

# DEAD SPACE

The changing discourse of death: how to design a contemporary and enduring funeral practice

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*Bamboo forest concealing the Grandfather cemetery*

## WHAT I MISS

It may be because at a special time, the turbulent last year, when I started the thesis, I always missed my family members far away on the other side of the earth.

How are they doing now?

I suddenly missed my Grandfather's village, which I only visited once a year. Grandfather passed away when I was very young. I get along well with my Grandmother, but I rarely hear the story of my Grandfather from my Grandmother, and his photos have been always hanging on the wall of living room, which conspicuously reminds me of his look. Maybe that is the way my Grandmother misses him. Until the last time I went back, that photo was no longer there. Is this memory over?

I didn't remember my Grandfather's cemetery because I only participated his funeral ceremony. The news broadcasts that public cemetery prices are getting higher and higher. Can the pain of losing a loved one be measured by the money? No one really mentioned this pain.

I started to reflect it, I want to tell this story by rebuild my Grandfather's cemetery.

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*People try to wipe the ashes from the tombstone*

## In the Depths of the Bamboo Forest

My Grandfather passed away when I was very young. To mourn his death, we went back to Shucheng County, in the west-central part of Anhui Province, China to participate in a traditional funeral ceremony. It was the first time in my life that I participated in a Chinese traditional funeral. The ceremony has its regional features, mysterious and sad, and it left a deep impression on me since then. Witnessing my Grandfather go through a series of funeral rituals, I realized that the customs in the Chinese traditional funeral practices are complicated. The rituals in the ceremony required my family to act with care considering the site, environment, and sequence of events. These rituals fully embody the idea that Chinese pursued the harmonious unity of "heaven, earth, and man", and paid attention to adapting to the time and place and following the laws of nature. It also expresses Chinese

traditional filial piety culture and humanistic value. Before sending the deceased to cremation, relatives have a chance to see the deceased for the last time. They usually take turns around the coffin, mourning in the order of kinship intimacy. At this certain moment, as the eldest grandchild, I walked past his body, our final interaction. Those observing were silent, and the environment was gloomy. I felt like I could not breathe. At that moment, I suddenly looked up and saw a portrait of him hung on the top of the wall in the memorial hall.

On the next day, he was buried in a bamboo forest not far from his house. There was a small monument with some simple sacrificial items. We bowed and bowed and kneeled down to say goodbye to Grandfather. Every step in the funeral ceremony is like a gradual farewell

between the son and the father, from giving incense to mourn to the deceased, viewing the deceased's last appearance before cremation, being asked by the master when he died and whether he passed peacefully, watching the coffin slowly fall, and participating in the next day's funeral burial. Because the sadness of separation is too intense. Only by saying goodbye paragraph by paragraph can living relatives adapt to life without the deceased.

In addition, I forgot to mention the sacred part of my Grandfather's funeral. The evening before the funeral, all relatives lined up to go to the cemetery of the other ancestors in the family. We walked around the cemetery three times and then walked in the opposite direction three times. The purpose is to bring home the souls of other people who have died, and then they will accompany the deceased when he is buried the next day. My Grandfather took his mother in the ceremony of receiving the souls. With great grandmother, we believe grandfather might not be so scared in the burial funeral.



*Grandfather's photo used hung on this wall*

After bringing the souls and returning home, all the relatives will kneel down or sit in a circle in front of the mourning hall. They put combs, mirrors, fruit, sweets, towels, et. that are prepared in advance on small plates one by one. After the speech, for example, before passing the towel, the master will say "Let the deceased go there and wash his face well" and pass it clockwise, and pass it from one person to another until it reaches the last person in front of the mourning hall. This ritual was the same as paper flowers, clothes, and paper houses that were given to the deceased, to wish that the deceased can live well in the

world after death. There is another ritual called “Shouling”, “Shouling” which means that the next generation in the family needs to stay by the grave for several nights after the burial of the deceased. It is to keep the deceased company \with the hope that the deceased will not be so scared when he first enters the soil.

In the past, I thought that these were unreasonable rituals, because they are indeed more like religious rituals, and it feels even a bit like we are tossing away the elderly. As I grew up, I gradually understood that these ceremonies are not only to help the deceased rest comfortably but also to give the relatives peace of mind. After experiencing it in detail, I was surprised by the people’s fear of death and the level of care for the dead in rural funeral customs. The deceased is not just dirt in a casket but still acts as a person who is afraid of

the cold and needs to lie down comfortably, a person who needs the company of his parents and children.

In present-day rural China, few people believe in the afterlife or whether there is even another place after death. But we still sincerely sent away the deceased, guarded the deceased, brought clothes and towels to the deceased, fearing that the elderly would have no money to spend there.

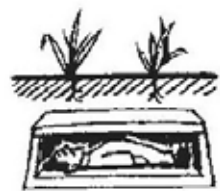
I still go back to the countryside every year to see my grandmother. Every year on Tomb-Sweeping Day, my dad still sacrifices to my grandpa, but grandpa seems to be sealed in that little mound, and apart from my father who sweep Grandfather cemetery every year, I rarely go to the cemetery to see him. I wonder if I have my child in the future, would he forget where my grandfather is?

Since I started studying architecture, I have worked on projects centered around life and not death: housing, commercial plazas, entertainment centers, education buildings, all of which are lively buildings, but in my education I have not encountered the subject of thinking and designing tomb architecture. When we look back on the history of architectural development, civilization derives from the construction of magnificent tomb buildings. Rulers of ancient Egypt, China, and other civilizations spent countless hours and financial resources planning their future palaces of death before they determined plans for their rule. Nowadays, people’s architectural ethos has long shifted from memorial to commercial, from monument to shop. Tension over land resources and environmental

pollution have made housing land limited, and explosive population growth has made it difficult to design tomb spaces in many places; thinking about the live space has already occupied people’s minds. With the advent of countless fancy buildings and splendid apartments are built up, is there still a land left behind after our death in this concrete jungle — a space that might allow us to inherit the ancient sacrifice ceremony? This is an issue that all human beings must think about – where is the space where is the space do our bodies rest after we die? What are the mnemonics that we can bring to future generations? How can we let our children and grandchildren remember that we have come to mourn us? How can we retain the aesthetics of sacrifice? How do we make contemporary and sustainable “dead space”?

## LIFE AND DEATH

The cemetery is a place for funeral and interment. Before starting the reconstruction of the cemetery, I need to understand the origins and development of the Chinese cemetery. First of all, in China, funeral practices are related to Chinese people's viewpoints toward life and death. Rituals embody the concept of life and death, and the cemetery is closely linked to a culture of life and death that helps individuals and their descendants to understand and respect life at different stages: life existence, death, and inheritance. The culture of life and death also helps people obtain psychological comfort by helping them overcome their fear of death. The cemetery, as a resting place after the end of life and a place for the living



葬

*word of burial in Chinese pictograph and ideograph*

to cherish life, has a connotation and form that are influenced by the culture of life and death I that described.

Primitive religions' concepts of soul and life gave people the consciousness and behavior to deal with the remains of the dead. In ancient China, people were aware of life and death, but they had to face death in anticipation of immortality. People began to explore the phenomenon of life and death, and funeral customs gradually emerged. China has a rich farming culture society, wherein the burial of the dominant one directly relates to peace on the earth. The use of funerary objects for the deceased to carry with them in the underworld reflects Chinese culture's belief in the immortality of the soul.

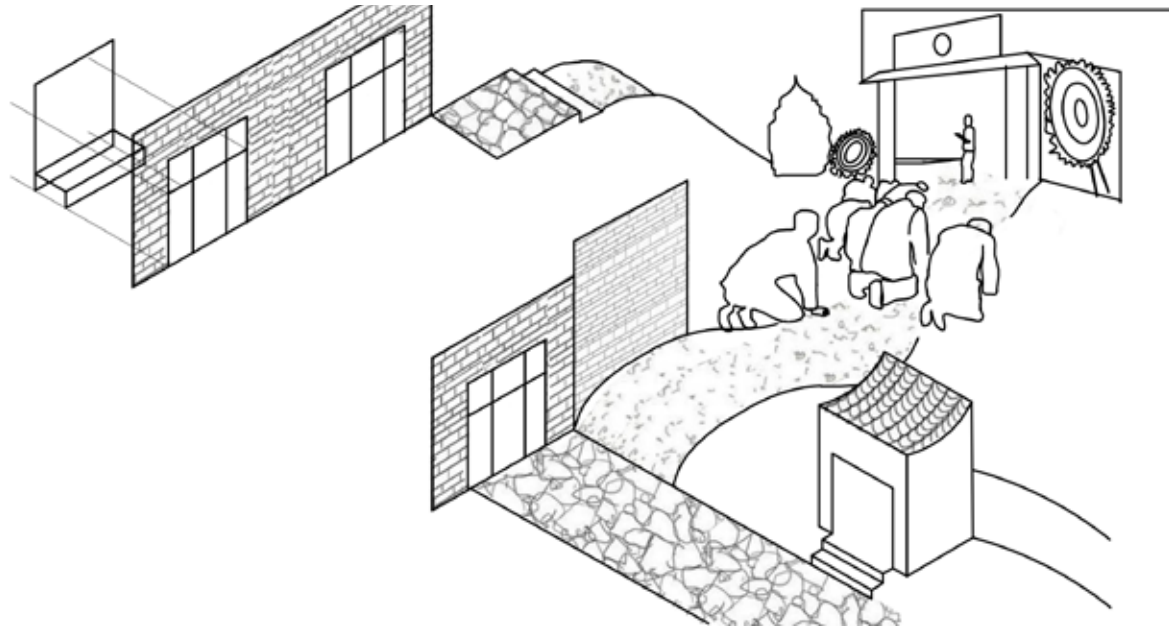
Confucianism is pervasive in ancient Chinese political literature and life, whose caution for death and views on filial piety have had a profound influence on the concept of Chinese funeral practices and activities. The coffin serves to protect the deceased's skin from contact with the soil, and can also relieve the deceased's sons. The grand and complicated funeral ceremonies that developed in later centuries resulted from the evolution of feudal society's political and cultural life.

