LAND-USE CONTESTATIONS ON A CHINESE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

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When I conducted ethnographic research on extra-curricular organizations and student activities in 2011 and 2012, there were two student activity centers at *South China University (SCU).*[1] The "old student activity center" was built when SCU's newest campus came into operation in 2004, while the "new student activity center" was more recently constructed in the early 2010s in response to growing demands for "students' space" on campus. As I will continue to illustrate in this paper, the ambiance and interior design of the two "student activity centers" were complete different. These architectural details conveyed transforming understandings of university education and modernity in the urban context. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how these changes have created new opportunities and challenges in space management and education reforms in urban China.

Drawing information from sixteen months of ethnographic research in a university in southern China, this paper discusses how land-use zoning and architectural details on a university campus reflected and facilitated important changes in the imaginations about university education in China. It analyzes conflicts and adaptations that social and ideological changes have instigated on campus. Using the spatial configuration and architectural designs at SCU as a case study, the first part of this paper discusses how the demarcation of on-campus land into an "academic quarter" and a "living quarter" reflected the cultural and political impulse to prioritize academic activities on campus. Then, it examines how SCU's old and new student activity centers embodied and exemplified these changing trends and processes of power contestations. I argue that urban processes and changing youth desires have made the idealized

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[1] "South China University," or "SCU," is the pseudonym for the university at which I conducted most of my ethnographic research from September 2011 to December 2012. The pseudonym is my own invention, and does not refer to any university that might bear the same name.

construction of an academic paradise impossible, and hence complicated the Chinese state's attempt to assume control over land-use planning and students' educational experiences.

"Academic Quarter" and "Living Quarter" at SCU

SCU's newest campus came into official operation in the Fall of 2004. Constructed on an isolated suburban island, the new campus was intentional separated from the "outside" world by natural geographical barriers. Commuting into the city took an hour by public transportation. Many educators, academics, and citizens were hopeful that the isolation of the ivory tower would provide a collaborative and distraction-free environment to support students' and researchers' full-time immersion in academic pursuits. Under government directives, the campus became a specialized academic zone that subjected to special regulations. The government had capped non-academically-related and non-university-affiliated land-use to less than 5%, and hence limited the variety and quantity of commercial activities that could take place on campus.[2] Within the geographical confines, students and academe were encouraged not to consider secular economic concerns that dictate everyday life in the urban area, but to devote all their energy in research and studying.

As in most universities in China, the SCU campus was divided into an "academic quarter" (教学区) and a "living quarter" (生活区). The two regions were set apart by a wide road that runs between them, with their boundaries clearly marked by signs. SCU's "academic quarter" referred to land assigned for academic buildings, laboratories, lecture halls, administrative offices, libraries, and sports facilities. It occupied 0.88 square kilometer of land. The "living quarter" where students slept, ate, and relaxed were much smaller in comparison. It

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[2] The size of the school campus was 17 square kilometer, among which 10 square kilometer was assigned to universities for educational purposes. 0.46 square kilometers (2.7%) were for supporting commercial, research, and residential facilities. 0.27 square kilometers (1.5%) were assigned for non-university-affiliated residential project.

assumed a humble size of only 0.25 square kilometer, less than one-third the size of the academic

quarter. While only 50% of the academic quarter was currently developed, the living quarter was

already over-packed with twenty-six dormitory buildings complexes, five canteens, banks, post-

offices, medical centers, and shops that were designed to accommodate and cater for twenty

thousand graduate and undergraduate students.

The general classroom building area was the most impressive-looking structure on SCU

campus. Its aerial view was often featured in the universities' publications and promotional

leaflets. The buildings were arranged into a rectangular layout. To one side neatly stood five

identical buildings, each of them was four-stories high and housed over thirty classrooms

equipped with projectors and multi-media facilities. On the other side of the rectangle, one would

find the most beautiful but also most expensive of the five canteens on-campus, and buildings

with administrative offices and big but rarely used lecture halls. In the middle of the rectangle

lay an open grass lawn, which took ten minutes to walk across from one end to another. A statue

of Chairman Mao stood in the center of the lawn. Along the walk one would also see a few other

commemorative statues decorating the long green corridor.

