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Event-bound architecture: A gathering place for the guest people

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Rice University, 1992
RICE UNIVERSITY

Event-Bound Architecture: A Gathering Place for the Guest People

by

Rosana Lin Keleher

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Master of Architecture

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Abstract

Event-Bound Architecture: A Gathering Place for the Guest People

by

Rosana Lin Keleher

Coding a building for a specific group of users may help re-define the sense of place Architecture provides in a mobile society. The key is to first find and define such a code within the cultural heritage of the users; and second, to embed the code into the architecture. The resulting building then straddles the line between permanent and ephemeral. It is permanent in the sense that it can be used indefinitely by the general populace for a variety of functions. It is ephemeral in the sense than when the intended user occupies the building, it takes on an entirely new meaning and function. Written Chinese becomes the code for the Hakka or Guest People of China. It is the character "guest" that becomes embedded in the Gathering Place that is designed for them in Southwest Houston.
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my forever friend Pete for his belief in me. To Marcia, Kevin and Carol and many other friends for their support and encouragement. To Mark for keeping the thesis alive. But most of all, I thank my father, Shun-Sen Lin, who shared his courage and knowledge with me.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of two ideas:

- the possibility of an architecture determined by events happening in the present, and

- the use of architecture as an expressive link to a culture, to its past and its future.

It arose from a desire on my part to try a bit of cultural surgery; I wanted to reconcile East and West through the selective translation of cultural ideas. It seemed apropos to try the reconciliation now as technology increasingly brings the world closer through the invisible lines of satellite communications, faxes and computers. We are more aware of other cultures today than at any other time in history. We are not only being asked to differentiate at incredible speeds, but also to assimilate quickly into a one-culture global community.

The fast pace of assimilation brings with it specific problems which have to do with a general loss of identity, and an increased sense of sameness. Perhaps these problems have always been general problems of the modern condition, but as Tokyo, Paris and Houston begin to look alike, it is again time to look at the implications brought by global unification. Specifically, it is time to add a codicil to Kevin Lynch's question "What time is this place?". It is no longer simply "What time is this place?", but "What time is this place, for whom, and for how long?".

As the urban condition becomes one in which population and landscape operate in a state of perpetual flux, the quest for establishing an identity becomes harder. For architecture, it means a shift in focus to accommodate the notion of change, of impermanence. Architecture, that which has always been place-bound, an icon of stability, of man's ability to conquer time and space, needs to break from its traditional role in order to embrace adaptability. If architecture remains place-bound, the urban landscape soon becomes dotted with skeletal remains, monuments to a recent past.
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, two French psychiatrists and philosophers offer a new way of looking at the issues of nomadism in our present culture. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they outline a new concept of "nomadism." Breaking away from the standard, hierarchically structured view of the scientific world (that which they liken to the branching structure of a tree), they offer instead a rhizome structure in which events and ideas are connected across board with no hierarchy, each idea reaching its own plateau. Thus, nomadic existence means an existence without a center, and in the urban sense, one that floats through the city. Nomadic space is thus unwritten and undesigned (smooth), reminiscent of an open-ended traversal through time and space. Accordingly, architecture can then be "severed from the site" and connections to the past and to place can be broken.¹

Although Deleuze and Guattari do not specifically address architecture in terms of its physical presence, their model has significance in architecture insofar as that it gives a new twist to the age-old relationship of space, time and architecture. As architecture and cities adapt to the presence of the car, so can it change to accommodate a mobile society that roams in the search of jobs in much the same way nomadic tribes have done for millennia in their search for food. As architecture is liberated from the framework of site, other frameworks must be found. The framework I hope to substitute is an event-bound architecture for a society of urban nomads who brings into any space, their specific cultural identity, and have the space respond to this very specific identity. In short, leaving architecture tied to site, but have its sense of place be brought into focus only with the occupation of the urban nomad.

The decision to use the Hakka people, a group of sub-ethnic Chinese, as the vehicle to test this new framework is due to the fact that their historic connections to site have always been tenuous. Known as the "Guest People", groups among the Hakka have been moving and relocating for 1500 years across China. The pattern of migration is not nomadic in the primitive sense where movement is marked by cyclical returns to the same place, but rather, a periodic shift in time and in place. The past is maintained by the Hakka dialect, the language being that element which marks the sense of the collective of the Hakka everywhere.

