



## Be a Responsible Contributor and Protector of the City

Text: The Bookshop

Located at G/F of HKAC, The Bookshop brings to readers English and Chinese books on performing arts, poetry, literary culture and selected range of books from photography, design, art, architecture literature, to comics and illustrated fiction. We also hold regular cultural events such as monthly storytelling and English play-reading. The Bookshop is one of the programme participants in *Quotidian Architectures Response Exhibition* ([www.venicebiennale.hk/vb2010/](http://www.venicebiennale.hk/vb2010/)). The Bookshop is run by MCCM Creations.

Q: The Bookshop J: Juan Du

**Q: How would you describe the current development and future potential of architecture in relation to different daily life aspects, such as food, clothing, dwelling, transport, leisure, and education?**

**J:** The basic aspects of daily living have deeply influenced how ideas and practices of modern city development have evolved over time since the industrial revolution. I think we must carefully re-examine the role of architecture in the daily life, as a professional responsibility to contribute to the society as well as a motivation to reinvigorate the architectural discipline with new vitality and purpose. Chinese colloquial saying “yi-衣, shi-食, zhu-住, xing-行” are four fundamental necessities of life, whereas education and leisure are the most basic public services a city should provide. Re-examining the role and potential of design through these basic and familiar topics, in the current *Quotidian Architectures* exhibition, we attempt to bring a new awareness to the way we live, we see, and how

the changing ideas of living affect the way our cities are designed and developed.

**Q: Personally, when have you decided to focus your career in architecture? What ideas/people/architectural works are most significant to you?**

**J:** I had chosen architecture as a major when I was a college student living in the States. The original attraction of the discipline for me is to be able to physically construct an idea through material, colour, form and space. However, the study and practice of architecture took on a new sense of urgency and responsibility for me after a family visit to my hometown during the early 90s. That was my first visit back in China after almost ten years. The economy-led urban development of the 2,000-year-old city shocked me in its destruction of the historic neighborhoods and the disconnection between the new skyscrapers and the daily life of the residents. I think my quest for a role of the architect being a responsible contributor and protector of the city started then, and is still ongoing. This is



both a personal and a professional pursuit that I try to communicate when I teach and practice.

**Q: There have been a lot of cultural events and re-vitalisation projects going on in historical buildings. In your views, what is the significance of these projects?**

**J:** Most of the historical buildings reveal the history and identity of a city. Newly injected programmes could bring them back into the daily lives of the inhabitants and visitors of the city; and demonstrate how contemporary designs and historic buildings could benefit from each other's presence. The Former Central Police Station Headquarters Building is a beautiful historical site. As venue of the Hong Kong Response Exhibition, the site has presented a challenge and a design opportunity for Chad McKee (co-curator) and myself both to respect the massive structure and to create an intimate visual experience for the visitors.

**Q: Sustainable development of the urban space has aroused continuous concerns over the last decade, what do you think is the role of architecture in contemporary local context?**

**J:** This is a big question for Hong Kong. The city has been the site of many inventions and operations due to the necessity for geographic and economic efficiency. At present, the urgent task facing the government, the architects, and the residents is how to develop the city in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. Sustainability is above all a cultural and social issue. Utilised thoughtfully, architecture is potentially a powerful instrument to facilitate the inherent conflicts between different interests and different groups of people.

Juan Du

Founder of research and design office IDU\_Architecture and Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Hong Kong. Juan Du is the curator of the 12th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice - *Quotidian Architectures*. The Hong Kong response exhibition is now opened till 25 June at the Former Central Police Station Headquarters Building.