The appearance of the grass lawn was always meticulously maintained. The solemnity of

the space was further underscored by the fact that the grass lawn was always quiet. There were a

few benches in the area, but I seldom saw them occupied. The hot and humid weather in

southern China and the absence of canopy in the lawn deterred most students from taking casual

walks in the academic quarter. The two neat lines of buildings surrounding the rectangular yard

did give it a monumental feeling. No vehicle was allowed in the academic quarter. Hawkers and

other non-academically related personnel were sternly kept away. There were students

commuting between buildings during inter-class hours, but the lawn was simply too big for it to

ever appear too noisy or too crowded. With the capacity to simultaneously accommodate fifteen thousand people in total, the university never ran out of space to hold formal classes. This main yard was the central on-campus structure among many other classroom and offices buildings at other parts of campus assigned to different academic departments for the overt purposes of hosting formal lectures. These buildings, together with the school library, occupied the majority of land on-campus.

On the other hand, the "living quarter" was much smaller in actual size. It felt even smaller because of the exponentially larger flow of people frequenting the area. Dormitory buildings were closely packed. There were not a lot of open grounds for social activities. The living quarter was always crowded with commuting students, bicycles, cars, and delivery vans at most times during any given day. The area was also infested by hawkers especially in the evenings. The living quarter had a completely different atmosphere than the academic quarter. While the latter was formal and neatly organized, the former was noisy, crowded, and at times chaotic.

Illustration 1. SCU's Academic Quarter.

Illustration 2. SCU's Living Quarter.

The underused academic quarter and the over-crowded living quarter showed that the land-use planning logic, from the very beginning, was dictated by the education ideal that SCU would be defined by its academic functions, rather than practical infrastructural concerns that made navigating everyday life on campus convenient for students. The separation of the

academic and living quarters by a wide road was geographical as much as it was symbolic. Every

morning, students walked or cycled across the road that separated the messy everyday life in the

dormitories from the academic buildings that symbolized the pinnacle of rationality, knowledge,

and authority. The walk from the dormitory to the classroom buildings took about fifteen to

twenty minutes. Many students often chose to stay in the academic quarter during the inter-class

breaks until the evening. They considered it a better use of time to study and to read in empty

classrooms rather than taking multiple long walks to and from the living quarter. But after

faculty and university staff went home for the night, the living quarter again became the center of

actions. The narrow roads again became crowded with students taking after-dinner strolls and

unlicensed hawkers selling snacks along the main street until 2am. The crowd and the noise gave

the living quarter a lively, disorderly, and even slightly dangerous ambiance. It was an area

defined by lived experience, rather than space and activity control enforced by bureaucratic

authority.

In sum, the academic quarter symbolized formality, authority, solemnity, and the

workday, while the living quarter represented informality, chaos, and the night. Their structural

differences and separations were maintained and reproduced not only by institutional regulations

but also by habits and practices of everyday life and by the physical structure and layout of the

buildings and grounds. As much as students' college experiences were shaped by their informal

activities in the living quarter, happenings in the academic quarter ultimately defined the image

and essence of the university as it presented itself and its students publicly to the outside world

and internally to itself. Spatial arrangement on campus and students' everyday life helped

constructing and reproducing the idea that academic pursuits and classroom activities always

took precedence over extra-curricular pursuits. Ordinary life is completely separate, private,

chaotic, inferior, but intimate and exciting. The university is officially bureaucratic, but the counter-experience inside is unstated, yet equally potent.

Construction of the "Academic University"

Architecture and land-use zoning on SCU campus embodied and reproduced certain socialist ideals about higher education: that a meaningful university education should be academically-oriented, that isolation from secular activities would improve intellectual productivity, and that the common experience of being "trapped" together would engender a strong sense of "community." These spatial arrangements were instrumental in cultivating a particular imagination about a responsible student.[3]

The predominant types of activities that were encouraged in this special geographical space, therefore, were academic in nature. This meant activities that involved formal, didactic relationship between the lecturer and the lectured.[4] "To attend a university" largely means "to take classes in a university." In Chinese universities, undergraduates were required to spend long hours in the classroom. This one-directional arrow of indoctrination is standard in the traditional Chinese understanding of education that places a much stronger focus on knowledge absorption rather than critical thinking on the part of the students. A survey that I conducted with 1,499 SCU students showed that the average classroom contact hours at SCU amounted to 27.14 hours per week. Some students, such as those in the disciplines of medicine, nursing, and engineering, reported up to 50 class hours a week. Students were also expected to spend considerable time studying, doing homework, and preparing for internal and external exams outside of the classroom. Respondents in my survey spent on average 17.29 hours a week on class preparation

