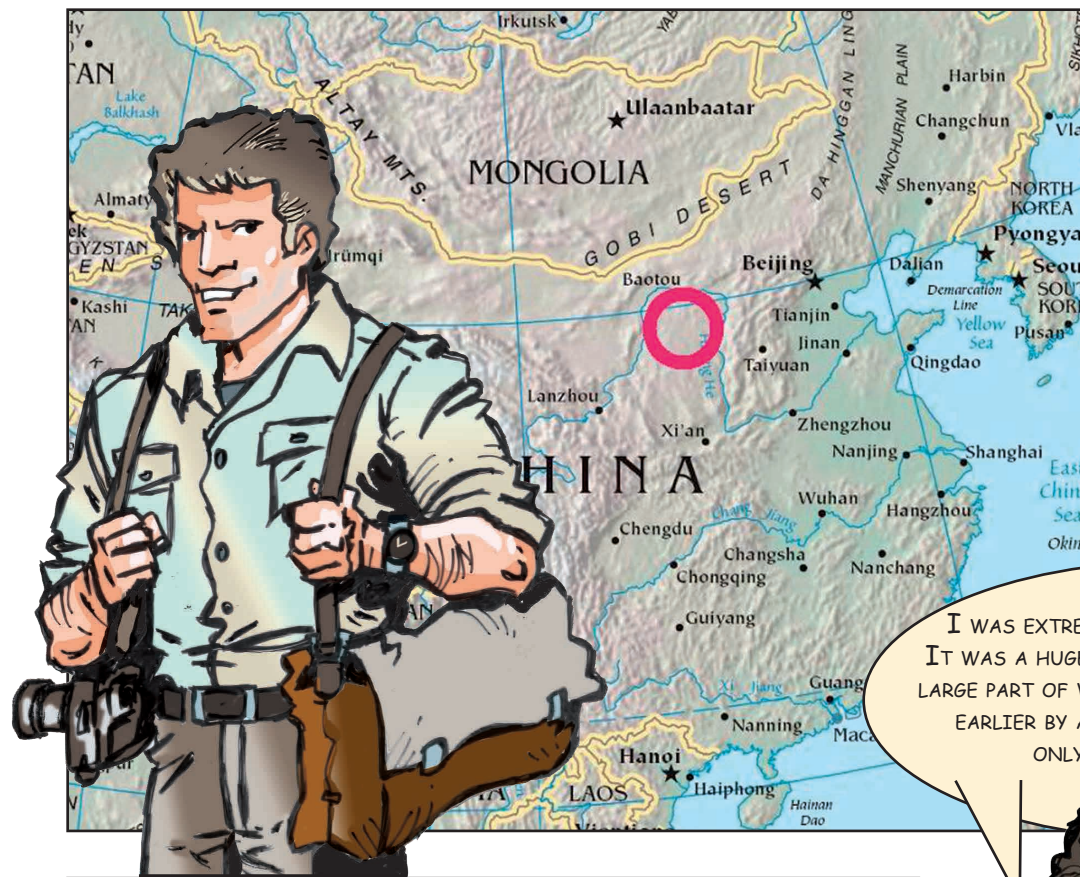


Baotou Project

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY OF BAOTOU (INNER MONGOLIA – CHINA)
School of Architecture (Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura)



IN 2003, ANTONIO RUIZ BARBARÍN, ARCHITECT AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF THE UPM'S SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, TOLD ME THAT HE HAD BEEN INVITED BY MR. JIANG JING HONG, AN EMINENT CHINESE ENTREPRENEUR AND BUILDING CONTRACTOR FROM THE CITY OF SHANGHAI, TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION TO DESIGN A MASTER PLAN FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY OF BAOTOU IN THE INNER MONGOLIA AUTONOMOUS REGION (CHINA).

I WAS EXTREMELY PLEASED AT THE PROSPECT. IT WAS A HUGE CHALLENGE TO REBUILD A CITY, A LARGE PART OF WHICH HAD BEEN DESTROYED YEARS EARLIER BY AN EARTHQUAKE THAT HAD LEFT ONLY 11 TEMPLES STANDING.



