

Fiction of Form: Beaux-Arts as Projective Grammar in Yang Tingbao's Architecture (1930–1981)

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes “fiction of form” to examine how architectural form mediates ideological pressures from institutional mandates, state imperatives, and professional discourse while sustaining cultural resonance in China (1930–1981). Through a comparative reading of plans, elevations, and spatial sequences, the article traces how Yang's Beaux-Arts-inspired design principles were adapted across three Chinese political regimes, as evidenced by Tsinghua University Library Extension (1930), Peace Hotel (Beijing, 1951), and Wuyi Hotel (Fujian, 1981). Respectively, these cases demonstrate institutional legibility achieved through axial order and hierarchical sequencing in the Republican Period (1912–1949); functional alignment via compositional neutrality and façade discipline under early PRC state imperatives (1950s–1960s); and cultural resonance achieved through courtyard sequencing and calibrated thresholds in the Reform era (after 1978). The study situates Yang's work within debates on non-Western modernism and reframes formalism as rhetorical instrumentation rather than aesthetic autonomy. It argues for further research into how architectural form—particularly when derived from Beaux-Arts traditions—can function rhetorically in shaping meaning across diverse geopolitical contexts.

Keywords: fiction of form, Beaux-Arts principles, Yang Tingbao, Chinese modernism

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1990s, China's building boom has been shaped not only by capital flows but also by tender-based procurement, approval procedures, and land-finance incentives—forces that have reshaped how projects are conceived and delivered. The result is visible in spectacle-oriented bids, demolition-led renewal, and homogenised “old-street” makeovers. Contemporary critiques of Chinese architecture often identify two symptoms: symbolic superficiality and theoretical fragmentation. The former refers to procurement-driven spectacle—oversized, image-led façades and lavish interiors—often cultivated through distorted tendering and “strong-leader” decision-making (Research Group on the Present and Future Architectural Design in Contemporary China, 2014). Theoretical fragmentation, by contrast, describes the dispersal of once-shared evaluative criteria into discrete, non-commensurable “rules of taste,” amplified by standardization, formal simplification, and cross-regional replication. Together, these conditions universalize the “local” and erode place specificity (Xu, 2018). While this diagnosis concerns contemporary discourse, it echoes a longer-standing tension: how architectural form mediates pressures under ideological shifts and political discontinuities.

To clarify how this happens in practice, the article turns to 1930–1981, a period that concentrates these tensions under changing governance. Across three regimes, architectural form negotiated shifting ideological balances among institutional mandates, state imperatives, and professional discourse. In twentieth-century China—spanning imperial collapse, revolutionary transformation, and market-oriented reform under state leadership—the built form of Chinese architecture did not evolve along a linear path of stylistic progress. Rather, it emerged as a site of cultural negotiation and strategic ideological ambiguity.

Recent scholarship has begun to reassess Chinese architectural modernity not as a derivative of Western paradigms but as a locally adapted, globally entangled project. Scholars such as Lu (2007) have explicitly challenged the core-periphery model by proposing dynamic, historically contingent frameworks of global

modernism. Rowe and Kuan (2002), while less explicit in this critique, offer valuable insights into how Chinese architects selectively appropriated stylistic elements to negotiate tradition and modernism. These perspectives illuminate how Chinese architects navigated changing international affiliations, from Western influences in the Republican Period (1912–1949) to Soviet models in the early PRC Period (1950s–1960s), and later, market-oriented cosmopolitanism (after 1978). Yet such scholarship often privileges institutional narratives or symbolic readings, leaving an under-examined question of how architectural form itself functions as a medium for deferring explicit political meaning while still mediating institutional claims and professional norms. Accordingly, rather than surveying styles, the analysis reads plans, elevations, and spatial sequences to trace how form negotiated institutional, state, and professional pressures amid regime transitions.

This conceptual approach challenges the modernist dogma of universal functionalism and reframes formalism as a culturally embedded and politically contingent practice. It further suggests that in China, Beaux-Arts principles, derived from the West, were not simply imported academic exercises but became tools for negotiating Confucian ethics, institutional authority, and regime change. Architectural form, in this light, is less a product of aesthetic logic than of discursive necessity: It can construct stability while deferring explicit commitments.

To develop this argument, the article examines three buildings by Yang Tingbao (1901–1982), an architect-educator whose career spans the Republican (1912–1949), early PRC (1950s–1960s), and Reform (after 1978) periods. Educated in the United States at the University of Pennsylvania in the early 1920s, where he earned a B.Arch. in 1924 and an M.Arch. in 1925, Yang returned to China in 1927 and shaped practice and pedagogy for decades. His training placed him among the first cohort of Chinese architects formed under American Beaux-Arts instruction (studying with Paul Philippe Cret and John Frederick Harbeson), a background that informed his procedural approach in later work. Yang's projects provide a continuous, regime-spanning lens: library expansion under university programs (Republican), hospitality under socialist scrutiny

(early PRC), and regionalist environmental design in tourism contexts (Reform). This historical lens shows that today's critiques have operational antecedents and grounds the discussion in observable procedures. Yang's architecture, in this article, is reinterpreted not as a compromise between East and West but as a formal rhetoric that navigates modernity's contradictions without resolving them.

By situating Yang's works within broader debates on non-Western modernism and architectural formalism, this article rethinks how architecture performs cultural translation under shifting ideological pressures. It argues that architectural form in twentieth-century China was not merely a vehicle of modernization; it can also be read as a site of strategic negotiation—a fiction not of illusion, but of composed legitimacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Fiction of Form” as Strategic Ambiguity

In twentieth-century China, architectural form transcended its role as an aesthetic or functional artefact, serving instead as a dynamic medium for navigating the turbulent interplay of institutional demands, political ideologies, and cultural continuities. This study proposes the “fiction of form” as a concept illuminating how formal composition creates perceptual order, cultural resonance, and institutional legitimacy while avoiding fixed ideological commitments.

“Fiction of Form”: Definition and Operative Function

The “fiction of form” is defined in this study as a deliberate architectural strategy that produces coherence and authority through formal composition—axiality, spatial hierarchy, and restrained articulation—without explicit alignment with institutional agendas, state imperatives, or professional doctrines. Its rhetorical form is widely transferable rather than tied to any single institution or culture. Grounded in programmatic ordering, spatial sequencing, and compositional

restraint, this transferability enables buildings to endure across shifting political regimes. Drawing on Eisenberg's (1984) concept of strategic ambiguity—communication that deliberately allows multiple interpretations to preserve flexibility—the “fiction of form” enables buildings to appear ideologically neutral yet culturally and institutionally effective.

In this framework, form is not a mask but a rhetorical device, as Hays (2009) suggests in his analysis of modern architecture's capacity to project detachment while engaging political realities. By withholding overt ideological expression, the “fiction of form” allows architects like Yang Tingbao to create buildings that endure across regimes. This strategic ambiguity resonates with the Chinese philosophical principle of “appropriateness” (*zhong yong*, 中庸), which advocates balance and moderation, enabling form to mediate between tradition and modernism without excess.

Recent scholarship likewise frames Chinese modernity as multiple and assembled rather than a unilinear import. Denison (2017) shows how pre-1949 encounters produced heterogeneous “modernities,” widening the archive of procedures beyond singular Western canons. Building on this, “Ultra-Modernism” situates Manchuria's experiments as portable techniques that could be reweighted across different political priorities (Denison & Ren, 2016). Xinyue Fang and Hua Li complement these Anglophone accounts. Their recent Chinese-language study reconstructs how the 1950s–60s discourse on “architectural theory” was institutionally codified—clarifying the mechanisms by which state imperatives and institutional mandates shaped design procedures—while debates in the 1980s reassembled a modernist vocabulary through professional media (Fang & Li, 2023).

In this article, “fiction of form” aligns with this literature by treating Beaux-Arts–derived procedures as transferable instruments that can be reweighted under institutional, state, and professional constraints, rather than as a fixed stylistic code.

Formal Legitimacy and Cultural Authority

Architectural form derives its power from its ability to confer legitimacy and cultural authority, a process illuminated by Weber's (2019) typology of legal-rational authority and Bourdieu's (1984) theory of symbolic power. Weber defines legal-rational authority as legitimacy derived from structured, rule-based systems, which in architecture manifests as ordered compositions like symmetrical plans or hierarchical layouts. Bourdieu's symbolic power describes how cultural forms legitimize institutions by embedding them in familiar codes that resonate with societal values.

In the Chinese context, Beaux-Arts principles emphasizing axuality and proportion aligned with Confucian ethics of "etiquette" (*li zhi*, 礼制), which emphasizes decorum and hierarchy. This formal compatibility allowed architects like Yang to domesticate Western Beaux-Arts principles without resorting to iconographic hybridity. By embedding Beaux-Arts principles in Confucian spatial ethics, Yang's designs achieved institutional legitimacy without explicit political alignment.