Another "shift" has brought many Hakka to Houston, this time independently rather than as clan groups. This shift marks a deviation from the traditional Hakka migratory patterns. The pattern, however, is more in line with the nomadic existence

¹Lynne Breslin[Breslin].
of people in the modern city. For the first time, the Hakka face a possible loss of ethnic identification: their Hakka ethnicity is no longer unique in an ethnically diverse city. Perhaps a better way of stating the problem is that they are no longer just Hakka, but Chinese-Americans, immigrants, engineers, doctors and strangers. They begin looking for each other and meeting to perpetuate their language, their food, in short, their culture. These meetings become significant events in the pattern of their lives.

I see the Hakka as representatives of the urban nomad. The significant events that are their meetings are held at random locations around the city in any place that can accommodate 300 to 500 people. The buildings they occupy are anonymous spaces that neither address who nor what they are, and why they are where they are. If the Hakka had a gathering place of their own, the challenge to the architecture would be to be to maintain a certain neutrality to the outside while addressing those same questions of identity. A gathering place for the Hakka is proposed using the meeting events as guidelines for its architecture. The gathering place should be able to adjust itself to the needs of the Hakka. It is to be a structure that "floats" in the urban fabric, its transience marked by its affinity for events, rather than a physical movement from place to place. It is to be an architecture defined by events, and consequently, by the users.

The research and analysis is broken down into two sections as follows: 1) a historical analysis of the Hakka, including an analysis of their architectural traditions, and the new roles and needs of the Hakka in Houston, and 2) a series of attempts to define event-bound architecture as a response to the needs of a mobile society. The design phase is the testing ground for these ideas.
Chapter 2

The Hakka: From Guests to Urban Nomads

Kevin Lynch states that "to preserve effectively, we must know for what the past is being retained and for whom. The management of change and the active use of remains for present and future purpose are preferable to an inflexible reverence for a sacrosanct past. The past must be chosen and changed, made in the present. Choosing a past helps us to construct a future."\(^2\)

2.1 An Historical Account

No other people in China can be as fully described and identified by their name and dialect as the Hakka. The word itself holds the key to the cultural, social, and historical consciousness of this group of ethnic Chinese. The Hakka dialect is one of the five major dialect groups in modern Chinese. The word "Hakka" (Mandarin k'o 'guest, visitor, stranger' plus chia 'man (an agent suffix)') is used in contrast to Puntei (Mandarin pen 'native' plus ti 'a place'), the native (of a place) or the aborigines, and literally means 'the guest people' or 'strangers'\(^3\). The identity of these people has been forged by their migrations. No specific name is recorded for these people before their first migrations south (Figure 6.1). These migrations began on the central plains of China at the beginning of the fourth century and lasted to the end of the ninth century. Four other migratory waves followed, the last one occurring after the middle of the nineteenth century. Each migration placed the Hakka further south and west from the central plains of China, forcing them into established communities who recognized 'others' only as 'strangers' or 'guests'.

The invasion of the "Five Northern Barbarians" during the Eastern Chin Dynasty caused the original displacement of the Hakka from the plains. Further civil disturbances and expansions caused by these same Northern rulers pushed the Hakka into a second move that lasted into the twelfth century. The third wave, from the twelfth to

\(^2\)Kevin Lynch[Lynch], p. 63.
\(^3\)Mantaro Hashimoto[Hashi], p.1.
the seventeenth century, was an attempt to flee the Tartar and Mongolian Invasions. The fourth wave was a response to the Manchurian Invasion and the establishment of the Ch'ing Dynasty. The final wave occurred during the turbulent years before and after the establishment of The People's Republic of China (beginning in 1867) when conflicts arose with the "natives" in Kwangdong (Figure 6.2).

The pattern established by the first migration was a desire to escape foreign domination. This pattern held for the first four migratory waves. The fifth wave differed from the others in that those seeking power were not foreigners but Chinese, albeit Communist Chinese. It also differed in that the Hakka had, by this time, gained a foothold in the society of the Southern provinces, and were actually instrumental in bringing Communism to Southern China. The conflict with the 'natives' may have stemmed from resentment on the part of the 'natives' over the increasing political clout of the Hakka. Hundreds of years after the first Hakka settled in Kwangdong, they were still considered 'guests,' outsiders.