DR. RUIZ BARBARÍN AND HIS TEAM WERE INVITED, ALONGSIDE OTHER FRENCH AND GERMAN ARCHITECTURAL FIRMS, TO LEARN THE DETAILS OF THE COMPETITION IN SITU IN 2003. I COULD NOT LET SUCH A GREAT NEWS OPPORTUNITY SLIP, AND I JOINED THE GROUP TO OFFER FULL COVERAGE OF THE VISIT.

WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT, WE EAGERLY SET OFF FOR INNER MONGOLIA. A GRAND RECEPTION AWAITED US UPON OUR ARRIVAL AT BAOTOU. A HUGE CROWD HAD GATHERED IN THE CITY'S ENORMOUS PARK, WHERE, AFTER THE POLITICAL SPEECHES OF WELCOME TO THE "INTERNATIONAL TOWN PLANNING EXPERTS", WE BOARDED A LARGE HELICOPTER TO OVERFLY THE LAND IN THE BEILANG DISTRICT ON WHICH THE NEW TOWN WAS TO BE BUILT.



ON THE FOLLOWING DAY WE WERE RECEIVED BY THE CITY'S MAYOR. ABOARD A MASSIVE WHITE LIMOUSINE, WE TOURED THE OLD TOWN THAT WAS TO BE DEMOLISHED. DURING THE VISIT, THE CHINESE AUTHORITIES ASKED DR. RUÍZ BARBARÍN WHICH BUILDINGS WERE AND WHICH WERE NOT WORTH SAVING. AMAZEMENT REGISTERED ON OUR FACES. IT LOOKED AS IF THE DREAM MIGHT VERY WELL COME TRUE. AFTER COLLATING ALL THE TECHNICAL INFORMATION, WE EXPLORED EVERY CORNER OF THE CITY IN THE COMPANY OF MSSRS. FEI CHUNLU, PRESIDENT OF THE BAOTOU LONGZANG REAL ESTATE CO. LTD., AND JIAN JIN HONG, THE PROJECT MENTOR, TAKING THE PHOTOS THAT WERE TO CONSTITUTE THE GROUNDWORK OF THE PROJECT.