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[3] Abundant literature examines the connections between spatial arrangement, everyday life, and subjectivity. A well-known example is the work of Henri Lefebvre, who dedicated his career to studying how architecture and spatial configuration transform everyday practices and reproduce the spirits of capitalism.
[4] See Fabio Lanza (2010).

and 21.35 hours a week on other academic-related work. Based on these numbers, a Chinese student spent 65.78 hours a week on studying and academics.[5]

This impulse to keep higher education within the confines of classrooms is also consistent with reasons why the modern university was introduced to China in the first place. The first Chinese university" was founded in 1895, in response to Japan's success in modernization and its subsequent defeat of Qing China in the Sino-Japanese War.[6] Desperate to defend itself against imminent colonization, the Middle Kingdom decided to set up highly instrumental institutions modeled after Japan, the USA, and European Countries to equip China with its own engineers and technological experts.[7] These institutions in late dynastic China had largely grown out of a tradition of pragmatism and political predominance. Science and military technology were instrumentally promoted to "use the tactics of the barbarians against the barbarians."

The legacy of specialization and practicality was further solidified after the Communists claimed control in 1949.[8] The overriding goal of higher education in the following decades was to serve the new socialist economy and polity. Middle-school students with the best academic records and proper political background were recruited into the universities with pre-assigned academic majors, following quotas set by the Communist state's centralized control. Up until

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[5] For an America undergraduate, average classroom contact hours was 12-16 hours per week. Students were expected to spend at least 25 hours on class preparation. According to the 2003 National Survey of Student Engagement of 437 American colleges, only about 13% of full-time students were able to meet that weekly demand. 41% spent ten or fewer hours a week (Nathan 2005:121).

[6] The first university was *Beiyang Gongxue* (1895), the forerunner of Tianjin University. This was followed by *Nanyang Gongxue* (1896, later Jiaotong University) and the Imperial University (1898, now Peking University) (Hayhoe 1996:3).

[7] There were different models of university in Europe and America. Qing China and Japan adopted the more technically- and scientifically- oriented one because it served the immediate goal of self-strengthening through scientific development the best.

[8] The heavy instrumental focus was temporarily relieved in Republican China (1911-1944) when a new generation of Western-educated historians and philosophers, such as Hu Shi and Chen Yinke became active scholars at Peking University. Chinese scholars were also influenced by John Dowey when the American philosopher was in residence in Beijing from 1919 to 1921.

1993, university students were guaranteed and assigned jobs in governmental units and state-owned enterprises upon graduation. The state was explicit in its attempt to ensure that universities manufactured productive socio-political subjects integral to a socialist economy. This functionalist understanding meant that different institutions should serve different but equally important functions in the coherent maintenance of national integrity and the socialist economy. The overarching purpose of all universities was understood in terms of contribution to the social whole.

Since its finding, the Chinese university institution was explicitly designed for training technical specialists to serve the state in its first century of modern development. Formal lectures in the classroom offered exactly this sort of technical and utilitarian trainings. The spatial setting at SCU reflected a particular imagination about the ideal nature of university education, that is, that a secluded academic realm contributes to complete devotion to and hence good outcomes in research and studying. Exposure to other activities are unwanted distractions that offer little educational value. It wasted students' time and energy that could alternatively be spent in valuable academic pursuits. As a result, extra-curricular education outside of a classroom context was minimal before the 1980s. It was still largely perceived to be peripheral to formal academic pursuits in contemporary China.