Different forms of tombs were formulated according to the level of the deceased, but in general, the funeral customs became a kind of ritual that all segments of Chinese society had to follow consciously. As the feudal society became more developed, new materials appeared, as seen in cliff cave tombs' use of mountains as mausoleums.

There were very early approaches to sustainable development that adapted measures to local conditions.

At the same time, underground funerals increasingly imitated the living space of real people. It was assumed that people's underground world was like a living world, with front rooms, back rooms, and corridors, all of which were commonly used in the structure and function of people's living spaces at that time.

Traditional tombstone burials are still mostly used in contemporary Chinese funeral practices. Tombstone altars have been passed down since the Shang Dynasty. But design that considers density and space for mourning is sorely lacking. The design of contemporary cemeteries is also monotonous, and lacks humanistic and cultural connotations. In fact, the chaos and disorder of modern cemeteries often make people fear the cemetery. Even if some of them pay attention ecology, the design techniques are not practical. The reasons for these problems are complex and complicated, and include design methods, laws and regulations, and so on.



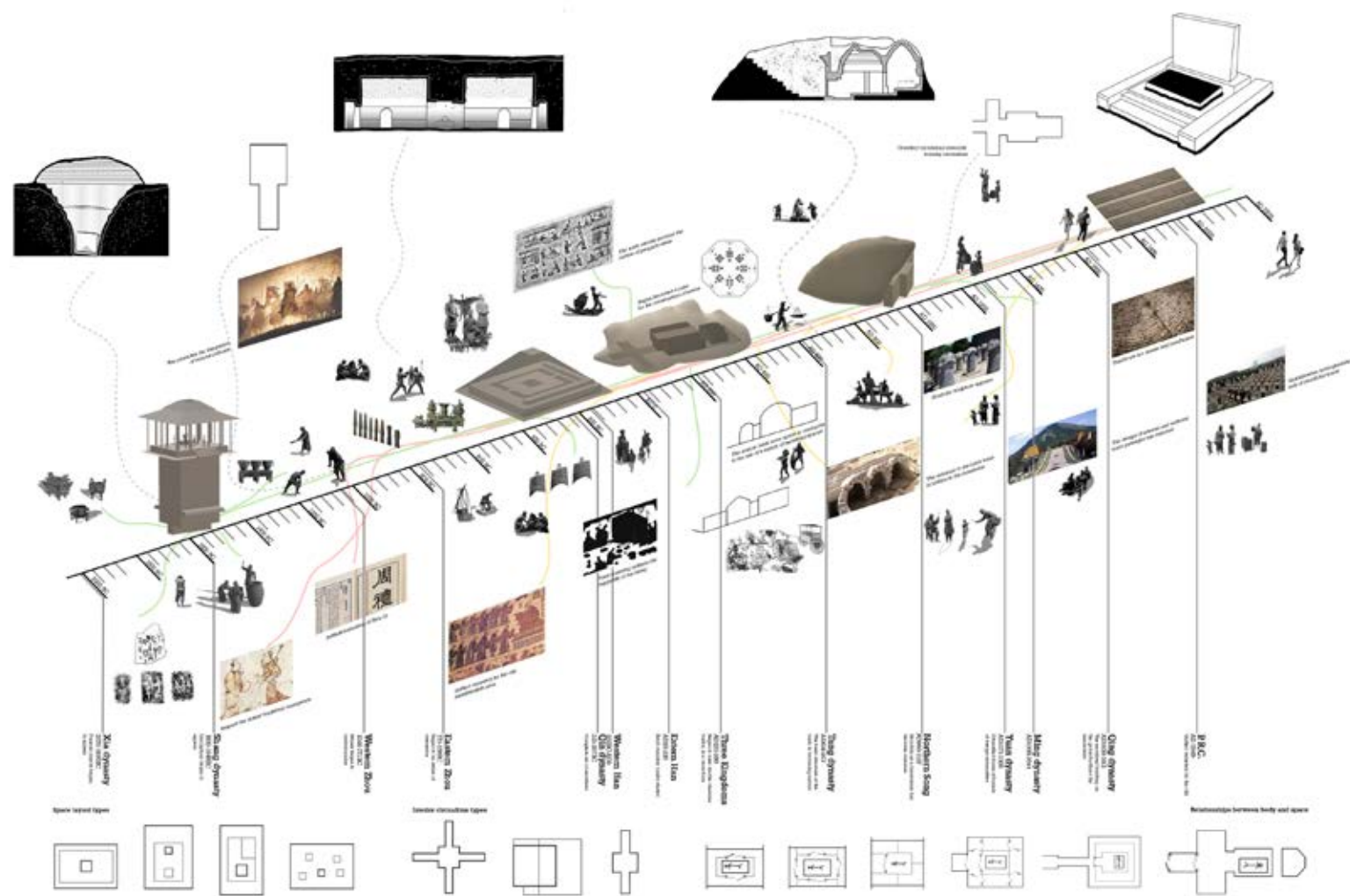
*word of burial in Chinese pictograph and ideograph*

People often attach importance to convey ideas of life and death; rituals form the roots of funeral practices.

## TIMELINE

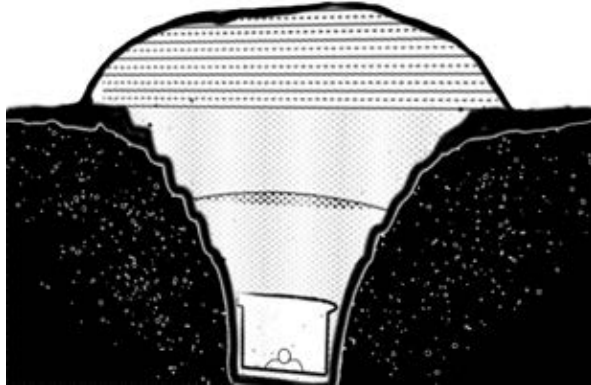


In my education, I have not yet encountered the subject of designing what I call “dead architecture.” So I want to take this opportunity by first analyzing and investigating the history and development of traditional Chinese funeral practices, and then by identifying the reasons for different tomb operations across the ages.

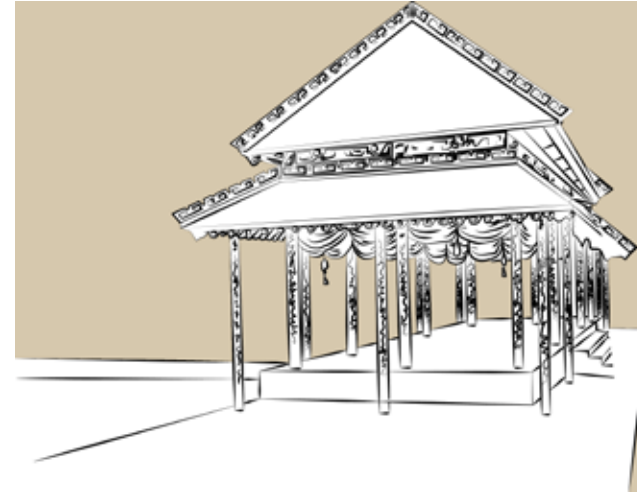




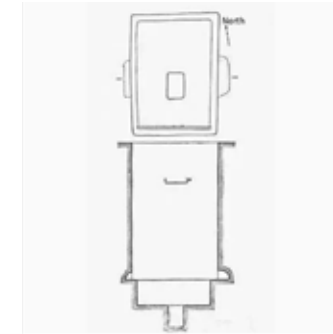
## Deep Pit Tomb



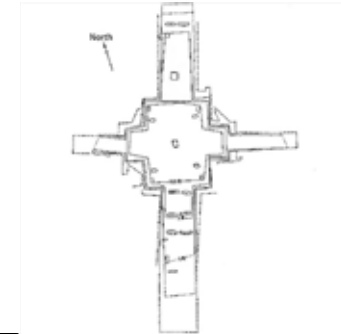
*Shang Dynasty - Qin Dynasty (1600 B.C. - 220 B.C.)*