Beaux-Arts as Projective Grammar

Rather than treating Beaux-Arts as a stylistic import, this study reinterprets it as a projective grammar—a system of spatial ordering, compositional discipline, and perceptual choreography. This shift in emphasis redirects attention from external appearance to internal logic, aligning with Middleton's (1982) account of Beaux-Arts pedagogy as an operational language for architectural form rather than a catalog of formal motifs.

Beaux-Arts principles—articulated through their canonical triad of *parti* (a conceptual diagram of spatial logic), *marche* (the sequencing of movement), and *composition* (the orchestration of elements into a coherent whole governed by symmetry, hierarchy, proportion, and rhythm)—offer an adaptable system of design intelligence. These principles allow architects to construct perception, hierarchy, and spatial rhythm through

a formal grammar rather than by prescribing fixed stylistic forms. They produce legibility and ritual structure, rendering Beaux-Arts resilient and operable across regimes with differing ideological priorities—here understood as institutional mandates, state imperatives, and professional discourse.

In the Chinese context, this grammar proved remarkably compatible with traditional spatial traditions. The axial layouts of traditional courtyard houses (*siheyuan*, 四合院) and imperial compounds, for instance, reflect Confucian ideals of ritual order, centrality, and hierarchy, values similarly embedded in Beaux-Arts *parti* and compositional logic. Yet this study does not suggest essential equivalence between the two traditions. Instead, it highlights formal convergence through cultural translation, wherein imported design systems were strategically recontextualized to align with local ethical and institutional codes.

Synthesis and Application

The "fiction of form" integrates strategic ambiguity, formal legitimacy, and projective grammar to reveal how architectural form in twentieth-century China mediated ideological, cultural, and institutional tensions. Unlike modernist notions of form as universal or functional, this concept treats form as a context-specific rhetorical practice, adaptable to political-social volatility. In Yang's projects—Tsinghua University Library Extension (1930), Beijing Peace Hotel (1951), and Wuyi Hotel (1981)—Beaux-Arts principles were not static transplants but dynamic tools for constructing legibility, authority, and cultural continuity. These projects demonstrate that architectural form in modern China functioned less as a neutral container than as a negotiated medium of expression. The "fiction of form" thus emerges not as evasion but as a strategic mode of presence: sustaining legibility without declaring allegiance, and embodying cultural resonance without visual excess.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in formal analysis, with the aim of unpacking how architectural form operates rhetorically within shifting ideological and cultural contexts. The inquiry focuses on how formal strategies articulate authority, convey cultural continuity, and reinforce institutional legitimacy in response to political contingency.

Case Selection: Yang Tingbao Across Three Regimes

The selection of Yang Tingbao's works is guided by both historical periodisation and institutional context. The three case studies span three major phases of China's modern transformation: The Republican Period (1912–1949), the Early Socialist Period (1950s–1960s), and the Post-reform Period (after 1978). Each project serves as a formal response to different political, cultural, and institutional pressures, offering a diachronic view of how Beaux-Arts principles were adapted as a resilient design grammar across ideological shifts.

Analytical Strategy: Formal Interpretation Beyond Stylistics and Aesthetics

Following Evans' (1978) account of the plan as a diagram of social relations and Foucault's (1995) reading of the panopticon as a diagram of power, this study interprets plans, elevations, and sequences as operational diagrams that register institutional, state, and professional priorities. The formal analysis seeks to interpret the rhetorical effects of form, using architectural drawings as primary evidence. The analysis is guided by three interpretive dimensions: (1) Controlled monumentality: how spatial hierarchy, axuality, and façade composition establish dignity and stability without recourse to explicit symbolic ornamentation; (2) Perceptual legibility: compositional clarity and spatial organisation that produce institutional legibility under changing institutional and state conditions; (3) Cultural mediation: how formal devices draw from

vernacular, ethical, or ritual space conventions to establish cultural resonance while avoiding explicit traditional motifs.

Each case is examined with all three dimensions, but with different primary alignments to the ideological levels defined in this article: Tsinghua University Library Extension (1930) is read as primarily shaped by institutional mandates; Peace Hotel (Beijing, 1951) as primarily shaped by state imperatives; and Wuyi Hotel (Fujian, 1981) as primarily shaped by professional discourse.

Sources and Limitations

The primary sources for this study are drawn from the complete architectural drawings and project notes compiled in *The Complete Works of Yang Tingbao* (Li, 2020), a national-level scholarly publication project included in China's National Key Publication Plan for the 13th Five-Year Period and, therefore, a stable, publicly citable source base for drawing-based analysis. These materials are supplemented by period publications and recent historiographical studies. All visual analyses are based on reproductions of original plans and elevations, most of which were directly drafted or reviewed by Yang himself.

While this study privileges formal analysis as a lens for rhetorical interpretation, alternative methodologies such as phenomenological or semiotic approaches could offer complementary insights into user perception or symbolic encoding. However, the present focus remains on form as discursive mediation, foregrounding its agency in navigating ideological volatility.

Tsinghua University Library Extension (1930)

In the 1930s, a pivotal moment in the late phase of "Western Learning Spreading to the East" (*xi xue dong jian*, 西学东渐), Chinese and Western academic paradigms coexisted in tension and translation. In architectural education in particular, this period witnessed experimental efforts to reconcile "Chinese learning as the essential structure, Western learning as the practical method" (*zhong ti xi yong*, 中体西用), producing hybrid pedagogies that sought to

balance cultural resonance with modern functionality (Rowe & Kuan, 2002; Yang, 2002). When Yang was commissioned to design the extension of the Tsinghua University Library in Beijing, both the institution and Chinese architecture were entering a period of transformation that explored nationalism and modernism. This period was marked by political fragmentation, foreign encroachment, and internal instability, intertwining modernization with anxieties over cultural identity and sovereignty (Lai, 2007). In practical terms, university commissions in this period prioritized program clarity, reading-room capacity, and supervision over stylistic declaration—an institutional mandate that shaped the brief (Tsinghua University Library, n.d.).

The university, originally founded in 1911 as a preparatory school for sending students to study in the United States, had by the 1930s become one of the nation's most prominent modern educational institutions (Qian & Wu, 2008). It embodied the ideal of an internationalized, elite academic culture that was still negotiating its relationship with Chinese intellectual and political traditions. The library project marked a significant moment in Yang's early career. At Tsinghua, Yang was tasked not with a new freestanding structure but with an extension, requiring continuity in form while upgrading spatial and functional capacity at the university's core. Accordingly, the brief emphasized stack expansion, controlled access, and legible circulation between catalog, reading, and supervision zones—an institutional priority. The timing further heightened these demands: Months after construction began (March 1930–November 1931), Japan's invasion of Manchuria (September 18, 1931) destabilized the Republican regime (Xu, 2010). In this context, the role of university architecture was heightened, and it was expected to project

institutional stability, cultural maturity, and intellectual seriousness, even as the political foundation of state authority remained fragile.

DISCUSSION

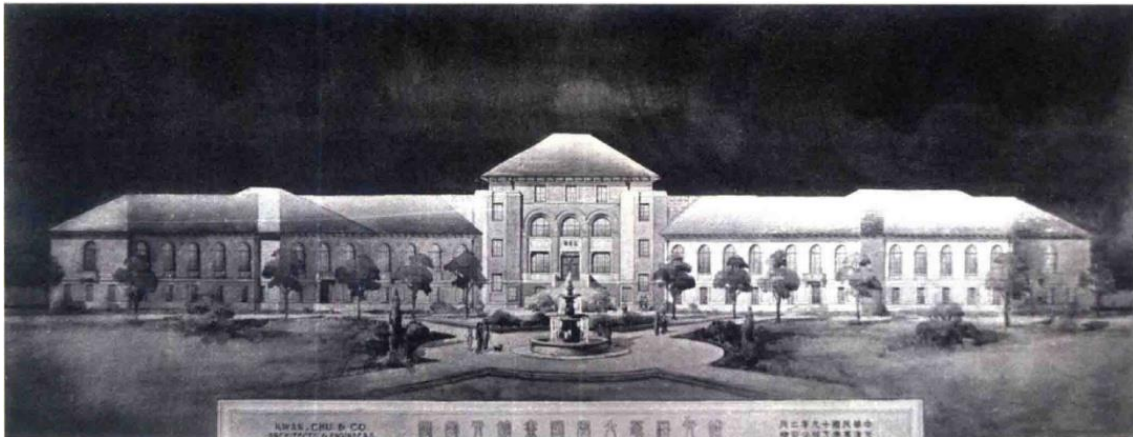
Controlled Monumentality: The Alignment of Axes

The extension of the Tsinghua University Library (Figure 1), designed by Yang in 1928, exemplifies how architectural composition could produce an image of stability and cultural continuity amid political uncertainty. Rather than projecting monumentality through symbolic ornament or nationalistic iconography, Yang's strategy relied on formal clarity, most notably axial alignment and spatial hierarchy, to construct an institutional identity grounded in neutrality and stability.

