

## Compoundologies - Timber, Folklore, and the Community Irrigation Networks of Chiang Mai

Tommy CheeMou Yang, Special Faculty in Architecture, Carnegie Mellon - Architecture



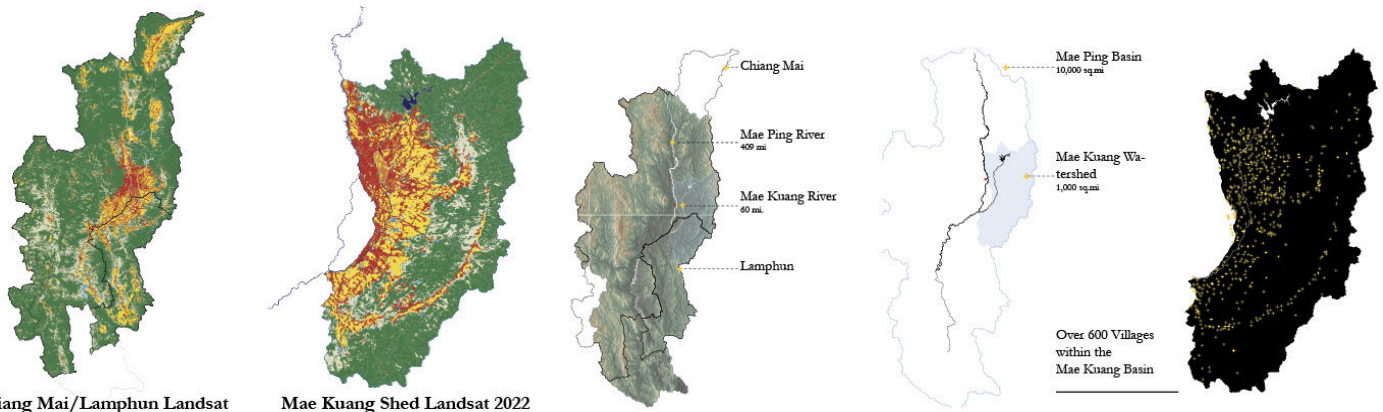
Chiang Mai - Back to the Field, Brian McGrath and Tommy Yang, 2023.

### Course Description

In the face of socio-ecological justice, how do we build knowledge around material economies, local sourcing, design detailing, and the processes of architecture as community empowerment?

This studio fosters knowledge built off of years of engagements in [Chiang Mai, TH](#) using fieldwork, film, and visual storytelling to explore citizen empowered design and the regenerative building practices of indigenous timber construction in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Chiang Mai is the second-largest province by land area (20,107 square kilometers) and the fifth-largest province by population (approximately 1.7 million people) of Thailand. It is located in the northern part of the country, approximately 685 kilometers from Bangkok sitting on the Mae Ping River basin at the valley between the Mountain Ranges of Lampang and Mae Hong Son. As a design family, **we will situate contemporary discourse in timber into systemic socio-ecological processes that includes folklore, forests, land ritual, harvesting, building, repair, and the geologic commons.** We will conduct field work in a string of villages 8 kilometers east of the center of the expanding city of Chiang Mai, Thailand exploring how the collective wisdom of community stewards uses vernacular timber methods to re-imagine an architecture for and of their common. The studio will introduce techniques in urban-rural forensics, animation, detailed prototyping, and typo-morphological research. **At four different scales - geology, the city, the building, and the construction detail - we will posit emergent narratives from the villages to establish a critical thinking position, a manifesto, and redefine the notion of the city and its architecture engaging social, political, and economic realities.**

With a focus on locality, this studio believes that contemporary building practices can be recalibrated with the embodied knowledge of everyday stewards, ultimately transitioning object-based approaches to address systemic issues that frame contemporary architectural practice. The semester-long journey will nurture a comprehensive project that includes animations, detailed architectural illustrations, and scaled fabrications in the design of a village compound. A pilot exhibit will close the design studio, holding a larger conversation around [community empowered architectural design](#), regenerative practices in architecture, storytelling, and activism.



Situating Chiang Mai, TH., Yang Tommy, 2023.