As constant newcomers to settled lands, the Hakka adopted over time the name given to them from the first wave. The word "guest" denoted the social position of the Hakka in their new communities: marginal and impermanent instead of central and permanent. Their position was as tenuous as that of any stranger to any community, but their needs were more profound and less temporal. Calling them guests served not only to distinguish them from the natives, but was also a polite way to address strangers. As the 'forever guests' the Hakka remained to settle in marginal areas. They cultivated the left-over land, and became more clannish than was normal for Chinese society. Whatever they may have been in Central China, most Hakka became farmers over time. Pride, tenacity, and more than a grain of truth allowed most clan histories to claim court scholar-officers as ancestors.

Historical and linguistic evidence support the Hakka's claim to an origin in central China. The speech and grammar have strong correlations to the ancient Chinese of the north and of the plains. Hakka scholars proudly extol the so-called 'urity' of their dialect. Ironically, it is the 'Guest People,' the people without a home and a place, who can claim ties in a culture where ancestry is treasured as a status symbol.

An estimated 30 million Hakka (1973 figures, around 40 million worldwide today) are spread over seven provinces in China: Kwantung (Guangdong), Fukien, Kiangsi, Taiwan, Kwangsi, Hunan and Szechuan. Another few million reside in Malaysia,
Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia, and Indo-China\textsuperscript{4}. The pattern of migration is not limited to China and the South China Seas but overseas as well. A survey of the Hakka in the United States has never been conducted, but in the Houston area alone, there are over one thousand Hakka descendants. The Houston Hakka Society claims a membership of over 150 Hakka families (around 600 regular members). The Hakka who are not members are those who do not attend meetings, often because their spouses are not Hakka.

2.2 The Hakka View of the World

The Hakka offer two clues to an understanding of how they view the world. The first one is reflected in the adoption and the etymology of their name. The second clue can be read directly in the communal houses they built in the countryside of the provinces of Fukien, Kwangdong, and Kuangsi. The guest people are known as Hakka in Cantonese, Keh Jia Ren in Mandarin, and Hak-nyin in the Hakka dialect. The adoption of "guest " as part of their name readily shows how the Hakka have come to regard their "difference" as a source of pride. The Chinese characters for the Hakka are the same in Cantonese and in Mandarin, being composed of three characters: 客 家人 , translating to guest + house/home + man/people. In contrast, the Hakka call themselves Hak-nyin, which is composed of two characters 客人 corresponding to guest + man/people. Traditionally this word order means "a guest." Mandarin and Cantonese have added "house/home" to differentiate the group from regular "guests." For the Hakka, the noun for guest assumes an atypical Chinese word order, instead of the characters 客人 (guest + man/people), it becomes 人客 (man/people + guest)\textsuperscript{5}.

Because of the dialect's ties to ancient Chinese, the Hakka are in a peculiar and unique position among the Chinese. Their dialect acts as a bridge between the various dialects, especially between Mandarin and Cantonese(one of the Min or Fukien dialects), the Northern and Southern dialects, respectively. Both these dialects developed from a common root but diverged very early in the history of China. The Hakka dialect, as it traveled through time and space, somewhat mitigated the differences. In a roomful of Chinese from different provinces all speaking Mandarin, the official dialect, most people can be easily identified by their accents, most people, but

\textsuperscript{4}Hashimoto[Hashi], p. 1.
\textsuperscript{5}Hashimoto[Hashi], p. 1.
not the Hakka. The independence and the clannishness of the Hakka are traits most Chinese would agree on, but they are not made obvious from the dialect. While the name the Hakka have adopted for themselves provides them with a certain amount of autonomy, the dialect proves just how much they have in common with all Chinese.

However, the Hakka architecture offers more clues to why they have been called the Jews of China. In the provinces of Fukien, Kwangtung and Kuangsi, where native opposition the the newcomers were the most hostile, the Hakka built big communal houses (Figure 6.3), some square in layout (Figure 6.4), others round, resembling a stripped-down Colosseum, multi-storied and bereft of all columns (Figure 6.5). These compounds contained flats or apartments for individual families, but had more space devoted to public functions than private ones. According to Andrew Boyd, it was as if "a whole village was built together in one building, with the addition of communal guest halls, ancestral halls and the like."