The overall plan demonstrates a carefully composed integration between the existing library structure, designed by American architect Henry Murphy in 1919, and Yang's new extension (Figure 2). Murphy's original design had already established a symmetrical axis along the central entrance bay, subtly incorporating Chinese roof forms without excessive stylistic syncretism. Yang's intervention respected and extended this logic, linking the original south wing with a new west wing through a four-story central hall. This hall became the new compositional and functional nucleus of the complex. Significantly, Yang did not merely replicate the axial system but restructured it. He introduced a triple-axis configuration: one along the south wing, another along the west wing, and a third along the central hall, intersecting at a single point marked symbolically by a fountain.

Figure 1

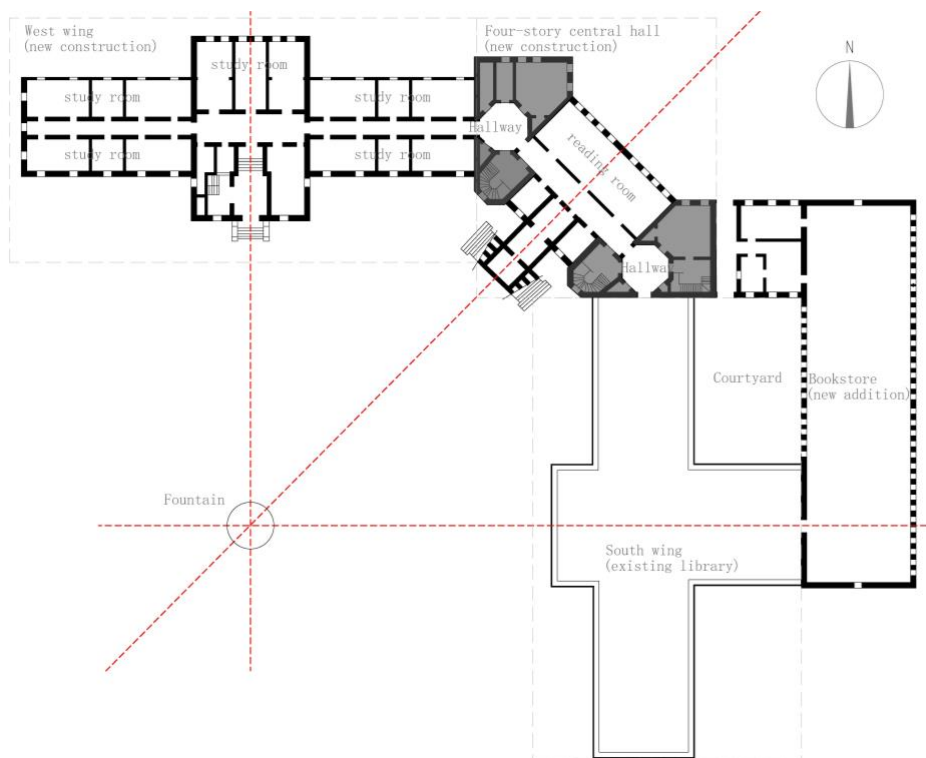
The Rendering of the Tsinghua University Library Extension Project



Note. Adapted from 杨廷宝全集 (一) [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.1] (p. 107), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 2

The First Floor Plan of the Tsinghua University Library Extension Project



Note. This diagram illustrates the multiple symmetries of the building, with the focal point of the axis implied by the fountain. Redrawn by the author, adapted from 杨廷宝全集 (一) [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.1] (p. 109), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission.

This maneuver shifted the spatial and compositional center of the entire library complex, transforming the addition into a recalibrated whole. Rather than simply echoing the existing structure, the extension constructs a fiction of continuity, a spatial field that appears coherent and complete while remaining ideologically uncommitted. Yang's approach echoes the logic of historically informed design: The new design integrates seamlessly with the old by presenting itself as a restoration rather than an imposition, and the extension resists ideological interpretation, instead conveying a sense of temporal neutrality. Simultaneously, this strategy creates a cohesive spatial atmosphere and a building-site relationship that could be read as the adaptation of *cour d'honneur* in Beaux-Arts architecture, a formally composed forecourt framed by symmetrical wings and anchored by a central axis. Much like the *cour d'honneur*, this spatial gesture choreographs entry as a processional sequence. Yang constructs a legible Beaux-Arts order within the library complex, advancing an image of institutional continuity that remains ideologically neutral.

Perceptual Legibility: Sequenced Movement and Space Hierarchy

Circulation within the design is choreographed through a carefully constructed sequence of threshold experiences. As illustrated in Figure 2, movement through the building unfolds along an elongated corridor that connects the west wing to the central hall and the original library structure. At each junction, Yang introduces an octagonal hall that serves as a spatial mediator between orthogonal and angled geometries. These nodes are understated in appearance; there are no monumental thresholds or grand spatial climaxes, yet they operate as structural pivots and perceptual anchors. They offer moments of pause and reorientation before the spatial rhythm resumes. Modest in form and precise in placement, the octagonal halls function like architectural articulations: They preserve circulation continuity between the old and new parts of the complex while discreetly expanding its capacity.

Service areas (represented as grey blocks in the plan) are distributed around these octagonal spaces, echoing the Beaux-Arts technique of *poché* in which thickened wall zones and "servant" spaces stabilize and complete irregular geometries while fulfilling pragmatic needs. This calibrated control of geometry reveals Yang's Beaux-Arts training, though its application here is notably restrained. A similar moment of modulation appears midway along the west corridor, where a shift in rhythm subtly interrupts the plan's regularity, not to delay movement, but to gently redirect it. In both instances, spatial variation is not deployed for symbolic meaning but for operational clarity. Rhythm and repose emerge through proportion and spacing, rather than visual gesture. What results is a sequence in which space unfolds with the right pace and scale; this is where "appropriateness" becomes architectural.

In the history of imperial China, from the Han dynasty onward, Confucianism evolved into the dominant ideological framework for successive regimes (de Bary, 1999). Despite dynastic change, rulers repeatedly drew upon Confucian ethics to legitimize political authority (Elman, 2000). Its profound influence is still clearly visible today. The Chinese government has established the "Confucius Institute" to promote Chinese culture through international exchange, demonstrating the enduring symbolic power of Confucianism. Among its core ethical tenets, "appropriateness" denotes a balanced and context-sensitive way of acting. Rather than dismantling social hierarchies, Confucianism affirms them as morally grounded structures, aiming to sustain order through ritualized and reciprocal relationships. Within such frameworks, "appropriateness" guides individuals to exercise moral judgment and etiquette appropriate to their role and situation. Traditional Chinese architecture reflects Confucian familial hierarchy through its spatial logic. This integration of spatial hierarchy and moral legibility in Yang's design resonates with principles emphasised in Feng Shui practice, particularly within the Form School, which applies Confucian ethics to architectural organization to promote balance, respect, and social order (Huang & Seeumpornroj, 2024). In a traditional courtyard house, the northern main hall (*zhengfang*, 正房) is reserved for the eldest or most respected family member, symbolizing

central authority and moral anchoring. The east and west wings are arranged symmetrically along the central axis, yet remain hierarchically differentiated: The eastern wing, considered more auspicious and symbolically superior, is commonly assigned to the eldest son, while the western wing is designated for the second son or junior family members. This layout spatializes familial roles and Confucian ethics of age, order, and respect. Form, in this context, is not merely visual appearance but a code of moral ordering; it communicates invisible hierarchies that structure behavior, enabling a sense of institutional and cultural stability.

In the Tsinghua Library extension, this traditional spatial ethic is reinterpreted in modern architectural terms. The central reading room anchors the composition both functionally, as the primary site of academic engagement, and symbolically, reflecting Confucian ideals of intellectual centrality and hierarchical balance. Flanking spaces are articulated with reduced massing and secondary circulation, reinforcing a sense of axial dominance and spatial order. Movement through the building follows a progression from more public to more focused zones, echoing the Confucian logic of precedence, appropriateness, and graduated access. More specifically, it echoes the Confucian dictum from the *Analects*: “Let the ruler be as a ruler, the minister as a minister, the father as a father, and the son as a son” (*junjun, chenchen, fufu, zizi*, 君君、臣臣、父父、子子). The phrase articulates a foundational principle of Confucian political ethics, suggesting that social harmony arises when each person fulfills their prescribed role with propriety and restraint. Likewise, in the Tsinghua Library extension, spatial legibility and hierarchical articulation mirror this ethic through each space performing its designated function within an ordered composition.

This spatial choreography illustrates how Yang internalized Confucian ideas of order and relational ethics not as decorative motifs but as compositional logic. Through sequential transitions and nodes such as the octagonal halls, the design fosters intuitive comprehension of spatial hierarchy without relying on overt symbolism. Authority is manifested in the cadence of spaces, the modulation of scale, and

the clarity of alignment. In Yang’s hands, form becomes a quiet yet potent medium of meaning. Perceptual legibility, in this sense, functions as a spatial rhetoric that translates ethical order into architectural sequence and allows tradition and modernity to coexist without conflict.