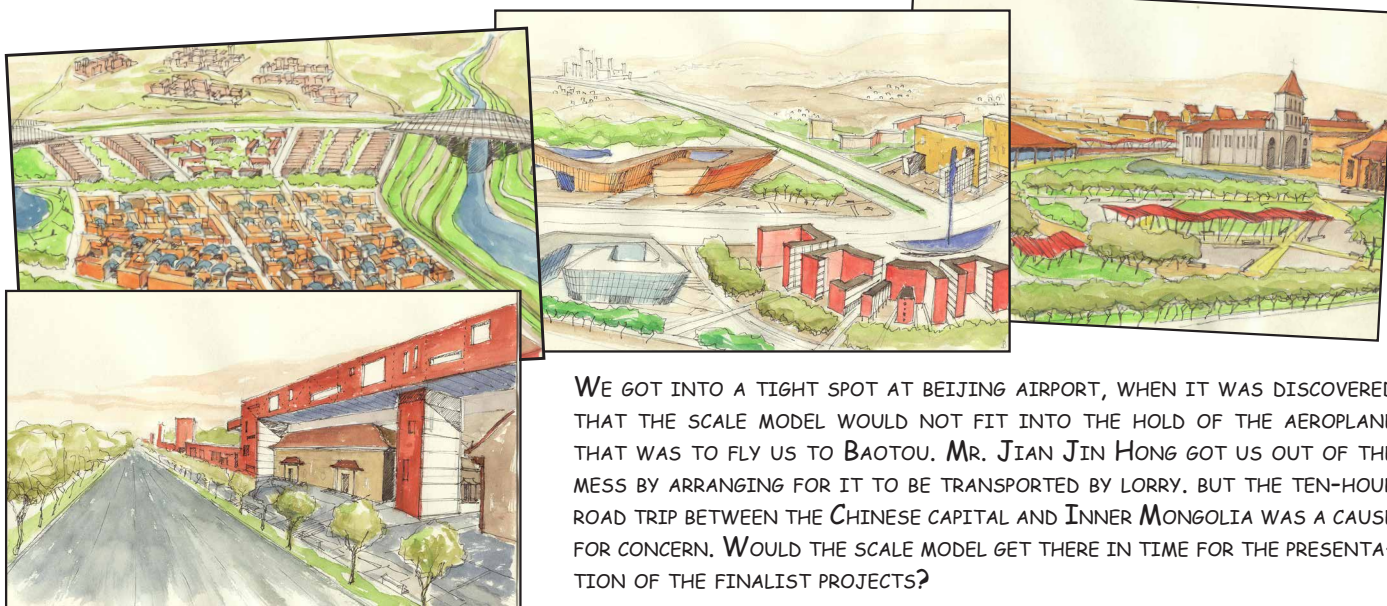


A FEW DAYS LATER WE RETURNED TO MADRID, WHERE THE TEAM OF ARCHITECTS WORKED FRENETICALLY FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS. NEVER IN THEIR WILDEST DREAMS COULD THEY HAVE IMAGINED THAT THEY, LIKE LE CORBUSIER IN CHANDIGARH OR NIEMEYER IN BRASILIA, WOULD GET THE CHANCE TO DESIGN A CITY HOUSING A POPULATION OF 500,000...



THE PROJECT THAT THEY DESIGNED HAPPENED TO BE SHAPED LIKE A FISH, WHICH IS A CHINESE TOTEM AND A FEATURE THAT THE CHINESE AUTHORITIES WERE TO RATE HIGHLY.

WE RETURNED TO BAOTOU IN OCTOBER FOR THE PROJECT PRESENTATION. AMONGST OUR LUGGAGE WAS A MASSIVE WOODEN BOX CONTAINING THE SCALE MODEL OF THE MASTER PLAN, AND THE RESULT OF HUNDREDS OF HOURS OF ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING IN THE SHAPE OF PLANS AND PERSPECTIVES. LOTS OF WATERCOLOURS WERE PRODUCED IN A BEAUTIFUL COMBINATION OF ARCHITECTURAL TECHNIQUE AND ART.



WE GOT INTO A TIGHT SPOT AT BEIJING AIRPORT, WHEN IT WAS DISCOVERED THAT THE SCALE MODEL WOULD NOT FIT INTO THE HOLD OF THE AEROPLANE THAT WAS TO FLY US TO BAOTOU. MR. JIAN JIN HONG GOT US OUT OF THE MESS BY ARRANGING FOR IT TO BE TRANSPORTED BY LORRY. BUT THE TEN-HOUR ROAD TRIP BETWEEN THE CHINESE CAPITAL AND INNER MONGOLIA WAS A CAUSE FOR CONCERN. WOULD THE SCALE MODEL GET THERE IN TIME FOR THE PRESENTATION OF THE FINALIST PROJECTS?

IN THE EARLY EVENING WE BOARDED THE FLIGHT THAT WAS TO TAKE US TO OUR DESTINATION. THE GRAND FINALE AT WHICH THE FINALISTS WERE TO PRESENT THEIR PROJECTS WAS TO BE HELD EARLY THE NEXT DAY. THE SCALE MODEL ARRIVED AT THE VERY LAST MINUTE, AS OUR PRESENTATION WAS COMING TO ITS END: THE EFFECT WAS UNBELIEVABLE.



DR. RUIZ BARBARÍN'S MAGNIFICENT PROJECT FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CHINESE CITY OF BAOTOU SETS AN EXAMPLE FOR THOUSANDS OF UPM STUDENTS WHO HOPE TO SEE THEIR ENDEAVOUR AND HARD WORK REWARDED IN THE NOT SO DISTANT FUTURE.



A GIGANTIC FISH WAS TO SHAPE THE FUTURE CITY OF BAOTOU, AND THE MASSIVE SCALE MODEL BUILT USING THE BASIC MATERIALS OF WOOD AND PLASTICINE SET THE STAGE. I CAN STILL HEAR THE APPLAUSE FOLLOWING UPON THE BRILLIANT TRANSLATION BY OUR INTERPRETER TRYM BAGGER.

THANKS TO THEIR TIRELESS WORK, AN EXCELLENT TEAM OF PROFESSIONALS REALIZED THEIR AMBITION AND WON THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION FOR THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF BAOTOU CITY AFTER COMPETING IN THE FINAL AGAINST THE GERMAN ARCHITECT COERSMEIER.