*Fu Hao's Tomb, Shang Dynasty, 1600- 1050 B.C.*



*Plan(top) Section(down)*



*Site circulation*

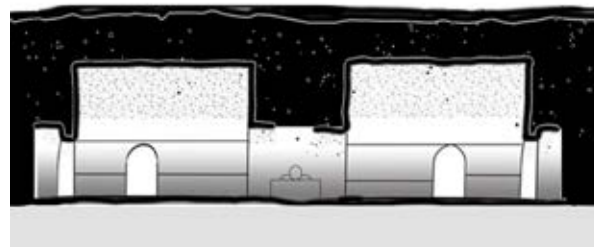
I selected a few ancient tombs that I think are representative of these practices, containing the basic configuration required by the Chinese ancient tombs. In Fu Hao's tomb from the Shang Dynasty, the first dynasty, people already designed the ceremony hall hidden the tomb architecture underneath, and people began to commemorate the dead with inscriptions which record the deceased's life experience, as well as the good wishes of future generations.



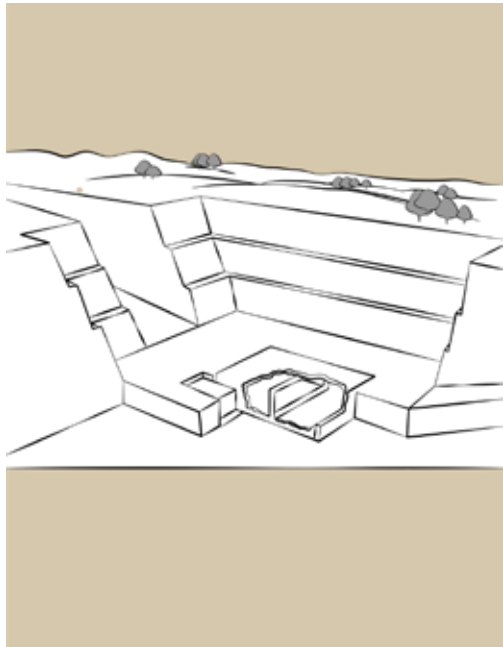
*Inscriptions*



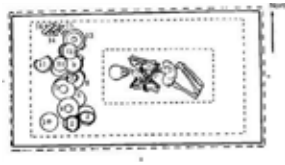
## Palace Tomb



*Qin Dynasty - West Han Dynasty (220 B.C. - 202 B.C.)*



*Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, Qin Dynasty, 246- 208 B.C.*



*Body coffin*

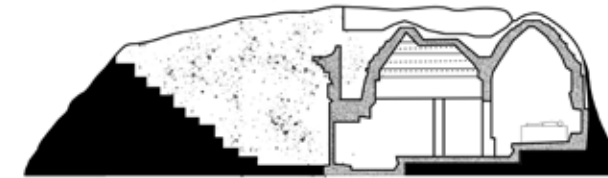


*Terra-cotta warriors*



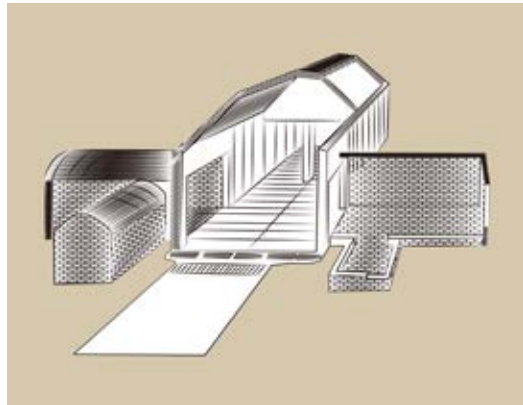
*Subterranean Palace*

## Cave Tomb

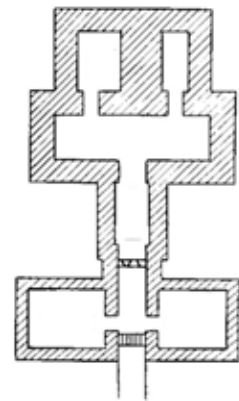


*West Han Dynasty - Tang Dynasty (202 B.C. - 649 A.D.)*

And in the Qin dynasty, people started to design multiple functions of the burial space in accordance with different rituals. The layout and arrangement of ancient tombs had a far-reaching impact on the imperial mausoleums of subsequent dynasties. Subterranean Palace tomb underground began to imitate the real palaces, imitating the death architecture of the emperor as his living space when he was alive. The funeral objects are also similar to those daily necessities, even creating Terra-cotta soldiers to protect the emperor.



West Han Emperor Tomb, West Han Dynasty, 202 - 8 B.C.



Plan



Han Tombstone Inscriptions

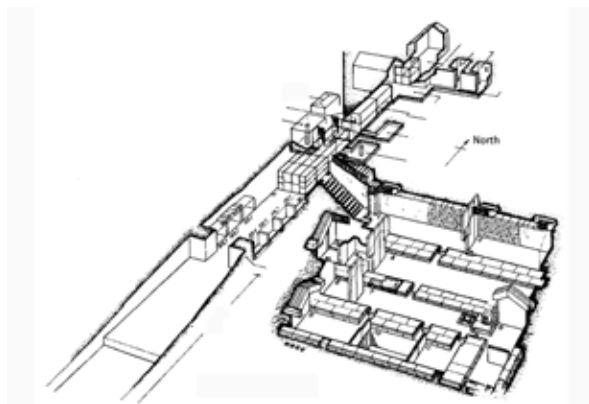
In the funeral practices of the West Han Dynasty, the cemetery tended to imitate the living space -- as evident in the form and structures of buildings from this era. The underground tomb space replicates the housing space on the ground, because people believed that the tomb was the home of the deceased in the underground spiritual world. During the Tang Dynasty, the maturity of the rituals made the funeral ceremonies more and more systematic. Ritual theories such as Fengshui, Bagua helped people decide the location of tombs.



Fengshui



Bagua



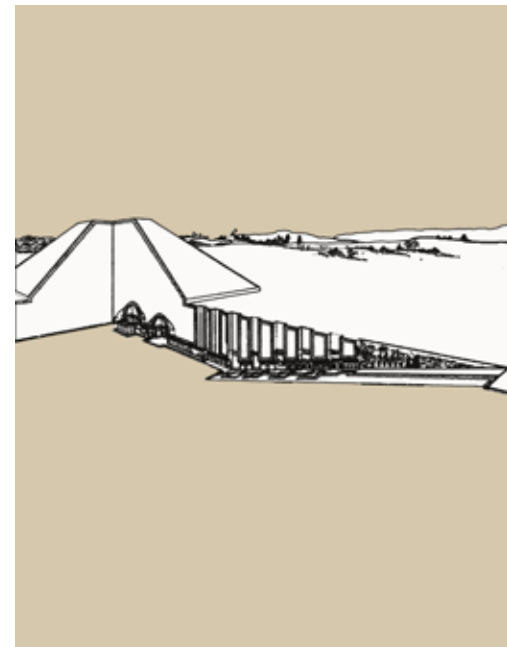
Interior circulation



Interior tomb room photo



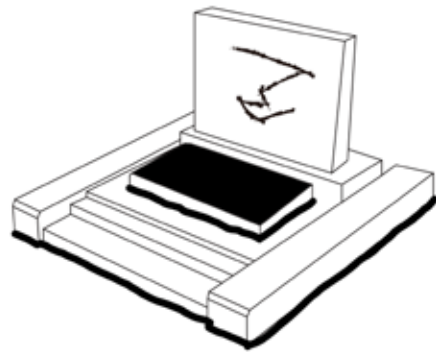
Site Photo



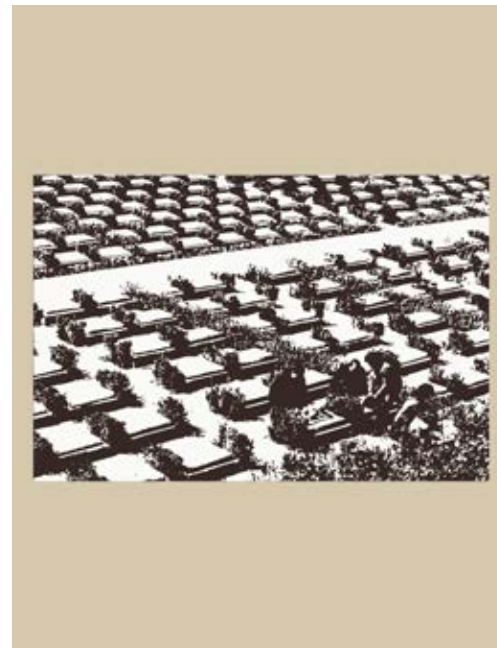
Zhao Mausoleum, Tang Dynasty, 589- 649 A.D.