Challenges to the "Academic University"

In spite of the intention of educators and city planners to make academics the monopolizing function on SCU campus, it became increasingly difficult to do so. In 2012, a McDonald's opened right next to SCU's living quarter.[9] The new fast food outlet stirred quite some excitement among SCU students. It quickly became the trendiest place to meet and to go

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[9] McDonald's is a symbol of modernity, capitalism, and globalization in China. For a detailed analysis of the socio-cultural implications of McDonald's, see James Watson (ed.) *Golden Arches East* (1997).

on dates. A meal at McDonald's cost about five times as much as a meal at the school canteen, but the establishment was always crowded during lunch and dinner times. Students did not mind spending an hour lining up for a value meal, especially during the establishment's opening days. Hundreds of students responded to the McDonald's recruitment notice for employment. A freshman told me that he wanted a part-time job at the McDonald's badly, because he envisioned that the job would give him the opportunity to practice spoken English.[10] He told me: "it would be so cool to work in a McDonald's."

The "invasion" of McDonald's and students' positive response to such showed that it has become increasingly difficult to force pure academic devotion into students' everyday life even on an isolated island. It also undermined institutional control over students' mobility and use of time. Part-time employment opportunities inevitably took time away from students' academic pursuit, and the university had no way to learn about these activities if they took place outside of institutional jurisdiction. My student informant considered a part-time job not as a distraction from his academic work, but an opportunity to develop his oral English, communication skills, and social exposures. His ambition revealed a rising recognition that a modern education had to go beyond the classroom. As the academic nature of the university became diluted under socio-economic changes, a formal education that hinged on practical utility to the socioeconomic polity, specialized training for technical skills, and classroom-bounded instructions no longer completely dominated the imagination about the ideal university experience.

The growing influence of socio-political changes since the 1990s had already been mapped onto the space-use zoning on SCU campus. Since the state retreated from guaranteeing employment to university graduates in the 1990s, students realized that earning good grades

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[10] In actuality, there were not that many English-speaking customers in this McDonald's due to its geographical isolation.

within the classroom was no longer sufficient assets to economic success and a stable career. They sought extra-curricular skills and exposure to prepare themselves for the job market. In the 1990s, there were rising demands for a more comprehensive tertiary education that many Chinese universities were unable to offer. Student organizations and extra-curricular activities prospered. The extra-curricular opened up new space and possibilities for students to navigate on-campus space and to negotiate for power in defining their university experiences.

Nowadays the grandiose academic buildings were no longer exclusively used for formal lectures. They also housed extra-curricular activities as well in the evenings and the weekends. When classrooms were not in use by professors, they became occupied by student groups for meetings, movie showings, and other organizational events. As associational life began to rival academic study as an increasingly significant and legitimate component of the university experience, some students over-burdened themselves with too many non-academic responsibilities. A common excuse for students' falling asleep in class was their extra-curricular work at night. Some students confessed to me that they occasionally had to bring organizational work to class if they had important events coming up. Symbolically and also in practice, student organizations had transformed everyday land-use and functions of structured space on-campus in an immediate sense, and pushed the boundaries of what a university education should constitute, creating an alternative pathway to gain respect on the college campus. In so doing, they posed pressure on the institution to adjust their zoning ideals and land-use management strategies.

The following case shows how extra-curricular organizations helped to communicate students' critiques about on-campus land-use in an effort to make university infrastructure more amenable. This conversation happened on the annual "Campus Rights Day" in March 2011. On behalf of the student population, the Student Union invited representatives from the school

canteens, utility companies, campus security, and general management to spend an afternoon in booths to receive students' comments and complaints. Most of the booths were busy for the whole afternoon. Student after student approached to complain about overcharged utility bills or hair in their food. The representatives would diligently jot down contact information and promise to follow-up. One women who seemed to be in her junior or senior year stopped in front of the representative from general management – by far the quietest booth that afternoon. She asked, "would it be possible to have more trees planted on campus?" The representative politely answered that the school had tried doing that, but the soil on campus was too infertile to support anything taller than small bushes. She assured the student that she would convey her opinions to the management company regardless. There were a few polite exchanges before the student walked away.

