and invention. Encour-
gage students to develop individual positions.
- Rely less upon the airbrush and beautiful render-
ings – encourage students to present their thinking
in their presentations to include historical and the-
oretical positions in their design work and presenta-
tions.
- Continue to learn from the accreditation process –
it galvanizes the school to perform its own assess-
ment. Use the accreditation process to clarify is-
suess and to help measure progress.
- In the end, it is the design work you see that indi-
cates how it all comes together.

This is a condensed accounting of just a few points
from their remarks. I repeat them here because I believe
they are relevant to the programs I visited at Tsinghua
and Chongqing, and they will have lasting value as ins-
tsights into architectural education in China.

Now on to the diagrams on the blackboard. The
central figure represents the process adopted in China
for becoming an Architect 1st Class: five years of study
and graduation from an accredited architectural pro-
gram, followed by three years of internship practice ex-
perience, and then taking and passing a national exam-
ination. The NBAA has been created to establish stand-
ards and administer accreditation. The National Board
for Architectural Registration (NABAR) has been cre-
ated to offer the examination and to administer the reg-
istration process. This process owes much of its struc-
ture and substance to the system in the USA.

The effort in the PRC to develop this during the
past five years has been very intense and focused. Sig-
ificant improvements have been made in architectural
educations. The accreditation process is maturing well.
This autumn, you will offer the first ever registration ex-
amination. Your students are exceptionally well pre-
pared in the basics of architecture.

Yet all of this – the high quality of basic prepara-
tion mastered by the students, the improvement in the
schools, accreditation and examination – despite re-
markable results in so short a time, is but a first step. I
say this because the larger objective – the path to excel-
ence in education (represented by the arrow crossing
over the university line) – lies beyond.

The one thought I would like to add to my col-
leagues’ observation surrounds this question of excel-
ence. It is direct enough: We must add the query
“Why?” to the development of skills. The curricula I have
read and the student work I have looked at are very
strong in skills: problem solving process, assessing
building use programs, making functional layouts, basic
building and site planning, inclusion of structure and
codes, and building design composition and representa-
tion. From my observations, your students are as well
or better prepared to enter internship than the majority
of students in the USA. If this is the case, why ask
“Why?”

In education at least, awareness of and mastery of
the unknown is a basic objective. In higher education of
excellence, the challenge is to ask the questions that
push the edge of where we are today. That process demands discourse, debate, challenge to convention, and risk. In the process of asking “why,” we engage in new learning and the development of new ideas. This is no less so in the discipline of architecture than other disciplines.

It is precisely because you now have strong academic programs that you can initiate movement towards excellence. What I would add are four elements: 1) more research into Chinese culture and its meaning in the contemporary environment; 2) research and scholarship into theories of architecture and urbanism – their critique and the new positions for China; 3) stressing invention and risk taking in design – the development of personal values for designing; and 4) using culture, theory, and values to create Chinese architecture and urbanism of intention and purpose beyond style, function and economics. This requires additional information resources, library and research materials, and an openness among the faculty to the exploration of the edge rather than the center. The will to pursue excellence is here, because taking the first steps I mentioned earlier required such a point of view. Which leads me to my final comments.

It is perhaps commonplace that each generation of people prepares the next generation to take its place. However, it is rare that a generation of leaders recognizes the need and opportunity to assert and establish a new paradigm for performance – to take a substantial evolutionary stride. You in this room have taken an extraordinary step to reposition the education, professional preparation and performance of the profession in China. You are true leaders. It has been a pleasure for me to have been invited to play some small part. Thank you.

Through the diagrams regarding the process of becoming an Architect I Class and educational excellence follow below.