# Cemetery Park



*P.R.C 1949 -*



*Contemporary cemetery park, after 1949 A.D.*



*No private space to mourn*



*Crowded cemetery in Hong kong*

Nowadays, due to the impact of social changes, foreign cultures and government regulations, traditional funeral practices have been abandoned in cities and tombs have been converted to Western-style, public cemetery parks. However, many problems have arisen from this shift, including simplification and homogenization. Cremation does save burial space but lacks space for mourning, and as such, the private space left for people to memorialize the departed is tragically limited. The design does not take into account the core of the funeral practices: the rituals which, up until now, have been passed down over thousands of years.

As a result, the core of my new cemetery mode design is about reconstructing the content of new rituals.

RITUALS



## “The Analects of Confucius”

In fact, to serve them now dead as if they were living, and now departed as if they were still with us– this is the highest achievement of true filial piety..

Mourning duties should be given to those who have ceased to be and sacrifices should be offered to ancestors, according to rituals, so that honesty and simplicity can find their way into the folk customs.

In mourning, we should not go overboard, beyond fully expressing our grief.



*Mourning in the tomb mural*



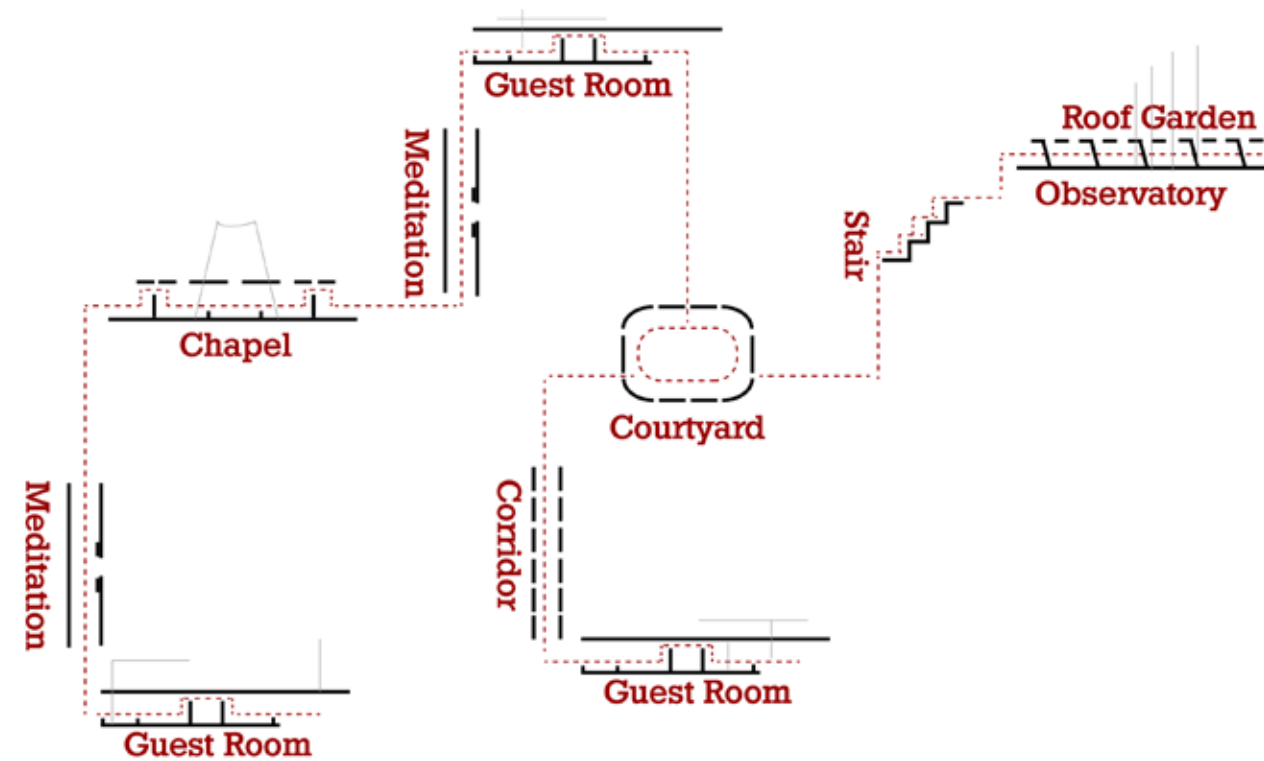
*All family members and friends will participate in respectfully*

According to traditional Chinese Confucian culture, the most important thing of ceremony is to serve the dead as if they were living, as if they were still with us. Mourning is the most major part, is the process of living family members and friends resolving grief and accepting the death of relatives or friends. I break down the contents of mourning into six stages: sadness, calmness, farewell, sharing, healing and memories.

And I started an experiment to try and understand and conceptualize the corresponding architectural answers in turn. Saying goodbye to the deceased body in the private space of the chapel, keeping calm in the soft light and shadow space, sharing the sadness with relatives or friends in the public courtyard, after walking up to the garden, healing in the natural environment of the observation deck, and finally embracing and accepting the death, where the body is returned to nature, and the passing of the individual gives birth to a new life, where new memories may bloom.

SADNESS --- CALMNESS --- FAREWELL --- SHARING --- HEALING --- MEMORIES

## PROGRAM



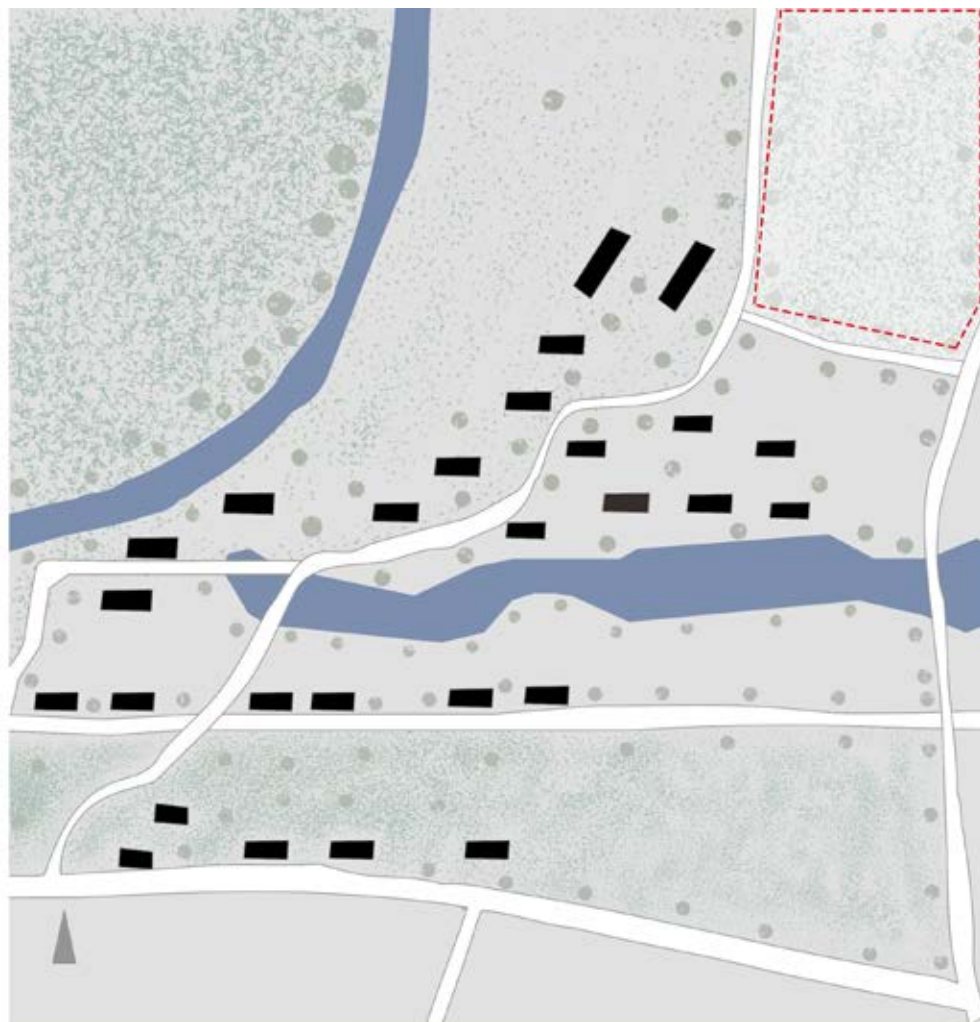
## SITE



Here is the site called Shucheng, it is a county in the west-central part of Anhui Province. The area is famous for tea, and its architecture is also very distinctive. Huizhou Architecture is one of the traditional Chinese architecture styles. The architecture uses bricks, wood, and stone as raw materials, notably timber frames as significant structures. Huizhou Architecture is rich in bamboo and bamboo crafts as well.