I immediately ran after the student, because I was curious to know why she stopped by to talk about trees while almost all other complaints were about something much more personal. The student told me as a matter-of-factly: "because of the sun." Seeing that I was still clueless, she went on to explain that the walk from the living quarter to the academic quarter was too long. If there was more shade along the path, students would not have to carry umbrellas all the time for fear of getting tanned from too much sunlight. I then realized that her comment about trees was actually a critique about the structural setting that subjected students to commuting between the academic and the living quarters every day. The distance had created much inconvenience in students' daily schedule. In this case, the Student Union had opened up a channel for students to participate in the discussion about land-use planning. The complaint about trees was minor and probably ineffectual, but the possibility of complaining at least showed students that they, too,

might have a say in conversations that once were completely monopolized by the government and the university authority.[11]

Student Organizations and the Emergence of "Students' Space"

The construction of the new student activity center was an example showing how students nowadays had been empowered with more freedom and leverage to expand their university education beyond the academic realm of formality and officialdom. The new activity center had also inspired new alternative strategies among students to cultivate their power and prestige on campus and to push the boundaries of how their university education should be like.

The Old Student Activity Center

SCU's old "student activity center" was situated in between the university's academic quarter and the living quarter. The building was only a decade old, but it was obviously not as well maintained as the academic buildings were. I found this "student activity center" nothing like the counterparts that I was used to in America. "Student activity center" at SCU felt like a misnomer, as the building housed more administrative offices than students' space. The first floor of the complex housed a bank, a hair salon, and a (now relocated and abandoned) convenience store. Up one flight of stairs were office suites of school administrators and counselors. The doors to the offices were shut most of the time. On the third floor, one would find storage rooms and small offices of the university chorus, orchestra, dance team, and other groups that represented the school in science and performing competitions. However, the storage rooms were shared, cramped, and minimally visited. With the corridors much more frequented

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[11] This was consistent with Fabio Lanza's historical account when he wrote that before 1919 "most of the student debates about life (生活) at Beijing university shift seamlessly from the broad institutional framework (curricula, administration) to the "personal" and "lived" (pedagogy, housing, clothes) (2010:30). These negotiations of boundaries in everyday life, he argues, transformed students' sense of political subjectivity and paved the way for the outbreaks of various student-led political movements in 20th Century China.

by university staff than undergraduates, the "student activity center" felt no different from any other regular administrative building.

The "student activity center" was named as such because it was designed to make students' life easier. The idea was to put school administrators in charge of supervising campus life and extra-curricular activities in one building to make it convenient for student organizers to get their activity applications signed off and equipment checked out. It was, however, probably not in the initial agenda that students needed – and deserved to have – space for their own activities and socializing. Clearly, educators and land-use planners did not consider student activities to be an autonomous realm for voluntary and unsupervised associations. Many lecturers, university administrators, and students I talked to told me that organizational activities ought to be supervised and coordinated in order to make sure that activities were educationally-relevant. In my survey research with 1,499 freshmen and juniors, 76.2% of the respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement "teachers and school administrators should be more involved in giving advice and guidance to student organizations." From this perspective, the current situation in which students took charge of their own organizational activities was actually an unfortunate result of the reluctance of professors and administrators to get involved, rather than an intended consequence to facilitate participants' personal growth by giving them the opportunities to lead and to coordinate.

My observations showed that student's space were important for the development of organizations. Among the organizations that I had sampled, the privileged groups that were given office space or designated meeting rooms – such as the Student Union, the Association for Student Organizations (ASO), and the university chorus - were some of the most active and tightly bounded organizations. The office space – however limited in size and quantity –

rendered associational meetings more organized as opposed to gatherings held around dirty tables in the noisy school canteen. Participants were more likely to linger around before and after associational meetings. The availability of space encouraged students to spend longer hours with fellow participants, as they could rest and take naps during extended and sometimes overnight event preparation. Some students would even study and do homework in organizational offices between classes. The physical space to meet hence played an important role in facilitating the cultivation of friendship and social ties. The differential effect that office space had on organizational development was very noticeable.

Besides these few privileged groups that had closer ties with the school administrations, other student organizations enjoyed no office space – in fact, no activity space *at all* – in the student activity center. Once I visited the building for a meeting with student representatives. I showed up fifteen minutes early and no one was there to open the door to the room. I looked down the greyish-white corridor with two lines of shut doors. The color and the silence reminded me more of a hospital than a student activity center. I was sweating from the heat, but could not find any indoor space to wait in. The only open door led into the student affairs office. I followed the outpouring fluorescence light into the office, where I found a spacious, brightly-lit, comfortably-furnished, and deadly quiet room with only a few administrators and student helpers who were working away on their computers. I knocked on the door and asked whether I could wait in the air-conditioned office for fifteen minutes. The student helper at the reception desk seemed to be shocked. He looked at me oddly for a few seconds, before coldly replying that the office was not for lounging around.