## Project Phases: From the Field to Imaginaries

### Design Phase 1, Aug 18-24, 2024

#### Chiang Mai Field Work - Folklore, Community Empowerment, and Regenerative Practices of Chiang Mai, TH

In her 2020 book, Diana Taylor illustrated the importance of presence in community building stating *...the act of presence "can be understood as a war cry in the face of nullification; an act of solidarity as in responding, showing up and standing with; a commitment to witnessing; a joyous accompaniment; present among, with, and to, walking and talking with others..."*<sup>1</sup>

With this premise, we will use fieldwork as a radical act of designing and method of inquiry. Utilizing the Chiang Mai Comprehensive Plan (CMCP) area, which is located in the center of Chiang Mai province, in 2018 and 2023 - we will unpack how large-scale top-down planning is fracturing agricultural areas of Thailand. The CMCP area has been determined by the Town Planning Act, B.E.2518 of Thailand, in 2012 - that expanded to the north, south, and east direction of the city during the last twenty years from the year 1990 to 2010, with the implementation of highways. Looking at how the city transformed within the enactment of the CMCP, our journey through Chiang Mai will comprise two metabolisms:

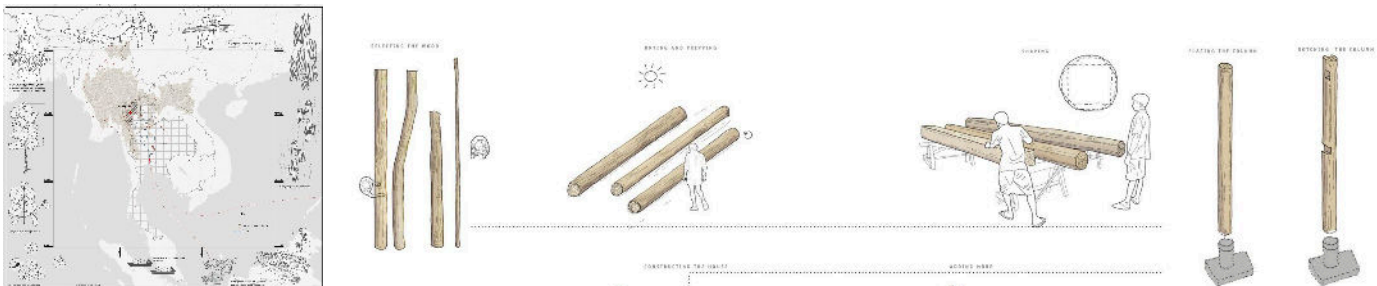
1. the modern sprawl along new highways from the historical center on the Mae Ping
2. the intricate network of rice farming villages within the Mae Kuang watershed

During our fieldwork, we will capture ethnographies of the lives and stories of ordinary villagers maneuvering in the desakota between these two metabolisms. We will dwell in the collective wisdom of urban-rural compound typologies, traditional Lanna timber practices, and how the canal systems continue to nurture regenerative practices of these communities in Chiang Mai, TH.

### Design Phase 2, Weeks 2 - 4

#### Socio-Ecological Methods - Muang Fai Community Networks: Curating Real Life Narratives From-The-Ground

The collected sketches, photos, videos, and measurements from the fieldwork will be interpreted by translating them into intensive Actor-Network Illustrations. Looking at relationships, acknowledging the long history between the geology, timber, folklore, and the city, we will respond to the problematic history of urbanization and city planning by understanding the breadth and danger of Chiang Mai's Comprehensive Plan to enhance learning, provoke dialogue and inspire policy change. How do we verify, resist, countermap, counterdata, and counter visualize from the ground? How does the typo-morphological research of the village contest our contemporary notions of timber, construction, and design? This accessible form of analysis and storytelling will interpret and communicate notions of the current lives of the Metropolitan Villagers' locality.

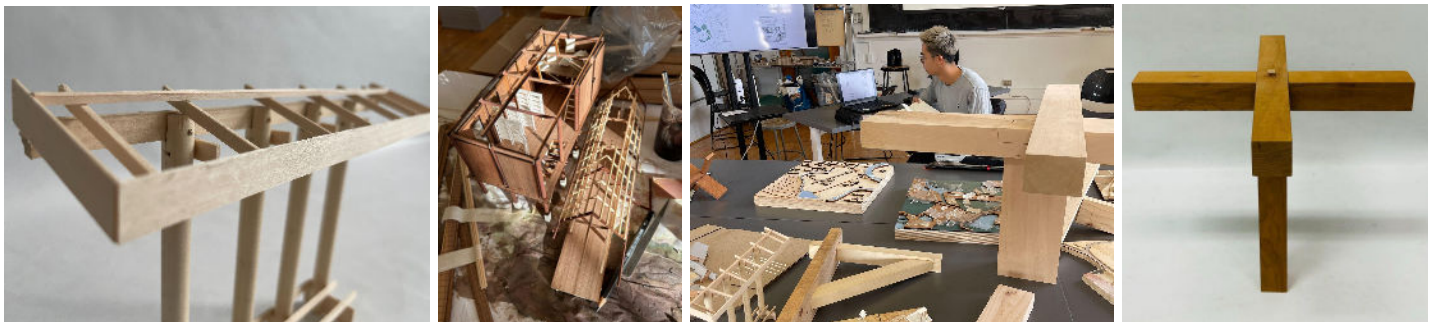


Timber Practices from the Locals, Autumn Dsouza, 2023 - from the Common Imaginaries Studio, Tommy Yang