- Village Housings
- ▭ Cemetery Site
- ▲ Village Entrance



Here is the site map. The black blocks represent temporary dwellings for attending mourners, the gray arrow represents the entrance to the village, the red area for the cemetery, which is in a bamboo forest, at the end of the village. A very important piece of background information on this village is that there was a couple who migrated here to raise their family because of the sino-japanese war, where all village members had a blood relationship, which is why I consider design as a bigger space for the whole village, not just my grandfather. The deceased from this village can have their tombstone or memorial ancestral tablet in the ceremony hall. This idea also offers opportunity: if someone is unable to return to the village to mourn for whatever reason, others who are able to be there can express grief and mourn on behalf of them. Most of the new generation will not reside there permanently, hence the temporary housing in the village for short stays and the abundance of hostels for visitors and family to rent.





*Citang (Ancestor Hall)*



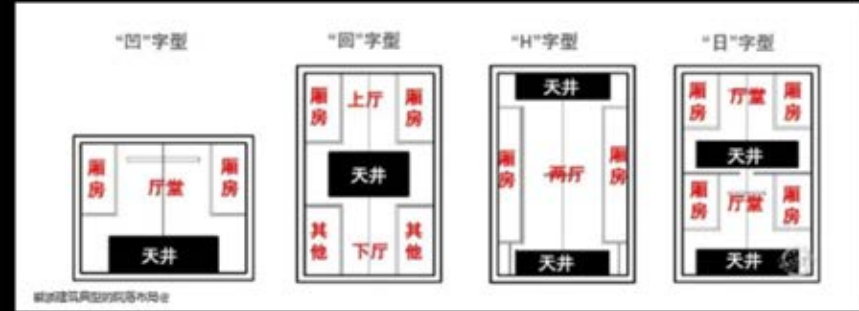
*paifang*



*Black tiles and white walls*



*天井 Tianjin (Ceiling Opening)*

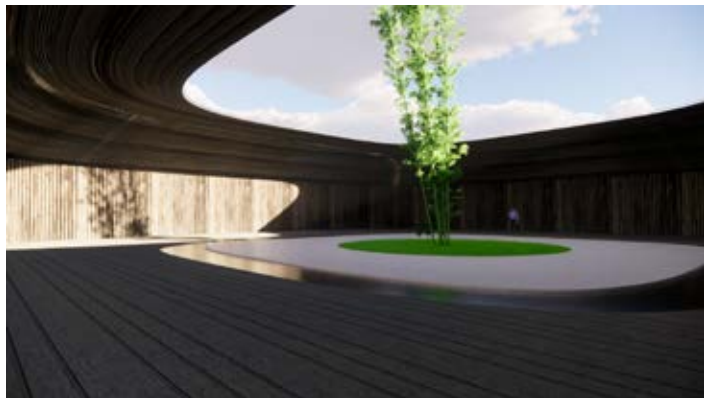


*Tianjin in different housing Layout*

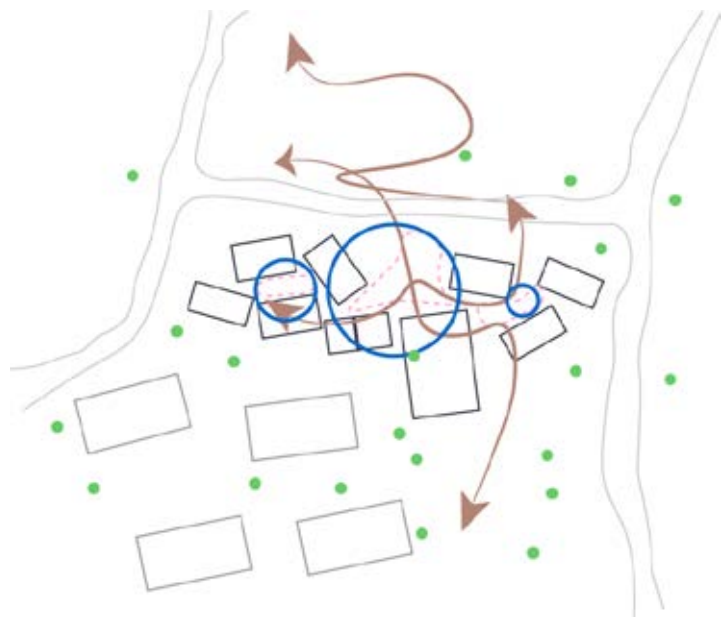
I also researched some unique local architectural language, which would be used in the funeral practice environment, citang also can be called :the ancestral hall and it is the space for local funeral ceremonies, paifang is the traditional style of Chinese architectural arch or a gateway structure. This can be translated as a cemetery entrance. The building style would imitate the local residential buildings, which feature black tiles and white walls.

In terms of spatial structure, tianjin (a Chinese word which translates to "ceiling opening") is widely used in local housing. These ceiling openings often served as bridge connections between different spaces, and possessed meditative qualities in the simplicity of their design and in their inherent opening to the natural world.





*Tianjin- Meditation- Connection*



*Hostels can be rent for visitors and family*

The placement of the temporary housing could also convey tianjin layout methods. A few hostels surround an open public space for people doing activities, The design of the path should be winding and winding along with the bamboo forest, so that the whole building can be hidden by nature visually, and people living in the hostels can't see the hall directly.



*Bamboo Concrete*

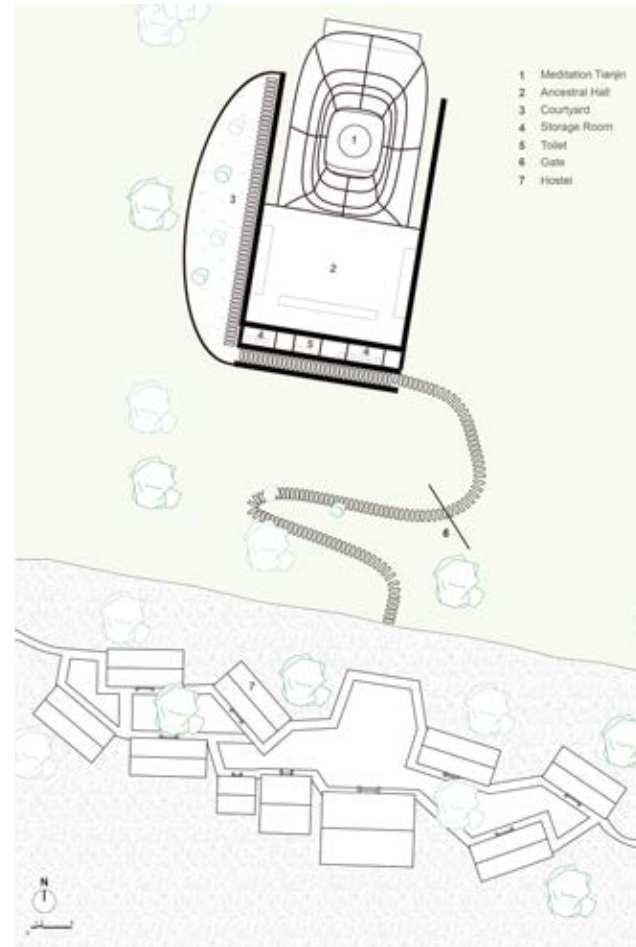
I found one material that I'd apply to that site called bamboo reinforced concrete. It has a raw, natural and non-decorative material language. The main building structure is constructed by concrete with a bamboo framework. The bamboo texture left on the concrete surface reduces the visual and material scale of the concrete wall and harmonizes with the surrounding trees and greenery.