Other than the few organizational offices, the only "students' space" available in the building was the event hall and the conference room. Student organizations, as well as academic

departments and other university offices, could request the use of the small event hall for hosting variety shows and performance events if they had applications approved in advance. However, events planned on weekdays were not likely to be approved because the noise and the flow of people might disrupt the normal operation of administrative offices situated in the student activity center. The event hall ended up being more frequently used by school administrators to host officially-sponsored events.

The conference room, similarly, was only available for student rental nominally. Very few student organizations had actually requested the use of this space. The room was set up for formal conferences. An elaborately decorated twenty-foot-long conference table took up most of the room. It hardly accommodated thirty large chairs, and the bulky furniture made moving around the room very inconvenient. The set-up was by no means designed to facilitate brainstorming and exchange of ideas. The table immediately forced participants into a status hierarchy as it was well understood that the most important personnel would assume the central seats. The formality and hierarchy imposed by the spatial set-up was not compatible with the friendliness and egalitarianism that tended to be associated with informal student culture and extra-curricular activities. Besides formal panel interviews, student organizations did not normally need such a formal set-up for hosting meetings and events. The conference room ended up being more frequently used by school administrators and CCP agents to discuss "student affairs" (学生工作), which means the supervision and management of students' extra-curricular life and their proper development in moral values and political ideology.

The New Student Activity Center

When I began my fieldwork in September 2011, SCU has just opened its new student activity center. The new student activity center was built in the living quarter right above the

school canteen. As opposed to the old activity center, the new space was much more well-lit and brightly-colored. The walls were painted in soft yellow and white, and were decorated by colorful artwork, photos, and display boards. It featured a big open lounge furnished with wooden tables and cushioned chairs of red and white. All chairs could be moved around as long as they stayed in the lounge. Walking past the lounge one would find a couple of small conference rooms, each furnished with a table, chairs, and a dry-erase board. At the end of the corridor one would also find a medium-sized activity hall with multi-media equipment and a lowly elevated stage area for performances. All of these rooms were partitioned by full-height glass panels. The other wing of the student activity centers housed studios and storage rooms for the university chorus, orchestra, and other performing teams. There was also a spacious office for a few student organizations, and two more traditionally designed and formally set-up conference rooms. New, comfortable, and modern, the new student activity center quickly became one of the most popular places for gatherings, project discussions, and event planning. The lounge was crowded all the time, either with students who arranged to meet up there for organizational affairs, or those came to study during their inter-class and evening hours.
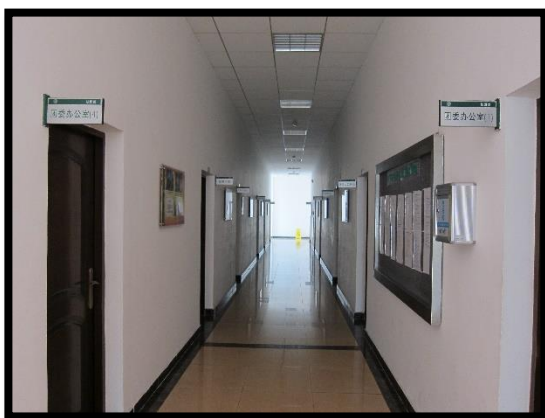

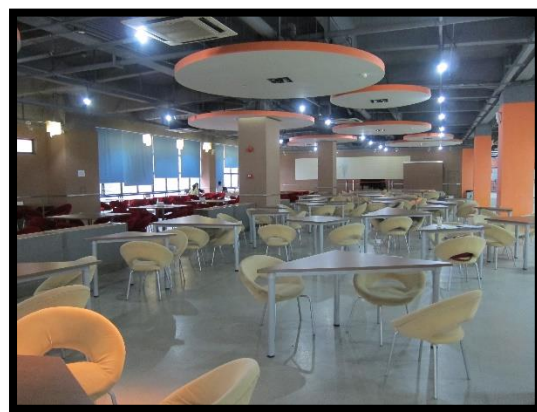**Illustration 3. SCU's Old Student Activity Center (2004).**

Illustration 4. SCU's New Student Activity Center (2011).