Cultural Mediation: Minimalist Façade

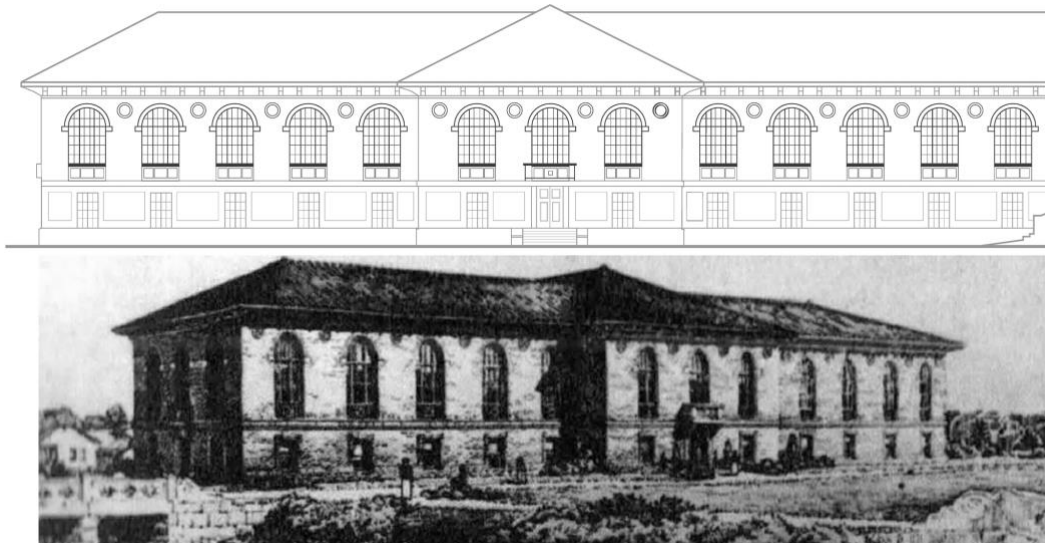
The façade of the Tsinghua Library extension exemplifies Yang’s approach to cultural mediation through formal restraint. Structured around a tripartite composition and axial symmetry, both hallmarks of classical Beaux-Arts design, the elevation nonetheless avoids visual excess. Vertical elements are proportioned with modesty, and decorative articulation is either subdued or entirely omitted. The second-floor windows recall the Palladian motif, yet are significantly simplified, stripped of their rhetorical flourish (Figure 3a). Yang’s addition carefully mirrors Henry Murphy’s original scheme (Figure 3b) in both elevation and compositional rhythm, ensuring visual continuity between the existing and extended wings. However, by inserting a four-story central volume that connects the two identical wings, Yang subtly reconfigures the overall spatial hierarchy, repositioning the architectural centre without disrupting the authority of the original structure. This maneuver does not overshadow the older building; rather, it reinforces its presence through formal integration.

This deliberate compositional discipline forestalls any overt ideological reading. Instead, the building conveys an image of seriousness and institutional reliability, particularly significant for an elite academic institution like Tsinghua University during the politically unstable early 1930s. Cornices and window frames are rendered with minimal relief, allowing light and shadow to generate depth without relying on ornament. The restraint of the façade ensures that no single element dominates the whole, producing a sense of equilibrium and neutrality. Authority here is expressed not through monumentality but through the quiet adaptation of Beaux-Arts principles.

Figure 3

Figure 3a (top): The Elevation of the Extended West Wing Designed by Yang Tingbao

Figure 3b (bottom): The Rendering of the Existing Library (1919) Designed by Henry Murphy



Note. Figure 3a, redrawn by the author, adapted from 杨廷宝全集 (一) [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.1] (p. 110), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission. Figure 3b, adapted from *Tsinghua University*, by Tsinghua University Library, n.d., (https://lib.tsinghua.edu.cn/en/About_the_Library/History.htm). Copyright by Tsinghua University.

Such formal discretion reflects a broader cultural negotiation. During the Republican Period, Chinese architects faced mounting pressure to articulate national identity through architectural form, while still operating within imported Western architectural pedagogy. Yang's design avoids both nationalist revivalism and colonial mimicry. It does not explicitly quote traditional Chinese architectural vocabulary, nor does it replicate European styles wholesale. Instead, it enacts dignity through compositional balance, a form of modern classicism recalibrated for the Chinese institutional milieu.

In this context, the dignity of the façade emerges not from symbolic assertion but from a carefully calibrated sense of visual appropriateness. This impression of balance is a fiction in the architectural sense, a deliberate construction of naturalness. Through disciplined control of proportion, rhythm, and surface articulation, Yang creates a building that appears to have grown organically from its predecessor, as though it belongs by cultural inheritance rather than by design intervention. Like the archaeological method of anastylosis, which reassembles

fragments to restore a plausible original, the façade recomposes historical and modern elements into a coherent visual narrative. Its neutrality is a synthesis, and this is where the “fiction of form” becomes operative: a silent negotiation of historical continuity, political discretion, and cultural memory through formal precision.

Comparative Reflection

As the earliest case in this study, the Tsinghua Library extension represents the foundational formulation of the “fiction of form”—a strategy that reconciles imported compositional systems with indigenous ethical space. Compared to later works, this project is more compositionally orthodox and reflects a phase in which Beaux-Arts operated as a universalizing logic. As the following cases will show, these strategies evolve in response to socialist ideologies and post-reform pluralism, and Yang's formal decisions grow more coded, adaptive, and ambiguous.

Peace Hotel, Beijing (1951)

The Peace Hotel in Beijing (Figure 4) occupies a transitional moment in China's architectural and political history. Constructed during the early years of the People's Republic of China, the building was commissioned as a state-owned diplomatic hotel intended to host foreign delegations and high-level government functions (Li, 2020). It was built not only to provide accommodations but to perform a symbolic function by projecting the image of a stable, modern, and legitimate socialist state to both domestic and international audiences.

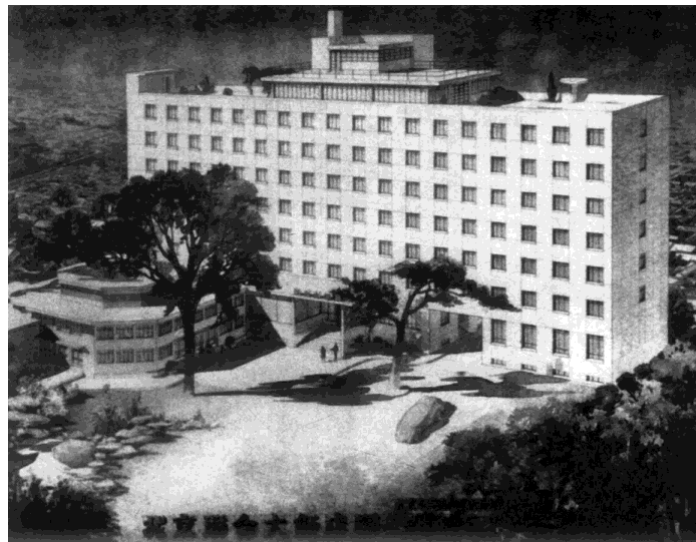
Within this early-PRC milieu, architectural production was shaped by explicit state imperatives: Design tasks were subject to political review and approval, cost–time discipline and material economy were prioritised, and standardised modules and type solutions were encouraged as signs of propriety and efficiency. Western modernism—particularly the International Style—was increasingly criticised as bourgeois; in response, policy discourse promoted “national forms” (*min zu xing shi*, 民族形式) and Soviet-inspired monumentality aligned with socialist values (Qian & Wu, 2008). For a

diplomatic hotel, protocol and supervision added further requirements: clearly separated guest/service loops, readable access hierarchies for reception and security, and a restrained public image commensurate with state dignity.

In 1951, as Yang began designing the Peace Hotel, Soviet-style neoclassicism—characterized by monumental scale, axial symmetry, and classical references—was gaining official endorsement in China. Architecture was increasingly regarded as a political instrument, expected to embody the authority and ideological clarity of the new socialist regime. This alignment was encapsulated in the widely adopted cultural slogan, “national form, socialist content”, originally articulated in the Soviet Union (Paperny, 2002), and later formalized in Chinese architectural policy. Yet Yang's design for the Peace Hotel resists these tropes. It does not adopt the big heavy roof, oversized colonnades, or socialist iconography seen in national projects. By this time, Yang was no longer simply a Beaux-Arts-trained professional. As a senior academic and national architectural leader, he was acutely aware of the ideological pressures shaping architectural production.

Figure 4

The Rendering of the Peace Hotel in Beijing



Note. Adapted from 杨廷宝全集 (二) [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.2] (p. 5), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission.

In this context, the “fiction of form” takes on new stakes. Where the Tsinghua Library extension performed order and continuity in a time of cultural uncertainty, the Peace Hotel composes pragmatism and neutrality under the pressure of ideological expectation.