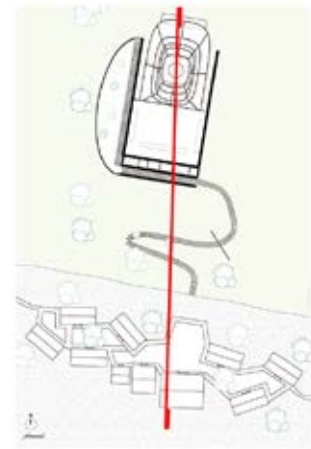
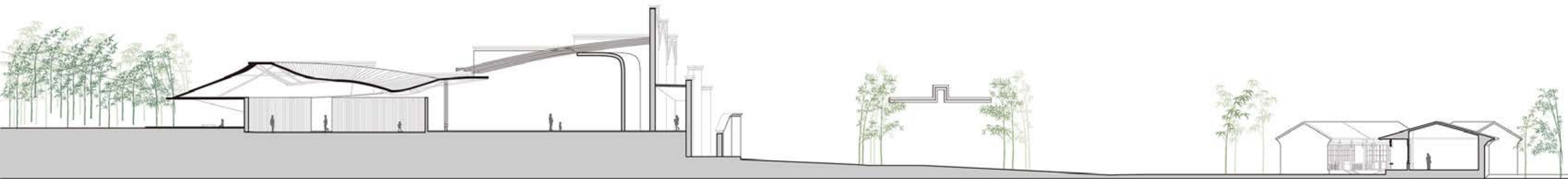
SITE PLAN



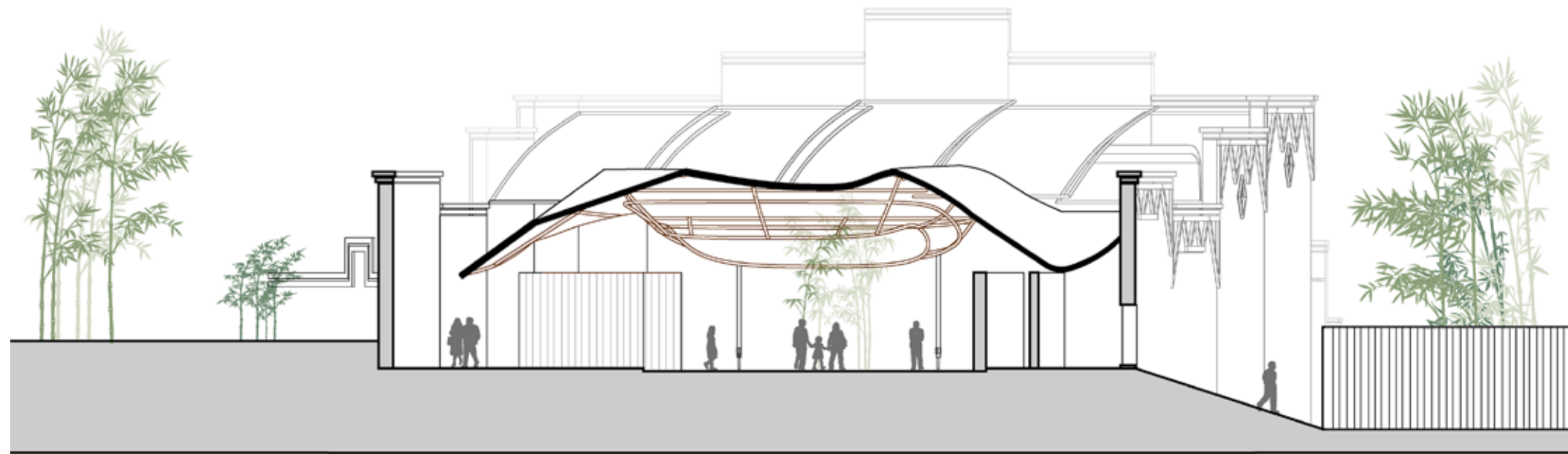
PLAN



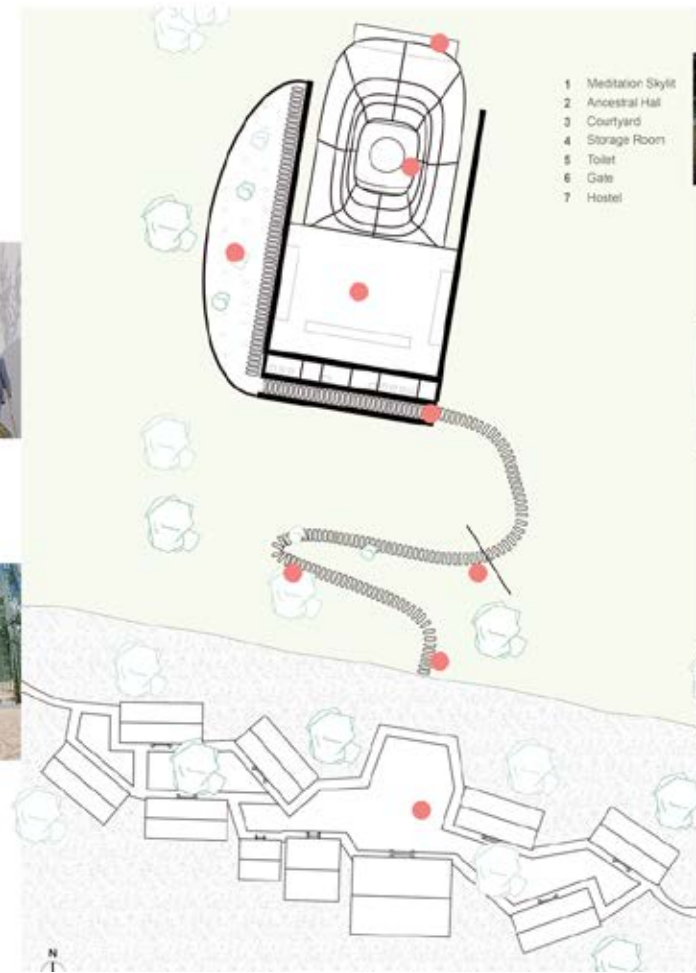
SECTION 1



SECTION 2

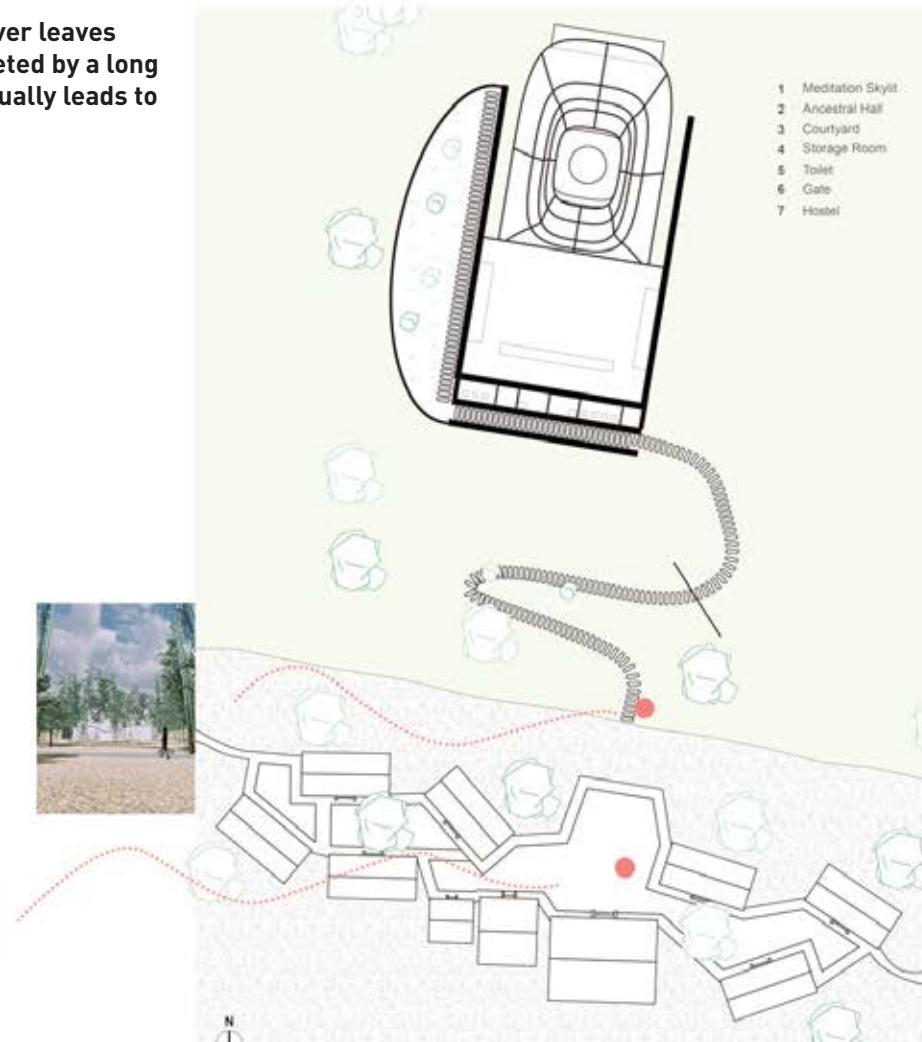


# JOURNEY

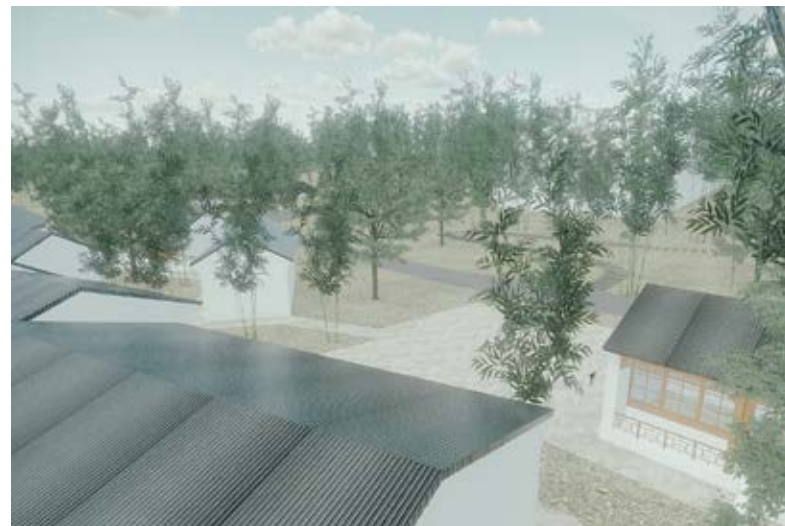




**SADNESS:** When the griever leaves their hostel, they are greeted by a long winding path which eventually leads to the ceremony space.