The round houses of the Hakka look forbidding even in a country filled with walled compounds. The building of these houses followed basic principles in Chinese architecture: they were walled enclosures, had an axial arrangement, courtyards, and followed the rules set by Chinese Geomancy. These principles were merely adapted to multi-story construction in various shapes, the basis being the square or the circle. Although the clan was the primary social structure in China, the Hakka expanded on this often to the point where the lines between different clans became blurred in the wake of being Hakka. To this day, the meeting between one Hakka and another means a renewal of a brotherhood or sisterhood. The exclusion by others forced the Hakka to look inwards, a characteristic reflected in their architecture.

2.3 The Houston Hakka

The new challenge for the Guest People was created by their immigration to the United States. For the first time since the first move to the south, the Hakka are not confronting a hostile environment. Most of the new wave of Hakka are scholars who chose to remain in the United States after completing their studies. They are a relatively wealthy and educated group who are as assimilated to the US, as any other immigrant group. The barriers to assimilation for the Hakka are not any different from those facing any other new group. The removal of the framework that helped

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6Andrew Boyd[Boyd], p. 103.
shape their identity is missing, and therein lies the challenge. Without the barriers of a hostile environment, which had been a factor in the Hakka maintaining their closed culture, the Hakka culture and language are in danger of dissolving into the melting pot.

The Hakka have countered the perceived risk of losing their heritage with the formation of a Houston Hakka Association (HHA). The group meets a few times a year and sends out a biannual newsletter. The HHA meetings are a good reflection of the assimilation process. Their meetings are conducted mostly in the Hakka dialect with a mixture of Mandarin and English thrown in for good measure. They are as likely to celebrate what was once an important day in the farmer’s calendar, Harvest day, with the Colonel's Fried Chicken as with the Harvest Soup (a mixture of vegetables and rice balls).

The Hakka of Houston find themselves at a cross-roads. They must choose between clinging to a remote but certain past and the forging of a new future. They have before them an opportunity to redefine themselves by opening up to the community. Although their goal is not assimilation but preservation, they cannot ignore the fact that with time, assimilation becomes not a choice but a reality. Without the physical and social constraints of the past, the Hakka will have more difficulty holding onto their language and culture for future Chinese Americans of Hakka descent.

As part of their desire for a place to gather, the Hakka raise certain questions pertaining to the relationship of the architecture to the people. What shape should this new "place" take? Should it be an architecture that speaks of the future, dissociating all history from its form and function? Should it be an architecture of the past, a museum celebrating an end? Or should it be an architecture of the middle, a place-marker in the urban landscape, one that can place the history of the Hakka in perspective, in relation to what was and what may be?
Chapter 3

Architecture of Events: Response to a Mobile History

3.1 Mobility and Nomadism

The concept of urban nomads is an intriguing one. The primitive model of nomads defines people that "move about a familiar territory in a regular cycle, carrying with him his goods and his society and thus changing only a part of his society and in an unchanging way." The urban nomad does the same today, except that the urban nomad often travels alone, and more than one part of her society changes. The territory is familiar, in culturally homogeneous America, every city is a replica of every other city, replete with interchangeable McDonalds, shopping strips, and suburbs.

The return of the nomad heralds a break with the dream of individual land-ownership. As natural resources dwindle, and world population continues to soar, land-ownership as the most coveted of material goods will become more impossible for more people. For the first time, society may be forced to rethink the idea of home as hearth. Supposing that nomadism takes over as the primary model for society, one would foresee an increased sense of loss, and a nostalgia for the past. Architecture, continuing in its present mind set of building to last into the next millennium, would simply not be able to keep up. Place-boundedness as the role of architecture becomes obsolete. How then can architecture retain a measure of control over the building, of making a statement that will not become meaningless in six months time? How can the temporary be exploited and celebrated?

Through repetition, architecture can break free of place, but how does it break with site? The gathering place for the Hakka merely needs to act as a shell, a container for their activities. In Tokyo, which is in many ways already a twenty-first century city, Toyo Ito creates two projects that speak to the urban nomad.