Controlled Monumentality: Institutional Presence Through Massing

The Peace Hotel's restrained massing exemplifies how institutional presence can be achieved without overt ideological expression. Completed in 1953, at the height of political pressure to adopt Soviet-inspired monumentalism and revivalist national forms (Lu, 2006), Yang's design eschewed the iconography characteristic of socialist realist architecture. Instead, monumentality is articulated through compositional control, proportional balance, and structural clarity. The façade adopts a tripartite classical scheme—base, middle, and top—executed with disciplined restraint through a subtly recessed base, regularized vertical bays above, and a flat parapet that terminates the mass with quiet finality (Figure 5). Beaux-Arts

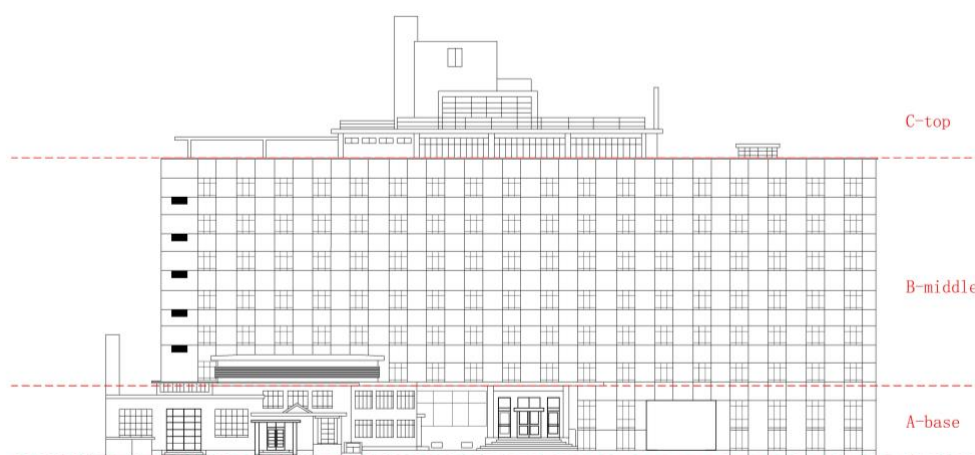
compositional principles remain present, but are reinterpreted to accommodate the austere and ideologically charged conditions of early socialist China.

Despite its formal restraint, the building was among the tallest in Beijing and hosted major diplomatic functions, making it a politically sensitive project. Soviet critics dismissed it as a mere “square box” (Qi, 1991, p. 4), echoing broader disapproval of functionalist architecture. Yang defended his approach by pointing to cost and time constraints, emphasizing pragmatism over spectacle, which was later endorsed by Premier Zhou Enlai, who affirmed the project's practical success (Qi, 1991).

Ultimately, Yang's building does not perform monumentality through ornament or heroic imagery. Instead, it constructs authority by massing, through the weight and rhythm of its volume, the control of surface articulation, and the deliberate absence of stylistic excess. This is a fiction of monumentality grounded in Beaux-Arts façade discipline—rational form-making through tripartite order, axial emphasis, bay-regulated rhythm, and restrained articulation—projecting dignity through composure rather than proclamation.

Figure 5

The Elevation of the Peace Hotel



Note. This diagram illustrates how the façade follows a tripartite classical scheme (base, middle, and top). Redrawn by the author, adapted from 杨廷宝全集 (二) [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.2] (p. 11), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission.

Perceptual Legibility: Organising the Compositional Framework

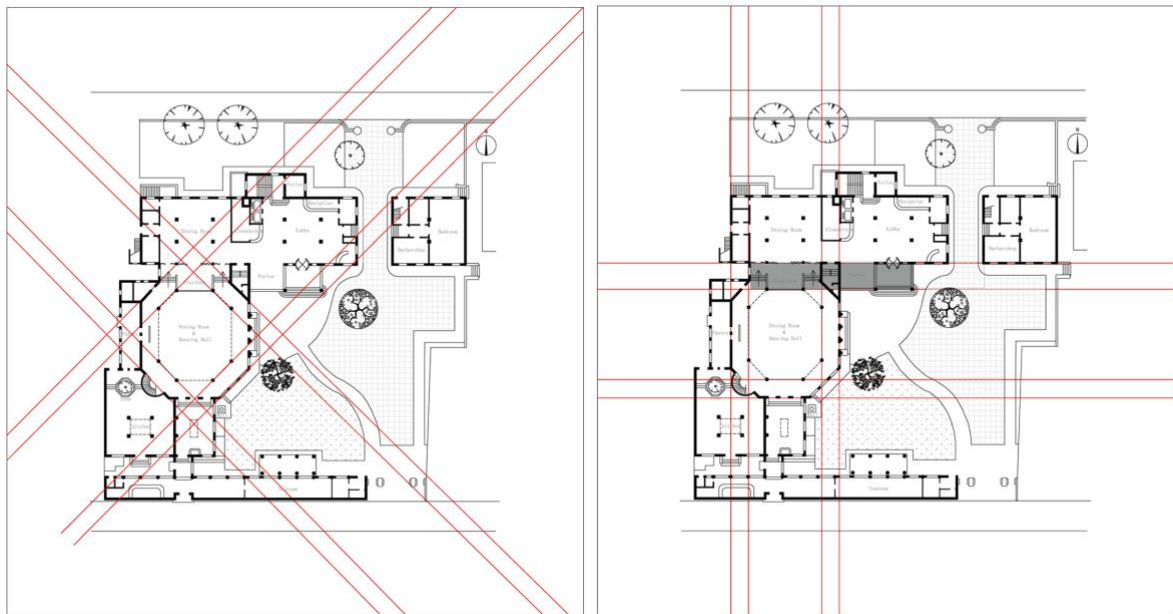
In the Peace Hotel, perceptual legibility is achieved through a highly controlled compositional framework in which the Beaux-Arts compositional geometry is adapted to site constraints and cultural context. A defining feature of Yang's design is the use of the octagon as an ordering device that governs both circulation and spatial hierarchy. Unlike typical axial plans grounded in orthogonal coordinates, Yang rotates the octagon's framework by 45 degrees from the cardinal grid (Figure 6a). This shift enables a flexible alignment of internal geometry with the existing site context. According to Yang's own recollection (Qi, 1991), the decision can be interpreted as a desire to preserve existing site features—the trees, a well,

and remnants of traditional courtyard houses—demonstrating an ecological and cultural sensitivity rarely acknowledged in early 1950s institutional projects.

Within the building, the octagon's framework determines the proportions and placements of primary elements such as entrances, stairwells, and driveways. The angled orientation creates an internal rhythm that mediates between formal structure and spatial adaptability. The transition between the dining room and the ballroom, for instance, is articulated through expanded interstitial zones, suggesting an evolved form of *poché*: not as mere structural infill but reimaged as spatial cushion zones that ease circulation and define transitions (Figure 6b). This intermediate space tempers the otherwise rigid grid, allowing movement to flow between functions without abrupt thresholds.

Figure 6

6a (Left): The Initial Framework of the Octagon; 6b (Right): The Adjusted Framework of the Octagon



Note. Figure 6a illustrates how Yang Tingbao used the initial framework as the compositional starting point, positioning walls within the framework (as indicated by the red markings in the figure). This layout allows the walls to avoid all elements requiring preservation, such as trees and wells. Figure 6b demonstrates how—after completing the overall layout—Yang Tingbao rotated the framework by 45 degrees and controlled spatial transformation by adjusting the framework's proportions. Examples include transitional spaces between interior and exterior areas, as well as multifunctional spaces within the interior. Redrawn by the author, adapted from 杨廷宝全集 (二) [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.2] (p. 9), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission.

What distinguishes this plan from Yang's earlier library design is the extension of compositional logic beyond enclosed rooms to include transitional zones. The octagonal geometry not only organizes interior spaces but also mediates movement between them, all structured along a unified datum based on the framework, integrating both original site features and programmatic zones. Perceptual legibility here emerges from the precise alignment of form, circulation, and environmental response. Through a spatial language that is both restrained and intentional, Yang sustains Beaux-Arts principles while rearticulating them within a context defined by pressing constraints, including tight construction timelines and limited site conditions.

Cultural Mediation: The Adaptation of the Nine-Square Grid

Although the plan at first glance resists classical dogma and suggests modernity, a closer reading reveals an underlying nine-square grid with regular spans and modular zoning (Figure 7). The east–west axis carries equal structural bays, establishing compositional discipline and adhering to standardized modules, which emphasize functionality and spatial regularity in the upper floors' standard guest rooms. Yang further organizes the north–south axis into a B-C-B pattern, with the central “C” position occupied by the octagonal hall—a spatial and compositional pivot. The flanking “b” parts are treated as subsidiary zones that address functional needs, such as a toilet to the north and a tearoom to the south. In another drawing (Figure 8), the tearoom on the south side deliberately adopts the same style as the traditional courtyard house located in the southeast corner of the site. This makes the tearoom along the street read more like an extension of the courtyard house rather than part of the hotel. Yet Yang's composition does more than manage appearances: It uses the grid to encode hierarchy and ritualized order within an ostensibly modern plan.

When the nine-square grid operates—like Durand's (2000) diagram for classical composition or Tzonis and Lefaivre's (1986, pp.