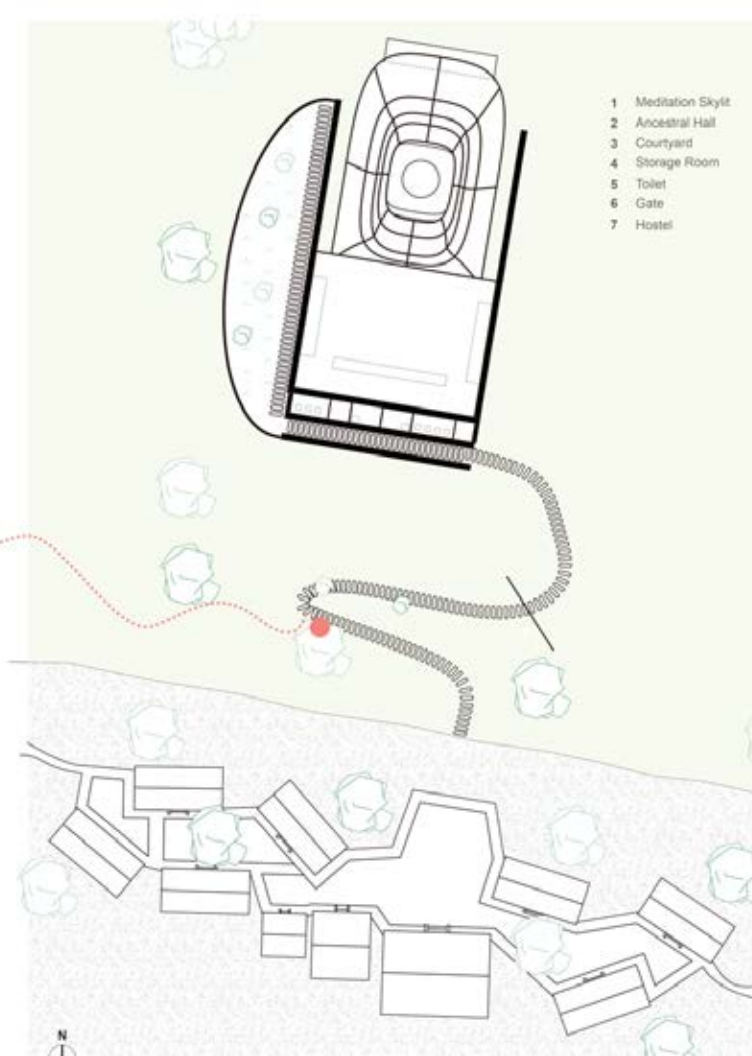


## SADNESS





**CALMNESS:** The path is designed with meditation and time in mind, using a long curving path to take the user on a meditative journey through nature, rather than finding their destination immediately. In addition, the forest conceals parts of the ceremonial building, allowing the user to become immersed in the environment.



## CALMNESS



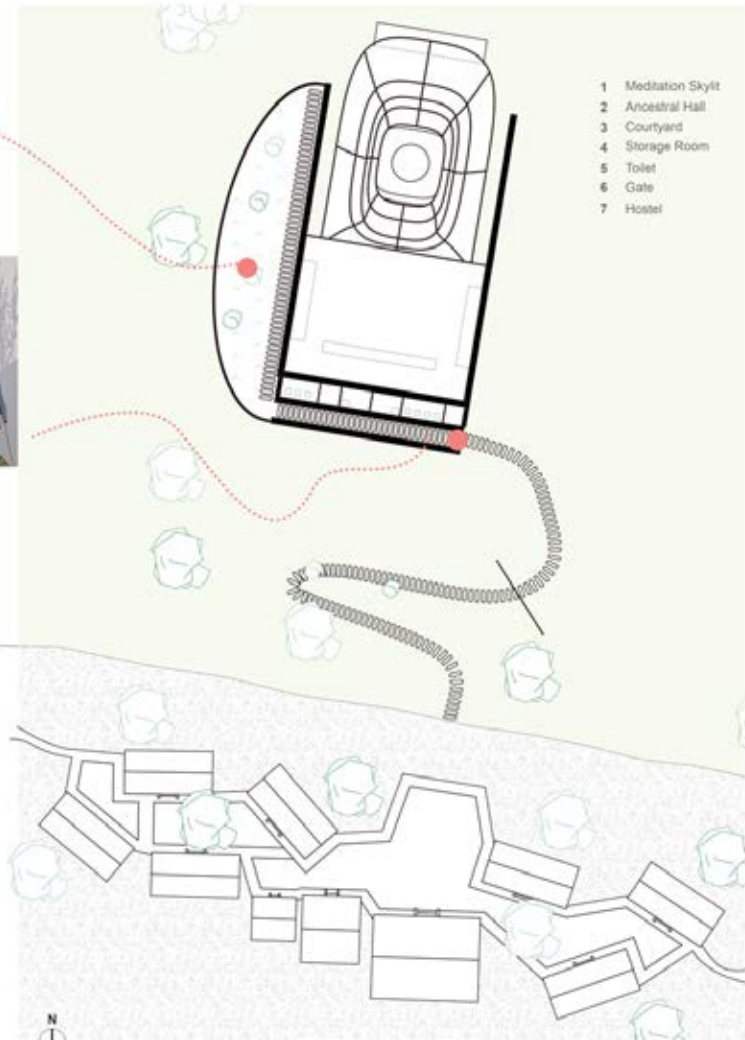
**FAREWELL:** Midway through the path, the user will pass through a gate that resembles bamboo and serves to transport the user to a different space while seamlessly blending in with the surrounding nature.



