Panda-Watching

Historic village reconstruction, Xueshan, Sichuan, China

Main author
Zhe Peng, student, Harvard Graduate School of Design, Cambridge, MA, USA

Context
Landscape, urban design and infrastructure

Client
Baoxing County government

Background
Public commission

Planned start
September 2013

The design proposes a post-earthquake reconstruction of Xueshan, a historic village known as the hometown of the panda in China. Focusing on the unique local characteristics of the site, the project uses bamboo as the main building material and revives traditional construction techniques. Approximately 50 houses will be rebuilt and a small number of new structures erected, including a hotel, panda museum, memorial hall and raised platforms for panda watching.

Is history a construct? What measures must be taken when dealing with historic preservation? To what degree can contemporary architecture refer to the past? These are some of the questions wisely posed by the project, both conceptually as well as through design. The proposal aims at a subtle balance between “the old” and “the new”, at times adhering to pure historic reconstruction based on the study of archival material, while at other moments taking greater liberties when interpreting vernacular form. The jury praises the clarity and beauty of the submitted drawings which intelligently refer to the tradition of classical Chinese painting, while acknowledging the present.

How can the reconstruction of Xueshan village respond to its cultural and natural identity? The proposal is a post-earthquake reconstruction plan of Xueshan village, a historic village known as the hometown of the panda. The severe earthquake resulted in great damage to the village where people endure a poor living environment. However, compared to Baoxing county on the opposite side of the river, Xueshan village retained a primitive simplicity. Focusing on the unique local characteristics, bamboo and panda, we propose a panda-watching tourism and bamboo reconstruction program.

The project not only attempts to improve the rural living quality but also to minimize the impacts towards the natural and historical value of the area. People could take a closer look at wild panda from a viewing platform and enjoy themselves in the village. Instead of sacrificing the existing attributes of the village or uprooting their lives and working in giant industrial centers, the villagers could create better lives for themselves in their hometown.

Bamboo – which is low-cost, fast-growing, resilient, and easy to process – is widely-applied in the reconstruction program. To save time and cost, the phasing of reconstruction is deliberately planned to match the growth cycle of bamboo. Also the façade module was introduced for new residences, enabling the West Sichuan residential vernacular to be maintained.

Panda-Watching is a program focused on harmony in the relationship between nature, culture and people.

Further authors
Zhenru Zhou, student, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA and Zhang Qu, student, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China