Modern vs Traditional Chinese Architecture
Traditional Lumber Architecture

Background:
❖ Began during the Zhou Dynasty (1045-221 BC)
❖ Stayed up until China adopted Western architecture in early modern times

Reasons:
❖ Using lumber helped to make foundations more flexible and resilient to recurring seismic activity
❖ If the buildings were damaged it was much easier to repair, reconfigure, and expand

Figure 2: Three major structural nodes
A room was comprised of 4 columns and sandalwoods.
Always consisted of an odd number of rooms.
The class of architecture is higher, the more rooms it has.
An example of this is the Taihe Temple in the Forbidden City.
It contains 11 rooms and it’s architecture is at the highest level.

Taihe Temple in Beijing, also known as the Hall of Supreme Harmony.
Single-Story Construction

❖ Goes hand in hand with lumber architecture as another way to combat earthquakes
❖ This was the preferred style of all buildings except for in the southeast corner as there is little to no seismic activity
❖ If buildings were two stories, they usually consisted of a balcony on the second story
❖ Higher buildings would signify the higher status of the elders
Chinese Ritual Systems Incorporated into Traditional Architecture

This stresses:
- the hierarchical idea
- color
- scale
- pattern
- structure
- the ideology of the unity of heaven and man
- the mutual coordination and integration of architecture and nature
Memorial Arch (Paifang)

Exemplifies patterns of Chinese ritual systems:

❖ Common patterns include dragons, phoenixes, fish, bats, and deer.
❖ Dragons and phoenixes belong to a royal family
❖ Bats symbolize good luck and happiness as the ‘fu’ in bianfu sounds similar to ‘fu’ which means blessing
❖ Deer symbolize promotion as it sounds similar to ‘lu’ which means salary
❖ Fish represent passing an important exam
❖ Other patterns such as cypress, peony, water lily, etc express luck, longevity, health, etc.
Importance and Symbolism Behind Colors

Five Primary Colors represent the 5 primary elements and directions

- Red - South - Fire
- Green - East - Wood
- Yellow - Center - Earth
- White - West - Metal
- Black - North - Water

Having all five elements in harmony will bring peace to all directions.
Gardens

Represent the connection between humans and nature

❖ 3 main kinds of gardens
➢ Aspire Conception
■ Royal gardens
■ Signifies virtue and moral principles
➢ Immortal Conception
■ Some royal gardens and temples
■ Belief that people can be immortal through ascetic practices
➢ Natural Conception
■ Private gardens
■ Focuses on the balance of humans and nature and all creature’s relations
Modern Architecture

Overview:
❖ Change in style occurred from 1840 (Opium Wars) to 1949 (People’s Republic of China)
❖ Blend of Chinese and Western style architecture
❖ Traditional Chinese architecture was still more common and influential
❖ Around the 1980s, the architecture switched to focus more on compatible, multiple, and open designs

This building incorporates beautiful designs from the Song dynasty with a modern spin.
Modern Architecture

❖ Emphasis on traditional factors incorporated and mixed with modern factors
❖ Heavy influence from western design styles and other parts of the world
❖ More sleek and futuristic feel
Dougong

❖ Originated in traditional designs (Tang and Song dynasties)
❖ Still incorporated into modern designs today
❖ System of wooden brackets (w/out the use of nails)
❖ Used to support the overhanging roofs
❖ So sturdy and successful, this technique is used in modern designs today
Feng Shui

风 = wind  水 = water

- The art of arranging buildings, objects, and space in an environment to achieve harmony and balance
- This has been done from ancient times and still exists today
- Both modern and traditional styles of architecture incorporate feng shui into their designs

HSBC Building, Hong Kong
Conclusion

❖ Overall, there are some factors and similarities between traditional and modern Chinese architecture.
❖ However, it is hard to continue building in a traditional style as the population is growing and space is limited.
❖ Therefore, modern building techniques have to focus on open concepts and building upwards to make sure the space is being used efficiently.
❖ Open concepts counteract the traditional style of multiple buildings with small sectioned off spaces.
Sources