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7Kevin Lynch[Lynch], p. 204.
3.2 Case Study 1: The Nomad Club, 1986

Located in Roppongi, the Nomad Hut (Figure 6.6) was constructed as a temporary project. The structure resembles a nomad's tent, held up by perforated aluminum, expanded metals, custom-made steel frames and complex connections. It is the only image that is rustic and primitive, everything else about the project speaks "techno-ease." For Ito, "the restaurant serves as an oasis for the adventurers who enjoy life as their fancy goes and travel in cities... an image of a huge tent briefly encamped in the desert of the city, glittering with neon-like stars in the sky."\

The restaurant was closed within one year of its construction although it was meant to stand two years. During that year, a sacred performance of Noh was enacted within the space. The space of the restaurant transformed into a stage, and from the exterior, it seemed as if only a film separated one from the stage. The event transformed the structure, but the structure had made allowances for the transformation. In describing the film or skin of the building, Ito states: "It is not unlike a blackout curtain which makes it possible to create beautiful images projected from the projector. When images start shining even after removing the blackout curtain, or when the fictional space starts floating like a phantom while adapting itself with the traffic flow on the highway and the surrounding sea of neon signs, we may declare that we have found a contemporary architecture."

3.3 Case Study 2: The Hut for a Nomad Woman, 1985

The project consisted of a minimalist dwelling proposal for the modern Tokyo woman (Figure 6.7). The exhibition was held in a department store. The dwelling was composed of a simple aluminum frame covered by an exterior membrane, filmy and gauzy. Inside, the dwelling held one bed and three pieces of furniture:

1. Pre-furniture for Intelligence - Storage furniture for information facilities to obtain and stock city information, and information capsule for swimming the city.

2. Pre-furniture for Styling - A combination of a dresser and a wardrobe. For a nomad woman, the city space is the stage, and she has to make up her face and dress up before appearing on the stage.

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8Breslin[Breslin], p. 48.
9Toyo Ito[Ito], p. 20.
3. **Pre-furniture for Snack** - A combination of a petite tea table and a cupboard. A small and cold Pao which awaits the nomad woman retreating from the stage. Under this tent where the light of neon signs invades, she eats fast food alone and f oes to sleep\(^\text{10}\).

Ito surmises that the modern Tokyo woman is a nomad whose living room is in a bar or coffee house, whose dining room is a restaurant and whose closet is a boutique. The urban nomad roams and drifts among these places, and their houses have to move with them.

Ito's critique of the modern condition is that the city dweller's life is composed of collage elements. At some point in the future, home may consist of a bed, a TV, and a trash can. The line between real space and video space is blurred, and at times, the video space becomes more real. While Ito holds up an uncomfortable view of the future city as a city of urban nomads, he attempts to offer a solution mired in acceptance. By removing the protective and heavy walls between the inside and outside, Toyo Ito is trying to bring a truer awareness of the city to its denizens.

Ito addresses nomadism by reducing the needs of the nomad to its bare essentials, and then expressing the transiency of such a lifestyle through the impermanence and lightness of materials. Ito's added social commentary points the way for others to follow. This interpretation of the needs of a specific group of people may be useful in re-interpreting the needs of the Hakka in the programming of the gathering place.

### 3.4 Implications for the Hakka

The structures in both case studies act as temporary shelters for the drifting urban nomad. Both mirror the temporality of any structure in the city, and the relevance they hold for the urban dweller. Even the sanctity of the home has been reduced to the bare essentials, as in the case of the Hut for a Nomad Woman. The lightness of the physical structures further adds to the temporal quality of the building: they are merely shells to be inhabited. Toyo Ito's social commentary focuses not only on the transiency of our lives in the city, but also on the ephemeral aspects of our lives on earth.

The sense of place imparted by the Nomad Cafe and the Hut for a Nomad Woman is due more to how well they speak to the city dweller of her own condition. It is in

\(^{10}\text{Toyo Ito[Ito], p. 13.}\)
their ability to truly reflect a specific condition that ties it to the modern city. In a city of fixed structures, the temporary "look" of these places stand out and impart a measure of resistance to the anonymous pull of the city. The strength of the projects lies in its ability to speak to the intended user, and not in the "look" of the structure. If a city were to be filled with these tent-like structures, anonymity would again rule.