### Design Phase 3, Weeks 5 - 8

#### Urban Mosaics, Design and Narrating a Typo-morphological Proposition - Juxtapositions, Prototypes, and the City

Using the stories, drawings, and maps nurtured from the first two phases, we will develop a series of typo-morphological propositions re-imagining new futures of how the vernacular knowledge of timber can help radicalize current architectural practices. As a family we will explore through acts of prototyping and drawing.



Prototypes from the Common Imaginaries Studio by Graana Khan, Anishwar Tirupathur, Ajay Chovatia, et al., Tommy Yang

<sup>1</sup> Taylor. (2020). *Present! : the politics of presence* / Diana Taylor. Duke University Press.



**Design Phase 3, Weeks 9 - 15**

**Practicing Care Through Architecture: Agency and Adjacency for an Architecture of and for the people**

Beyond the general provocations of documentation and research, something else stands out through the rituals of architects and designers – the ability to make connections and find new tactics as creative citizens in the face of our socio-ecological crisis. By using storytelling and fiction as an affective practice around timber, we will investigate the political, social, cultural, and environmental tensions gathered through our current analysis. We will nurture an architecture imaginary in the development of a compound design. The juxtapositions of imagery, sounds, videos, and sketches will be used to create an argument that would posit an architecture for and of the people into the real-world settings of Chiang Mai, TH. By critically engaging in the discourse of timber in the design of a dwelling we consider issues of gender, domestic objects, and everyday life integrating them into the discourse of socio-ecological justice.



*Growing the Compound Together*, Brian Hartman 2023 - from the Common Imaginaries Studio, Tommy Yang

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### Biography of Instructor

#### Tommy CheeMou Yang, Instructor

Tommy CheeMou Yang is a multi-disciplinary HMoob (Hmong) designer, researcher, and educator at Carnegie Mellon University whose work focuses on ordinary everyday practices and how these micro-narratives can create large urban and architectural change. His methodologies include fieldwork, archival data collection, critical mapping, comics making, animation, game design, and oral history interviews. In his praxis He completed his Bachelor of Science in Architecture at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and holds a Master of Architecture from Parsons School of Design at The New School with Distinctions. He is a recipient of the Alpha Ro Chi Medal 2020 for Design Excellence and multiple awards.

Yang's research has been funded by the National Endowment of the Humanities, Wisconsin Historical Society, Urban Systems Lab at The New School, Urban Field Station Arts in Residency, and Ann Kalla Funding at Carnegie Mellon University. His works and research includes [The HMoob Stories Project](#), Ecologies of Four Chinatowns, Finding Home: A Place to Belong, and more.

### Research Collaborators

This research is a long time collaboration between Brian McGrath and Tommy CheeMou Yang. This course wishes to elevate collaborations and acknowledge the unending support Brian McGrath. This studio course also gives special thanks to Chiranthanin Phuwa Kitika who has supported the project since 2023, and the love and knowledge in community engaged design he instills in the students.

#### Brian McGrath, Collaborator and Mentor

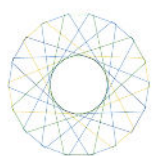
Brian McGrath is an architect with forty years of research and practice. The focus of his work is urban adaptation and change from social justice and ecological resilient perspectives. McGrath is a Principle Investigator in the Baltimore Ecosystem Study, where since 2005, he led the Urban Design Working Group. His books and publications include: Genealogy of Bassac (2021), Patch Atlas (2020), Urban Design Ecologies Reader (2012), Digital Modeling for Urban Design (2008), Transparent Cities (1994), Resilience in Ecology and Urban Design (2012), Growing Cities in a Shrinking World: The Challenges in India and China (2010), Sensing the 21st Century City (2007), and Cinematics: Architectural Drawing Today (2007). McGrath served as a Fulbright Senior Scholar in Thailand in 1998-99 and an India China Institute Fellow in 2006-2008 and was Research Director in the joint US-EU exchange program Urbanisms of Inclusion, and more recently Scientific Advisor for Designing Brussels Ecosystem.

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