1–6) “poetics of order”—it also functions as a silent transcription of traditional Chinese construction logic. This compositional principle recalls the modular foundations of the *Treatise on Architectural Methods* (*yingzao fashi*, 营造法式), an official Chinese building manual first published in the 12th century that codified traditional construction methods. In the *Treatise on Architectural Methods*, architectural foundation layouts were divided into different grid units according to the grade of the building, thereby projecting the principles of axial symmetry, centrality, and spatial hierarchy based on Confucian etiquette logic (Figure 9). In the Peace Hotel, the octagonal dining hall occupies the central cell of the plan; a spatial hierarchy is nonetheless concealed within this arrangement. When the curtain between the dining room and the ballroom is closed, the ballroom and the platform—originally a transitional zone—combine to form a large, self-contained conference room. The roles of speaker and listener are clearly defined by the spatial hierarchy created by the height difference. The staircases reinforce this hierarchy by controlling access and staging movement between levels.

Comparative Reflection

The Peace Hotel represents a transitional moment in Yang's practice in which he maintains institutional decorum while sustaining political neutrality during a volatile ideological shift. Compared to the Tsinghua Library, the Peace Hotel exhibits greater spatial density and a more sophisticated integration of circulation and zoning. The earlier academic clarity evolves here into a more coded formalism: legible yet more strategically deployed. This reflects Yang's growing reliance on abstract composition as a tool for cultural continuity and political discretion.

In contrast to the later Wuyi Hotel, the Peace Hotel remains urban, axial, and reserved. It bridges the Beaux-Arts heritage and the emergent socialist context, and demonstrates Yang's strategic ability to maintain architectural agency while refraining from ideological excess.

Wuyi Hotel (1981)

Designed in 1981 and completed in 1983, the Wuyi Hotel is located in the Wuyi Mountains scenic area of Fujian—later inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. It represents the pinnacle of “fiction of form” in this study, marking a shift from a defensive strategy of institutional survival to a proactive mode of cultural production. More broadly, mountainous scenic areas in China can be understood as cultural landscapes that function as carriers of local history and practice, with “irreplaceable ecological, cultural, and tourism value” (Zhou & Buranaut, 2025). The project belongs to the early Reform and Opening-up Period, when architecture’s political horizon expanded beyond revolutionary representation toward economic development and a cautiously outward-facing posture. In this context, coastal provinces such as Fujian were assigned a disproportionate experimental role in “opening,” with flexible measures intended to attract external capital and facilitate cross-border exchange, reshaping how projects were commissioned, justified, and evaluated in coastal regions. The establishment of Special Economic Zones along the southeastern coast—most notably Xiamen in Fujian—signalled a new development logic that linked local construction to foreign investment, overseas Chinese networks, and intensified circulation across borders (Zeng, 2010). Tourism, in turn, was increasingly reframed from a largely diplomatic activity into an instrument of economic growth: under Deng Xiaoping’s central leadership, it was promoted as a productive sector capable of supporting development and earning foreign exchange (Deng, 2000). Hospitality projects in scenic and culturally symbolic settings therefore acquired a strategic role and were expected to host external visitors,

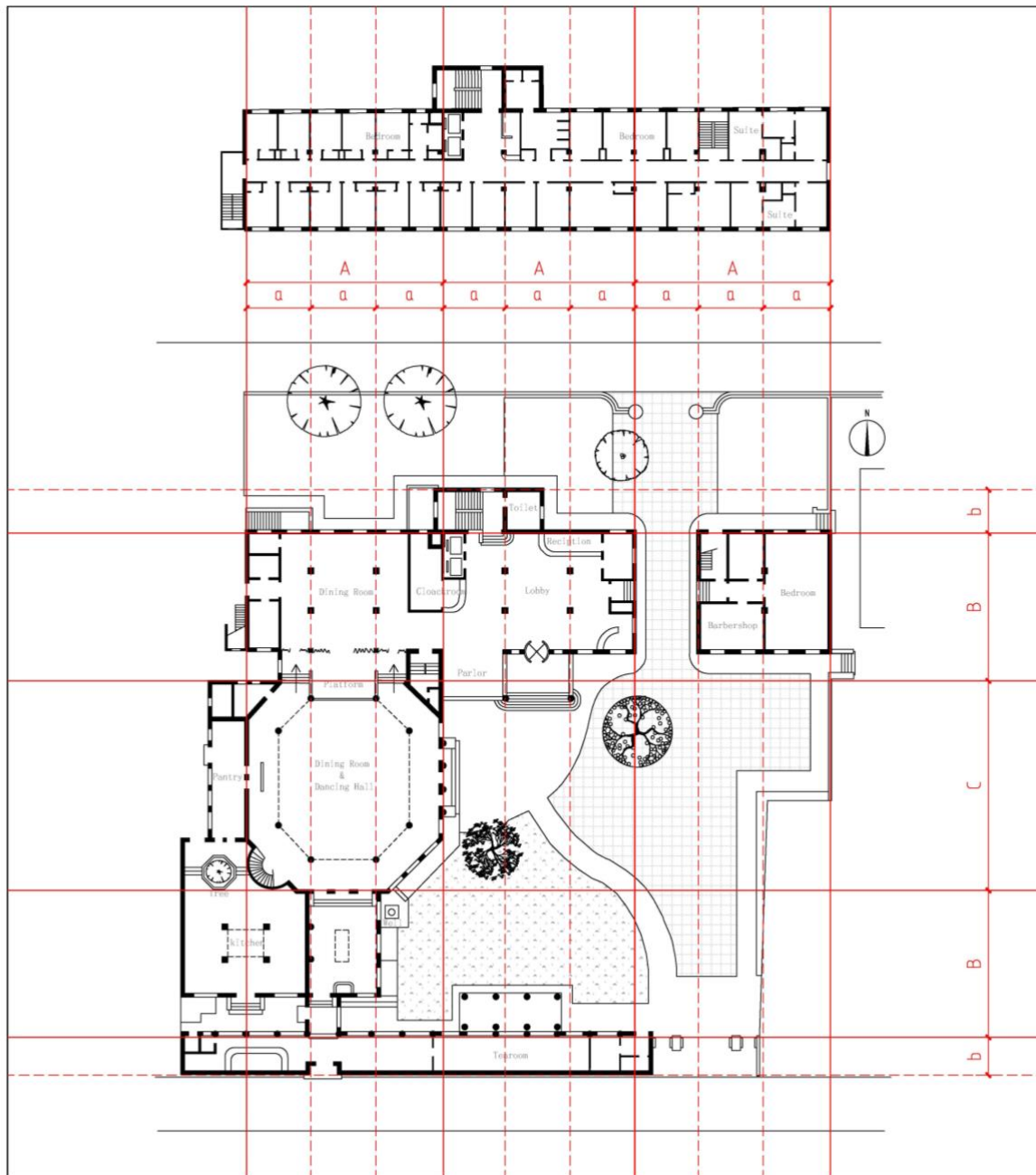
support regional development aims—without projecting an ideologically risky image.

Situated within these reform-era conditions, the hotel responded to a complex array of demands: projecting cultural legibility for international tourists; maintaining ideological neutrality under state oversight; supporting economic development through tourism; and integrating with the protected landscape (Oakes, 1998). Within the profession, these tasks were increasingly framed by a regionalist and environmentally responsive discourse—valuing courtyard sequencing, terrain-fit massing, and material restraint as markers of procedural legitimacy—such that evaluation emphasized how form worked rather than what it represented. As a cultural institution hosting overseas Chinese, delegations from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, and international visitors (Zhao, 2014), the Wuyi Hotel needed to balance regional identity with global legibility, modern rationality with environmental harmony.

Conceived as part of a collaborative effort led by Yang Tingbao and Qi Kang to develop a “Wuyi Style” (He, 2018), the project prioritized a low-rise, terrain-responsive design using local materials under economic constraints. Yang’s vision, articulated as blending into the landscape “like a thatched hut made of branches” (Qi, 1991, p. 49), reflects a deliberate humility that masks its strategic sophistication. The Wuyi Hotel transforms the “fiction of form” into a performative architecture that enacts Chinese cultural values through spatial experience rather than symbolic motifs, creating a sense of inevitability and cultural resonance. The case study demonstrates how Yang’s Beaux-Arts-inspired strategies evolved to mediate Reform Period pluralism, producing an architecture that is simultaneously rooted and universal, traditional and contemporary.

