Title or Proposal: A TALE OF TWO STREETS: COMPARATIVE EXPERIENCES ON STREETS IN THE EAST AND WEST
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Abstract:
The Third International Conference on Design Principles and Practices is a cross-disciplinary forum that brings together researchers, teachers and designers from all over the world to explore the meaning and purpose of design in society. Participation and visibility in such international platforms creates much needed opportunities for dialogue and awareness that is particularly important in the current climate in academia with its emphasis on cross-disciplinary research and teaching. I am requesting funding to present my paper at the conference and to cover registration fees, air travel, ground transportation, lodging and boarding.

Proposal:
Streets hold a special place in the literature on public space and are both literally and metaphorically the most fitting symbol of the public realm. Historically, the street has been one of the most significant public spaces in both occidental and oriental cultures. Yet, currently, the use and meaning of the street differs drastically between the East and West. The Western street is characterized by order and is a rationalized, regulated and commodified space whereas the oriental street is distinctive of an environment of complexity and contradictions, a diversity of use with an apparent disorder, and an place of over-stimulated sensory experience. In trying to enliven the street and to infuse it with vitality, the occidental cultures seek multiplicity, informality, ambiguity in form and use, and a heightened sensory experience. The orient, on the contrary, looks for ways to bring order to its seemingly chaotic milieu to appreciate the experience.

The goal of this research and presentation of the paper is to investigate what the two cultures can learn from each other. How can design inform the production and modification of spaces that allow the exchange without importing meaningless or acontextual forms? In this paper, I study streets in both cultures and explore the significance of the street as a meaningful place for meeting, interaction and human-human contacts, and a place for haptic experiences and body-object contacts. The comparison reveals the qualities that are missing in each context to allow the street to becoming a meaningful public space in present time. I conclude by suggesting design guidelines that may be interpreted and materialized contextually in the East and West to make the street a public space that is an arena for public life, a meeting place for different social groups and a space for the display of symbols and images in society.

Cross-cultural studies such as this are particularly significant in current times when there is tremendous export of forms and technologies taking place across the globe. Such studies of public space that investigate cross-cultural perspectives especially further the goals of the University by providing a better understanding of diverse cultures around the globe. Studying cultures in parallel provides opportunities to learn more about one’s own culture and to explore its hidden potential.
Streets are particularly noteworthy public spaces that play a significant role in urban and community design. Examining public spaces in oriental and occidental cultures provides us with unexplored possibilities of use and meaning of public space in our society. Such inquiries help us to better understand and engage with communities locally; a goal shared by the School, College and the University. My research and presentation support the intellectual goals of SACD, CVPA and USF. Presenting at a major cross-disciplinary international forum affords the visibility aspired by the School, College and the University.