For the Hakka in Houston, the Gathering Place needs to address not only the programmatic needs of the group, but also to speak to them in a way only they can understand. It will be through this type of specificity that architecture will be tied to the event of their gatherings. In short, the architecture will be coded to the Hakka.
Chapter 4

Cultural Coding and Decoding

The eccentricities of the Hakka dialect and other differences have been discussed earlier in the paper. What is missing from the discussion is the cultural heritage the Hakka share with all Chinese. The Hakka are basically Han Chinese, sharing with all Chinese a highly structured written language and its accompanying scholarship and history. The Hakka cannot escape being influenced by general Chinese traditions because the rules that govern the written form of the language is part of a greater tradition that governs everything from family relationships to buildings. Even the interior layout of courts and rooms in the Round Houses is derived from the traditional Court-yard House found in every Chinese city. It is within the written language that one can perhaps extract a code to embed into the architecture.

4.1 The Written Character as Code

Written Chinese depends heavily on user recognition of its many rules and restrictions. The history of the Chinese character developed over time from the simple ideogram or idea picture to a logogram, regular symbols. China's unity over time has often been attributed to the coherence of its written language. Chinese is primarily a written language; sound comes in a poor second. This allowed for the variation of dialects, of spoken Chinese. The written language acted as a universal code for all Chinese (Figure 6.8). As the language developed, the characters were stereotyped through a fixed number and order of strokes. According to Gustav Herdan, the stereotyping "severed the last connection between the pictorial remnant of the ideogram and the sense of the word, because it was no longer the picture of an object which dominated the use of the ideogram but a sort of code of strokes of different numbers and positions."11

The rigid rules accompanying the writing of Chinese characters are learned from childhood. Endless repetition of the word in the correct sequence of strokes are written

11Herdan [Herdan], p. 50
into a square. The characters are positioned in the square according to the stroke order and tradition. Some general rules governing the writing include the following: 1) in general, a left to right order in strokes and parts within a character, 2) top left to bottom right, 3) top before bottom, 4) outside before inside, and 5) horizontal before vertical (Figure 6.9). The reproduction of a character not in the correct sequence would not be called writing, but tracing a meaningless outline. From such rigid beginnings, the characters are "assembled in a sentence like a set of building blocks of the same size and pattern."\textsuperscript{12}

Thus each character is a complete summation of the rules guiding its formation. With this in mind, it is possible to choose one character have the character already be the embodiment of all writing principles. For the Hakka, the obvious choice is the one word that holds specific meaning for them: the Chinese character for guest:  

### 4.2 Between the Permanent and the Ephemeral

Using the word "guest" and its accompanying rules of writing to inform the architecture of the gathering place would begin the process of coding the architecture for the Hakka. The Chinese character for "guest" is composed of three elements: the ridge and cover , the individual or different , and the opening or mouth . Translated literally, the word means the different voice under the roof, as opposed to the idea of family members being of one voice. For all Chinese other than the Hakka, the reading of the character "guest" would seem appropriate for a gathering place. However, for the Hakka, the character "guest" is part of their history and their psyche. In imbedding the code in the architecture, the building will be forever tied to the Hakka, needing their presence for it to become decoded.

The resulting building then straddles the line between permanent and ephemeral. It is permanent in the sense that it can be used indefinitely by the general populace for a variety of functions. It is ephemeral in the sense than when the intended user occupies the building, it takes on an entirely new meaning and function.

\textsuperscript{12}Herdan[Herdan], p. 46
Chapter 5

The Gathering Place

5.1 Site

The siting of the Gathering Place is to be in the Southwest Houston Suburb of Sharpstown (Figure 6.10). The western section of the suburb has been "colonized" by Chinese and other Southeast Asians. The site sits behind a church, smack in the middle of shopping centers and apartments. This site offers some continuity with the Hakka's historical past, being a piece of land "left" over from previous development.

The site is a 300' by 360' lot sitting on the South side of Clarewood Street. Clarewood Street runs one block north and parallel to Bellaire Boulevard. Just slightly under 2.5 acres, the site faces North, an unfortunate condition according to the principles of Chinese geomancy, which promotes entry from the South.