Other than the set-up and the ambiance of the space, another stark difference from the old student activity center was the absence of university staff. The new student center was more apparently designed for student use. School administrators seldom set foot in the crowded and unruly living quarters, including the new student center situated therein. The student center opened until 11pm every day. While the use of partitioned rooms still required applications in advance, the lounge area was open to all students with no reservation requirements. A reception desk manned by student helpers was there to help visiting students to navigate the space. There was no administrative office occupied by university employees. Instead, the student activity center was run by the Association for Student Organizations (ASO) and other appointed student officers, who managed the students' space on behalf of the university administration. Conference room rental in the student center was first processed by these student helpers before they were passed onto supervising administrators for rudimentary signatures.

The contrast between the two student activity centers showed significant shifts in the administration's understanding of students' space and extra-curricular activities. The location and the architectural design of the new activity center clearly showed its orientation as a space for students run by students. The colors of the space, the moveable furniture, and the design of glass partitions embodied the ideals of creativity, flexibility, youthful energy, and openness as the defining characteristics of the new activity center. Shifts in the major focal points in the "conference rooms" – from a conference table in the old center to a dry-erase board in the new center – conveyed transforming notions of meetings, productivity, and power dynamics in student organizations. The fact that the university was willing to invest in constructing a designated space for student activities showed that it acknowledged the growing demands for

and necessities of extra-curricular activities. It also showed that administrators were willing to experiment with granting more autonomy to students to run this realm of informal education.

While the new student activity center was constructed because of associational demands for meeting space, it did not cater just to organizational participants. The general student population, too, was able to utilize and enjoy the facilities. The rise of student organizations, accompanied by socio-economic changes and transformations in the understanding of tertiary education, had forced the university institution to adjust its policies and strategies in managing space and students' activities. The possibility of participation in the negotiation for space, while still constrained by institutional authority, had nonetheless led to actual changes in institutional zoning and infrastructure, and hence gave students better leverage to define their college experiences beyond the academic classroom.

New Students' Space and Strategies

At an internal meeting of a prestigious student group, Jiaqi, a student leader of junior standing, encouraged freshman officers to apply for work-study positions at the student activity center. Speaking from personal experience, Jiaqi said that being the manager there was a pretty sweet deal. The hourly wage was good, and there was not a lot of work. The job was a good opportunity to acquaint oneself with university administrators. It would looked good on the resume as one could easily inflate the title of an activity center manger to that of an officer in the Communist Youth League. Most importantly, the student leader said, was that the position gave rise to opportunities to accumulate personal favors.

Like most junior attendees in that meeting, I at first did not understand what Jiaqi meant, until he explained that the control over assigning activity space was an invaluable asset. Managers at the student center could entertain last-minute room-use requests for personal

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acquaintances, or turn a blind eye to gatherings that would not have been officially approved if the application had passed through school administrators. "Favors had to be repaid." Jiaqi was wearing a meaningful smile at this point, "if you did your friend the favor (of getting her an activity room), she would be in debt to you. Next time when you need something done, you could ask that friend for help." Another student leader helped to explain, "if you get to work at the student activity center, you will become the 'warlord' (土皇帝) there. All applications for activity venues have to go through this person, who has all the authority to say 'yes' or 'no.'"

Jiaqi's advice showed that the changing perceptions of students' space and extra-curricular activities – concretely realized in the new student activity center – had opened up new ways for students to participate and negotiate in on-campus land-use contestations, and gave rise to new strategies that students could invent and deploy in order to earn respect and success. Gone were the times when loyalty and obedience to Party authority and institutional superiors were the only essential elements required for student activists to claim power on-campus (see Shirk 1982). Nor was status determined by academic brilliance. Successful student leaders today needed not only the endorsement of those hierarchically above them but also the support of their peers. The skills and flexibility to manipulate these various vertical and horizontal relationships were more important than absolute subservience to the power center, and were seen as alternative and valid routes to success in the real world – perhaps even more than academic achievement.