Figure 7

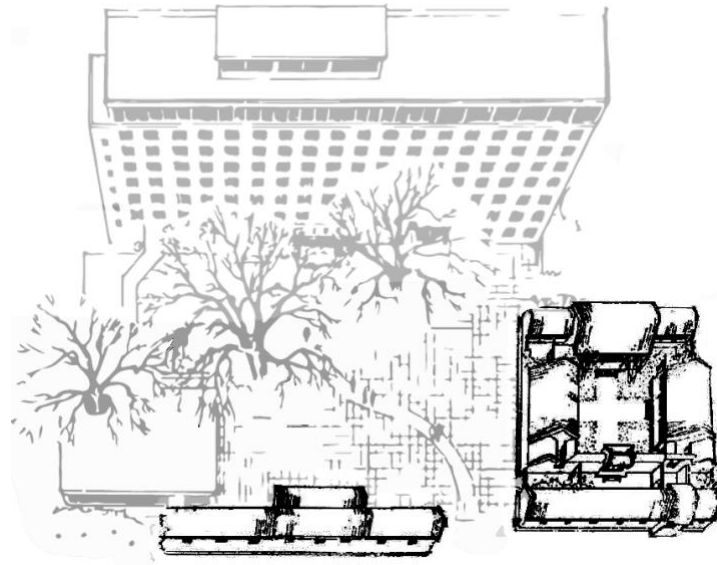
The Peace Hotel—Master Plan (Bottom) and Typical Upper-Floor Plan (Top) Overlaid on a Nine-Square Framework



Note. The drawing intentionally overlays two levels of plans to show how the standardised upper-floor bay rhythm aligns with the ground-floor axial corridors and program within the same compositional grid—demonstrating grid-driven control across functions. Redrawn by the author, adapted from 杨廷宝全集 (二) [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.2] (p. 9), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 8

The Sketch of a Bird's-Eye View of the Peace Hotel



Note. The diagram shows that the tearoom retains the same architectural style as the adjacent traditional courtyard. Redrawn by the author, adapted from 杨廷宝谈建筑 [Yang Tingbao's discourse on architecture] (p. 2), by K. Qi, 1991. Copyright 1991 by China Architecture & Building Press.

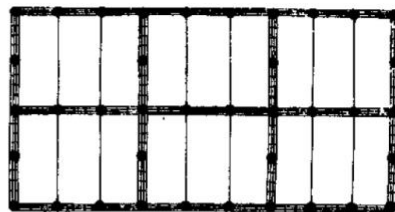
Figure 9

The Different Forms of the Fundamental Plan in Traditional Chinese Architecture

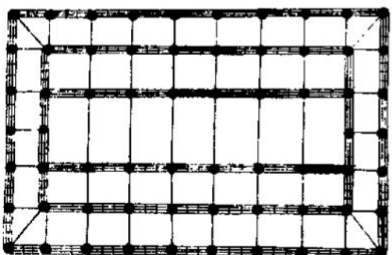
Great Timberwork Standards: Ground-Plan Division, Plate 10



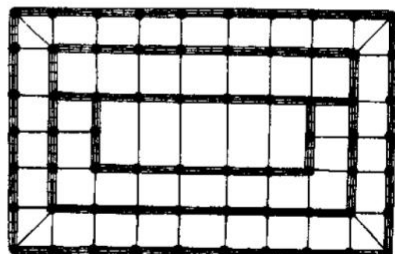
(A) Perimeter bay equal division scheme



(B) Nine-square internal division scheme



(C) Longitudinal central-bay enlargement scheme



(D) Perimeter bay reduction with widened inner court

Note. Redrawn by the author, adapted from 营造法式 [Treatise on architectural methods], by J. Li, 1103 (<https://archive.org/details/06051724.cn/page/n41/mode/2up>). In the public domain.

Controlled Monumentality: Modest Presence and Vernacular Echoes

The Wuyi Hotel reinterprets monumentality through spatial modesty and cultural embeddedness. Located within a nationally protected landscape and subject to tight economic and political constraints, Yang's design eschews the imposing verticality or axial grandeur commonly associated with state architecture of earlier decades. Instead, it adopts a horizontally distributed form that dissolves into the topography (Figure 10). This low-rise composition responds not only to the terrain, but also to a Reform Period ethos that valued cultural resonance over ideological spectacle.

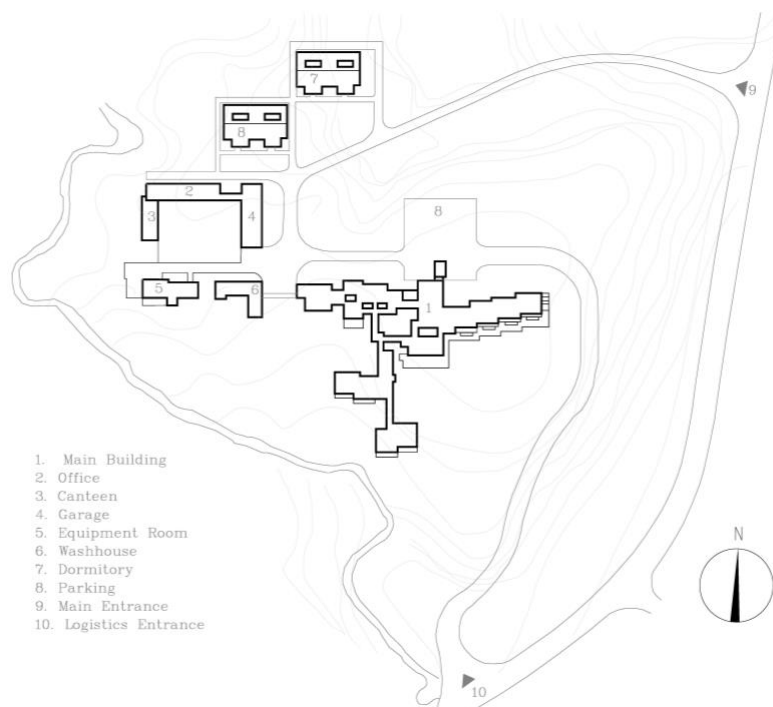
Yang's team, including Qi Kang, sought a regionally grounded architectural approach responsive to the site's cultural and ecological context—often described retrospectively as a distinctive “Wuyi style” (He, 2018). This involved

a synthesis of vernacular architectural elements, such as pitched roofs, timber detailing, and stone bases, with modern construction techniques. The hotel is composed of a series of connected volumes that echo the fragmented clusters of traditional Hakka dwellings, unified by shared courtyards and meandering circulation paths. These strategies produce a monumental effect not through scale or ornament, but through spatial orchestration: rhythm, tactility, and environmental attunement (Figure 11).

This approach exemplifies Yang's mature use of Beaux-Arts principles. While compositional clarity and modular discipline remain, they are deployed here in the service of discretion and landscape integration. Monumentality becomes implicit rather than declarative: a quiet gravitas achieved through balance, proportion, and an architectural equivalent of literary understatement. In doing so, the Wuyi Hotel redefines architectural presence in line with Reform Period values: culturally grounded, environmentally conscious, and rhetorically restrained.

Figure 10

The Master Plan of Wuyi Hotel



Note. Redrawn by the author, adapted from 杨廷宝全集 (二) [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.2] (p. 170), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 11

The Façade of Anliangbao (Left) and Wuyi Hotel (Right)

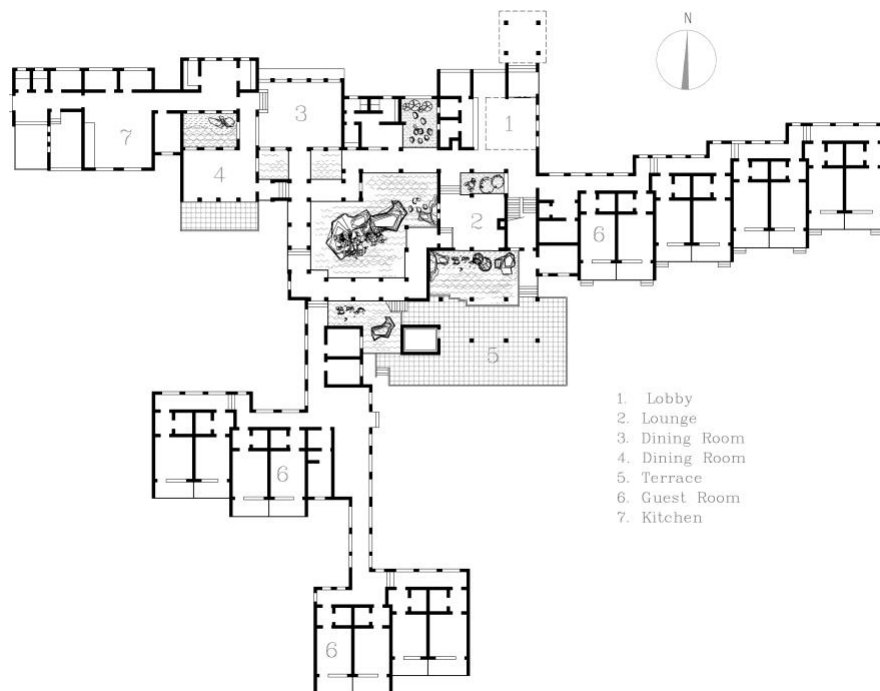


Note. Images modified by the author. Anliangbao (left), adapted from *Anliangbao*, by X. Wang, 2013, Wikimedia Commons (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%E5%AE%89%E8%89%AF%E5%A0%A120130614.jpg>). Copyright 2013 by Wang Xuepeng. Wuyi Hotel (right), adapted from *杨廷宝全集 (二)* [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.2] (p. 169), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission.