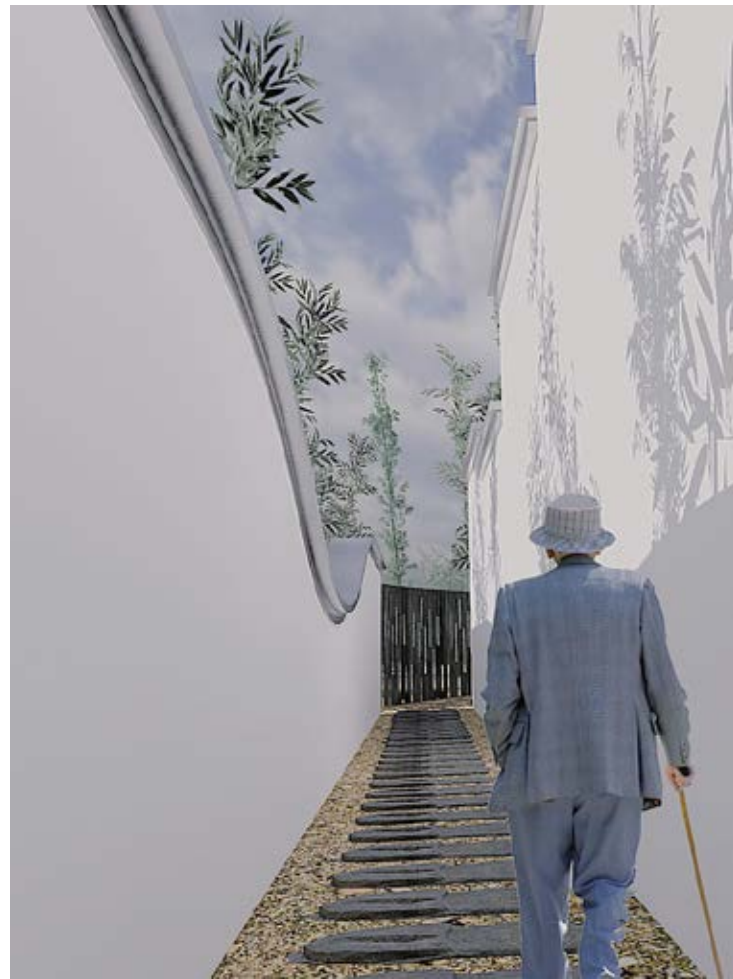
## FAREWELL

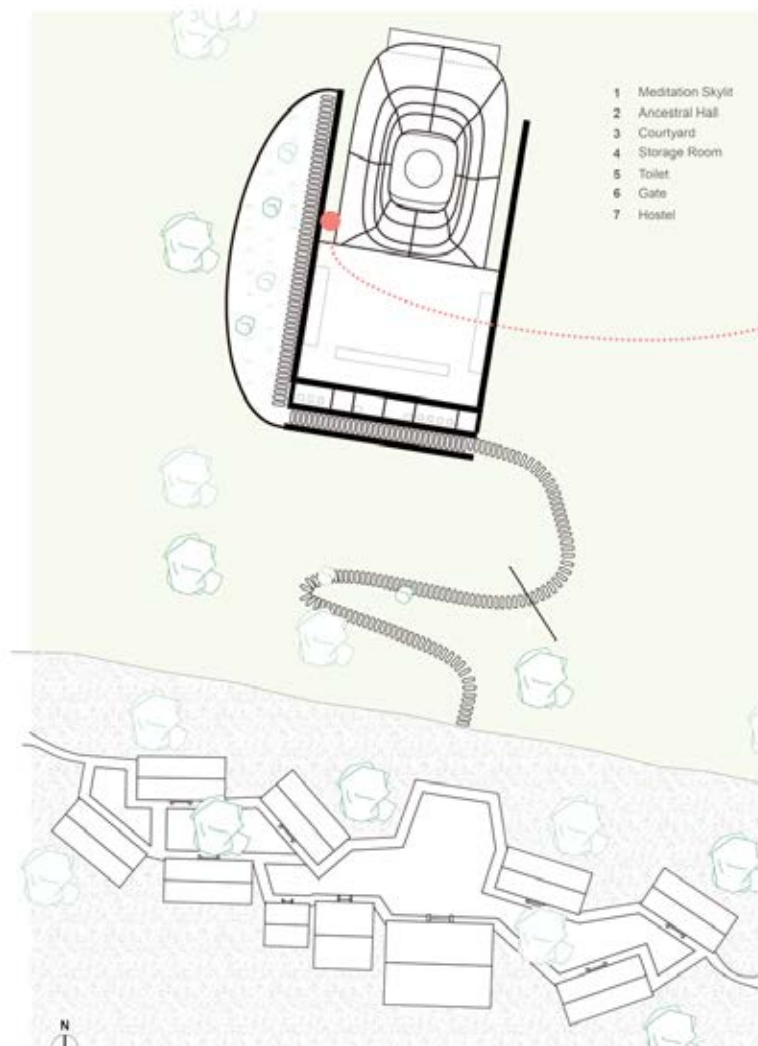






**SHARING:** As they approach the building, the user will enter a courtyard, with a fence whose cutouts mimic a river. This is a space to greet friends and family and feel a sense of calm.

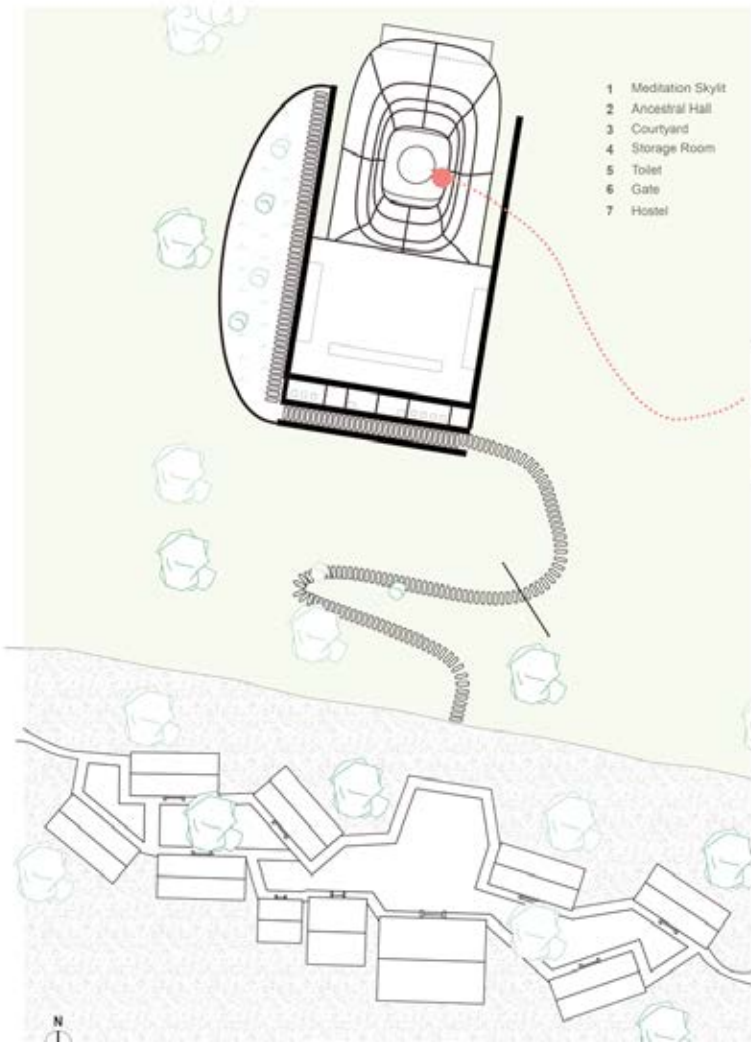




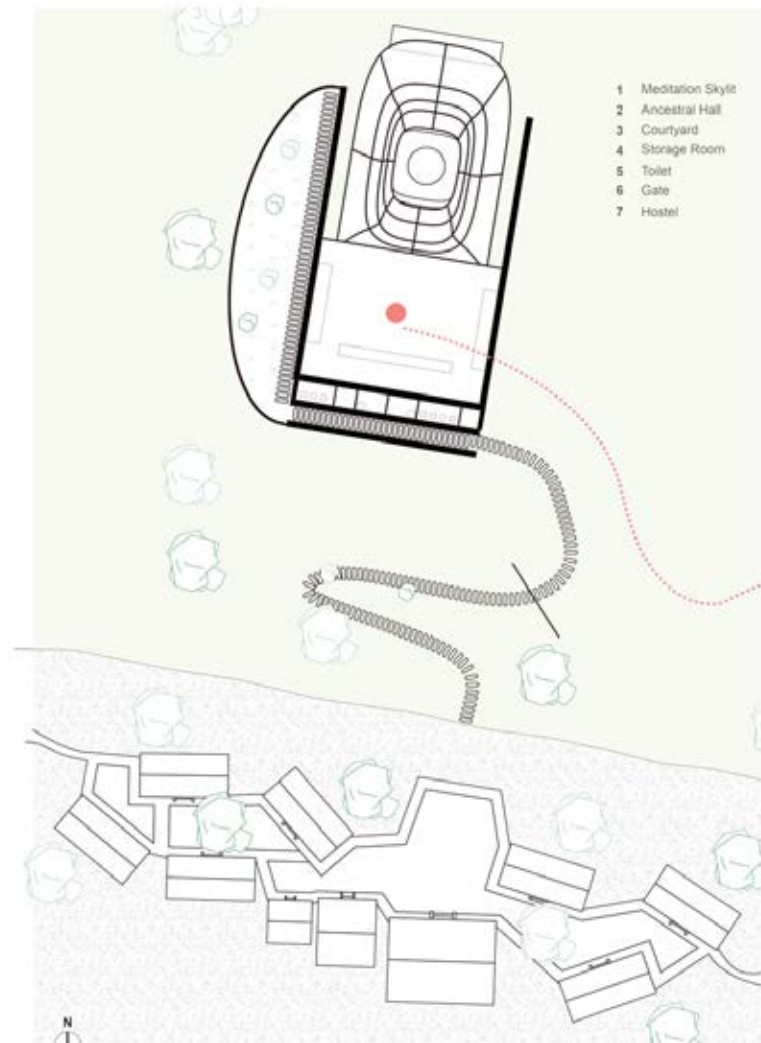
**Entrance of the Tianjin**



**HEALING:** When the user arrives at the ceremonial hall, they will be greeted with a large open ceiling that allows for plenty of natural light, with the elegant and minimalist blend of nature and architecture allowing for a great sense of peace. Here, the user may sit and enjoy the simplistic open design as part of the meditative experience, and convene with family and friends before entering the prayer hall.







Ceremony Hall

# MEMORIES

**MEMORIES:** After the user has completed their meditation and prayer, they are led to a tearoom where they may once again reconvene with family and friends and sip on tea together to complete the ceremonial journey.