Jiaqi earned respect at ASO and on campus by using his privileged relationships with university officials to help his friends. He was able to maintain a good relationship with the school administrators so they would trust the management of the student activity center to him. At the same time, he was comfortable with manipulating officially endorsed authority to further his own reputation and personal networks. By sharing this strategy with his junior officers, Jiaqi

had again reinforced his status among his ASO followers. He was considered successful by many of his peers because he was able to take advantage of and manipulate his official connections and available resources to cultivate his personal networks while still taking care of his assigned duties efficiently.

A New Era of University Education in China: Challenges and Opportunities

> The world over, a new definition of the university must be found.
> China is heavily handicapped in this essential task by its political
> dogmas, and, even more, by cumbersome personality of its
> Supreme Leader, who has very precise and definite ideas about
> universities and a reckoning to settle with university people.
>
> - Simon Leys (1977:157)

Over the last two decades, the Chinese government has invested heavily in the development of higher education and a knowledge economy. Public spending on higher education has multiplied to encourage innovative research and publications in world-renowned journals. University enrollment increased exponentially from 9.8% of the eligible age cohort in 1998 to 24.2% in 2009 (Wang, Liu, and Lai 2012). The Chinese state took initiatives to facilitate scholarship exchange by sending students abroad and drawing foreign scholars to China. Massive state efforts had gone into building what President Xi Jinping called "China's own world-class universities" with "Chinese characteristics."[12] Political scientist Elizabeth Perry describes these ambitious reforms and state-led investments using the term "the New Great Leap Forward" (2014). While Perry expresses skepticism in China's ability to promote innovative scholarship and humanistic education, she acknowledges that the scale of governmental involvement and investments in China's higher education was unprecedented.

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[12] President Xi Jinping's remarks when visiting the Peking University on May 4th, 2014.
http://gaokao.eol.cn/kuai_xun_3075/20140910/t20140910_1173813.shtml, retrieved November 5, 2014.

It could be argued that all these features and characteristics of higher education management resembled the socialist *danwei* structure of the first decades of Communist rule when work units were placed under centralized control in order to facilitate production and managerial supervision. The novelty and trendiness of "modernity" aside, the new campus did not challenge the understanding and operation of Chinese tertiary education in any profound sense. They were not transplants from "the West," but a modern Chinese invention that enabled the Party-state to continue with its managing of tertiary education. Embodying ideals of practicality, specialization, and classroom-bounded education, the architectural design of SCU's new campus, I argue, reflected the impulse to modernize higher education, but also showed that much more has remained resilient throughout the last Century of development in China's universities.

However, it is increasingly difficult for the state to assume total control over spatial zoning in universities and the developmental trajectory of China's universities. A university, after all, was not a "total institution" (Goffman 1966) in an absolute sense, where the institution monopolizes control over the flows of knowledge as a disciplinary measure (see, also, Mitchell 2001 [1988]). Institutional regulations and students' self-discipline were insufficient to force students to attend class or to stay on the island. In fact, the case of the SCU was a good example that shows the difficulties of totalizing control in the urban context. The ambition to build an academic wonderland was artificial and unrealistic. Not enough planning had gone into developing supporting infrastructure, such as public transportation and faculty housing, to sustain the university's academic functions. In spite of the land-use planners' best efforts, universities could never be total institutions in practice.

The ideals of the "academic university" came under attack as the very notion of "modernity" transformed and multiplied.[13] Gradually but surely, new desires and youth activities pushed the boundaries of SCU's academic orientation. This extra-curricular space was the arena where students contested with the university authority for power to define their own education. It became the site where conflicting understandings of "modernity" and "student" came to be negotiated. The urban context – with heightened complexities in the flows of people, ideas, and knowledge – has presented new challenges and opportunities in the management of higher education (see, for example, Hannerz 1992). Through analyzing the case of SCU, this paper hopes to illuminate how these changes were mapped onto architectural designs and spatial management issues, and how modern changes have empowered more stakeholders to participate in defining a meaningful education on Chinese university campuses.

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[13] This was not an issue specific to the Chinese context. In the late 20th Century, scholars studying the European and American universities also raise concerns over the "identity crisis" of "modern universities." Examples of such include Bill Reading's *The University in Ruins* (1997) and Gerard Delanty's various works on universities and modernity.

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