Perceptual Legibility: Sequential Circulation and Topographic Narrative

The Wuyi Hotel achieves perceptual legibility through a sequential circulation system that departs from Beaux-Arts axiality and instead embraces a narrative spatial rhythm. This rhythm evokes the Chinese aesthetic principle “introduction, development, turn, conclusion” (*qi cheng zhuan he*, 起承转合), rooted in poetry and extended into landscape and architectural design to guide experience through progressive transformation. The floor plan organizes the hotel into clusters arranged around a central communal hub, following a compositional logic akin to a “main body–linkage–subsidiary” structure (Figure 12). Public spaces, such as the lobby, lounge, and courtyard areas, form a porous core, while guest rooms extend along irregular spines that adapt to the site’s ridgelines and valleys, ensuring privacy and environmental sensitivity.

The circulation operationalizes the Beaux-Arts principle of *marche* as a garden–courtyard promenade: Narrow corridors release into open terraces, compact rooms open to framed views, and layered thresholds at intermediate courtyards create deliberate pauses and points of reorientation. These shifts create a rhythm of compression and expansion, guiding users intuitively without monumental markers. Landscape elements such as stone paving, native trees, and terraced gradients articulate thresholds, enhancing orientation while embedding the design in the Wuyi Mountains’ topography. This approach contrasts with the hierarchical clarity of the Tsinghua Library’s axial corridors or the Peace Hotel’s geometric order, reflecting a mature adaptation of Beaux-Arts principles to Reform Period demands for experiential coherence and environmental harmony. By prioritising movement over monument, Yang constructed a spatial narrative that performs cultural identity through bodily experience.

Figure 12*The Cluster Organisation of Wuyi Hotel*

Note. Redrawn by the author, adapted from 杨廷宝全集 (二) [The complete works of Yang Tingbao: Vol.2] (p. 171), by Z. Li (Ed.), 2020, China Architecture & Building Press. Copyright 2020 by China Architecture & Building Press. Reproduced with permission.

Cultural Mediation: The Courtyard as Cultural Anchor

At the heart of the Wuyi Hotel lies a courtyard that serves not merely as a spatial core, but as a cultural anchor—mediating between collective memory, environmental sensitivity, and experiential continuity. Rather than functioning as a decorative garden or a nostalgic reconstruction of tradition, the courtyard operates as a culturally embedded spatial device that resonates with domestic visitors through embodied familiarity and with international guests through immersive spatial experience.

The courtyard embodies the Daoist principle of “unity of heaven, earth, and humanity” (*tian ren he yi*, 天人合一), a worldview that foregrounds the harmonious integration of human life with natural and cosmic orders. This philosophical logic is translated into architectural terms through experiential calibration: the courtyard moderates climate, structures circulation, and stages

everyday interaction. The visitor's journey—from the entry lobby, through a transitional lounge, and finally into the courtyard—is choreographed through shifts in material, light, and enclosure, echoing the spatial sequencing of classical Chinese gardens (Figure 13). These transitions offer not a visual spectacle but a gradual orientation, balancing openness and intimacy, movement and repose.

Unlike the axial corridors of the Tsinghua Library or the formal grid of the Peace Hotel, the courtyard here does not prescribe hierarchy through symmetry or monumentality. Instead, it structures space through layered thresholds and environmental gradients, reflecting an alternative mode of cultural expression. As Zishen and Jukui (1985) noted, the courtyard was intended to induce a psychological return to nature, offering not a literal imitation of tradition but a felt continuity with regional sensibility. The spatial arrangement subtly evokes the literati retreat and reframes it within the context of modern

hospitality. The cultural authenticity is performed in the atmospheric depth.

As a cultural mediator, the courtyard operates at the intersection of Confucian order and Daoist fluidity: It shelters hierarchy through scale differentiation and softens boundaries through spatial porosity. It articulates neither nationalist symbolism nor international modernism; instead, it advances a grounded, site-responsive typology that transcends binary categorisations. Compared with the rhetorical clarity of Yang's earlier projects, the courtyard in the Wuyi Hotel presents a quieter "fiction of form" that sustains cultural identity through elaborate inhabitation. It is here that architectural form becomes legible not through what it shows, but through what it enables: memory and belonging.

Comparative Reflection

The Wuyi Hotel represents the culmination of "fiction of form" across Yang's three cases, transforming strategic ambiguity from a mode of institutional defence into a proactive cultural language. Unlike the Tsinghua University Library

Extension (1930), which deployed axial symmetry and restrained façades to project institutional stability, or the Peace Hotel (1951), which deployed a rotated octagonal geometry and modular zoning to balance functional pragmatism with ideological sensitivity, the Wuyi Hotel reinterprets Beaux-Arts principles through a regional and environmental lens.

Its fragmented zones and narrative circulation sequences prioritise topographic integration over hierarchical clarity, shifting emphasis from compositional formality toward atmospheric continuity. While the Tsinghua Library relied on classical restraint, and the Peace Hotel balanced socialist austerity with symbolic order, the Wuyi Hotel consolidates a reform-era regionalist approach, grounding Beaux-Arts grammar in courtyard sequencing, topographic alignment, and material restraint to achieve environmental and cultural resonance. The courtyard no longer merely organizes space; it stages cultural continuity through immersive experience. In collaboration with Qi Kang, Yang thus crafted an architecture that reconciles cultural specificity with global legibility and modern function with ecological and ethical consciousness.

Figure 13

The Courtyard of Wuyi Hotel



Note. Adapted from *Wuyi Hotel*, by Trip, (n.d.), Trip.com (<https://hk.trip.com/hotels/wuyishan-hotel-detail-436744/wuyi-mountain-villa/>). Copyright 2026 by Trip.Com

CONCLUSION

Yang Tingbao's architecture, spanning the Tsinghua University Library Extension (1930), Beijing Peace Hotel (1951), and Wuyi Hotel (1981), reveals the "fiction of form" as a rhetorical strategy for navigating twentieth-century China's ideological turbulence. Working through Beaux-Arts principles, Yang crafted buildings that projected institutional legibility and cultural resonance without committing to a single ideological idiom. This study demonstrates how form, far from being a passive aesthetic, became an active medium of cultural and political negotiation, mediating modernity's contradictions while drawing on traditional Chinese ethical frameworks, including Confucian and Daoist thought.

Each project marks a distinct evolution of this strategy. The Tsinghua Library's triple-axis plan and restrained façade composed stability amid Republican Period fragmentation, aligning with Confucian spatial hierarchies to project academic dignity. The Peace Hotel's rotated octagonal grid and nine-square logic balanced socialist austerity with cultural continuity, using geometric ambiguity to deflect ideological scrutiny. The Wuyi Hotel's fragmented zones and courtyard-centric design embraced Reform Period pluralism, enacting "unity of heaven, earth, and humanity" through topographic resonance. This progression, from ordered clarity to coded formalism to atmospheric embedding, traces Yang's maturation and the localization of Beaux-Arts as a projective grammar, responsive to China's shifting context.

Beyond its historical significance, the "fiction of form" challenges universalist modernism and enriches global architectural discourse. As Lu (2006) argues, Chinese modernism was not a derivative import but a dynamic negotiation of global and local forces. Yang's work exemplifies this, using Beaux-Arts not as a Western transplant but as a culturally embedded tool, resonating with Bourdieu's symbolic power and Eisenberg's strategic ambiguity. By crafting forms that appear inevitable yet strategically ambiguous, Yang offers a model for non-Western modernism, where architecture performs cultural labour without succumbing to ideological or revivalist excess.

This concept holds relevance for contemporary practice. In today's globalized world, architects face similar tensions of balancing cultural identity with cosmopolitan demands, navigating political constraints, and addressing environmental imperatives. Yang's strategies of formal restraint, contextual adaptation, and experiential resonance provide a precedent for creating architecture that is both locally rooted and globally legible. The Wuyi Hotel demonstrates how a regionalist procedure can sustain institutional presence and cultural identity—through courtyard sequencing, layered thresholds, and topographic alignment—achieving environmental and cultural resonance without recourse to overt symbolism.

While Yang's work is rooted in the Chinese context, comparable strategies emerge across other non-Western modernisms. In postcolonial India, Charles Correa fused abstract modernism with vernacular courtyards and cosmological alignments (Bahga & Raheja, 2018), while in Latin America, Rogelio Salmona integrated modernist grids with indigenous spatial rhythms (Hernandez, 2002). These parallels underscore the broader applicability of the "fiction of form" as a rhetorical strategy for negotiating identity and ideology in postcolonial and geopolitically complex settings. This study calls for further exploration of the "fiction of form" in other non-Western modernisms, examining how formal strategies negotiate power, identity, and continuity across diverse geopolitical landscapes. By reframing formalism as cultural negotiation, the "fiction of form" invites people to see form not as an end but as a beginning, a rhetorical act that composes legitimacy, defers ideology, and opens possibilities for architectural agency in an interconnected world. In this light, the truth of form may reside in the nostalgia in patterns, empathy in phenomena, and belief in culture.

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