5.2 Program

The Hakka require a building that can accommodate 400 people or more during specific times of the year (such as the Chinese New Year), but is intimate enough for gatherings of 30-200 people. They require a large kitchen in which to prepare special, festival foods. Parts of the festival dishes may be prepared ahead of time in individual kitchens, but will need to be assembled during the meetings. At times, food will be catered.

The purpose of the meetings are to promote the sense of being Hakka through the speaking of the Hakka dialect and the making and consumption of foods derived from the farming tradition. Song and dance may be performed during these meetings, especially since Hakka mountain songs are very special to this group of people.

5.3 Design

The building is conceived of as the writing of the character "guest" on the site (Figure 6.11). A square field for writing is created by raising four walls with an
entry on the south (Figure 6.12). The diagram is a series of nested squares. Moving
inward, the first square is the bamboo wall surrounding an inner wall of tamped
earth. Between the square of tamped earth and the building is a third square form-
ing the garden. The building sits like an open pavilion in the center of the garden
(Figure 6.16). The building is again a square with a smaller, 60’ by 60’ square in
its center. This inner square is the gathering hall itself. Its siting is reminiscent of
the siting of Hakka ancestor halls inside the Round Houses. A series of pairs of steel
columns march across the square from south to north, bisecting the site in two. The
steel columns touch the building only at its center, in the gathering hall itself.

The entire site of the garden and the building serves to act as a series of indices
of the Hakka and the Chinese culture. The building sits between a raised mound to
the northwest and a large pond to the southeast. The terrain moves from the top left
to the bottom right with the building sited between the two (Figure 6.13). From the
street, the first thing one would notice would be the pairs of columns that cross the
site (top before bottom). Three doors wide enough for one person to enter one-at-a-
time open to the south, under the overhead columns. In essence, each person plays
the character of "guest," physically becoming the literal "different voice" under the
roof (Figure 6.14). As one enters, the beam grid of the roof looms over the building,
shielding the terraces, stairs, and ramps under its eaves (again, top before bottom)
(Figure 6.15). The northwest and northeast corners of the building hold the services
and storage on the half-sunken ground floors with a library on the northeast corner,
and a chess/tea terrace on the northwest corner. A large kitchen is located to the
north of the gathering hall. A second story balcony looks down into the space, acting
as an observation deck. The steel columns act as an independent system on the site
except at the point where three pairs touch the gathering hall. At this intersection,
the columns help to hold up a glass roof. A series of gauzy clouds are suspended from
the glass roof.

The pavilion idea is carried through the open plan of the structure. The views
from within are geared towards the garden. The garden is further indexed to the
four compass points, which are in turn, associated with the seasons, and thus, with
specific vegetation. To the North is winter and the plum blossom. To the east are the
peach blossoms symbolic of spring. The white lotus lie in the pond to the South, also
meaning summer. Finally, to the West lies autumn and the chrysanthemum flowers.
In the northwest corner, at the highest point on the site, a garden of longevity is
raised with stones.
Symbolically, the gathering hall is the square that marks the "different voice" of the character "guest." It is only at this point that the three elements of the character: ridge and cover, difference, and voice come together. Each Hakka will find that at the center, she becomes the character. She stands in the "mouth" of the character, surrounded by the "difference," gazing at "roof" (Figure 6.17).
Chapter 6

Illustrations

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Figure 6.17  The Gathering Hall: Perspective and Section.
Bibliography


Appendix A

The general opinion of the Jury (composed of Stephen Harris - Yale, Ellen Whittemore - Graduate School of Design at Harvard, and of my own committee members) was that the building was still at a very diagrammatic stage. A second pass-over should be made of the building which would concentrate on the parts of the architecture that compose the character "guest." Stephen Harris questioned the adamant use of wood as the primary material. At an earlier discussion with Jennifer Bloomer of the University of Iowa, it was suggested that the writing of the character was missing the hand that writes the character. The building needed to move into a deeper level of detail that shows the "hand" behind the building. Bruce Webb suggested freer studies should be attempted at this stage to get back into the character "guest" and how the Hakka would read it. Specificity of the building was an issue for almost everyone on the Jury.