The urbanization that China is currently experiencing is explosive and unprecedented in history in its sheer magnitude, impact and scale. This has signified some of the most innovative architecture and urbanism occurring right now in the world. It is not, however, without its challenges, as this rapid modernization has meant some significant social issues such as the widening gap between rich and poor, as well as the depletion of natural resources and sustainable urbanization in favor of the “economic dragon”...

Wang Shu Central Academy of Art, Hangzhou (right)

ARC 591-491: MODERN ARCHITECTURE, URBANISM AND LANDSCAPES IN CHINA RESEARCH SEMINAR
SPRING 2016
Credit Hours: 3 Credits
Class Hours: 9:30-11:40 FRIDAYS
Instructor: SHANNON BASSETT

ELIGIBILITY: GRADUATE STUDENTS AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS (SENIORS)
COURSE DESCRIPTION:
What is contemporary architecture and urbanism in China? We will attempt to answer that question in this research seminar. The objective of this course, is to introduce students to the development of modern architecture and urbanism in China. To do so, we will first focus on specific episodes and ruptures of modern architecture and urban development, by tracing a trajectory of the modernizing influences acting on China, beginning with the Opium Wars and Treaty Ports. Historically, there is often a clear symbiotic relationship between the social, political and economic circumstances with architecture and urban development. Framework+Context Through a series of lectures, discussions, readings and film, students will be provided with a framework in order to ground themselves in an understanding of the historical context of architecture and urbanism in modern China, and how it has developed in its trajectory across the 20th century, with its strong emergence in the last decade, including in new special economic zones such as Shanghai and Beijing. We will examine the work of architects and urbanists, both Chinese architects, foreign trained Chinese architects, as well as foreign architects working in China and their influence. We will begin by looking at the work of several generations of Chinese architects, in addition to foreign architects working in China. The first generation of Chinese architects were foreign trained (most in the US) during the 20ies and 30ies, returning to China and the new profession and practice of architecture in the Republican period after the toppling of the Qing Dynasty. The second generation of Chinese architects from the 40ies were impacted in practice with having to operate under Chairman Mao’s communist state during the period from 1949 to 1976. We will finish the course by looking at the architecture and urbanism of contemporary China after opening up and reform in 1978 by numerous foreign architects, in addition to the third and fourth generation of Chinese architects. Finally we will look at the recent movement back to the Chinese countryside by intellectuals, elites and artists in the wake of the ills of the industrialized Chinese cities, in search of clean air, water and a restored relationship between habitation and nature. We will examine architects engaging with the villages in the countryside as an alternative model of development, including the work of Pritzker winner Wang Shu. Students will required to do weekly readings, participate in discussions, lead a discussion for assigned readings one week, in addition to completing a research paper and small design research speculative proposal as part of their evaluation.