EVENT RECAP · HKU LECTURE FOR MASTER PROGRAM OF... SCIENCE IN URBAN DESIGN AND TRANSPORT

People-Oriented Design and Zhongguancun Street's Evolution

Jane Huang on street renewal and design thinking in the age of AI

Online Lecture | 15 September 2026

How can streets respond to people's needs? And what does "people-oriented" mean as cities enter the age of AI?

On 15 September 2026, MUDT7011 Design Studio, part of HKU's Master of Science in Urban Design and Transport programme, held an online lecture. Course lead Frankie Wong welcomed Jane Huang, Founder and Director of Insight Design Studio, as guest speaker. In a talk titled "People-Oriented Design in the Renewal of Zhongguancun Street," Ms. Huang shared her professional experience, drawing on a decade of evolving street-renewal ideas and practice in Beijing.

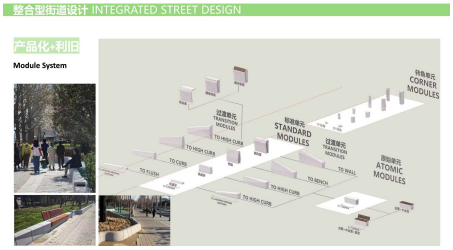
People-oriented design through the evolution of Zhongguancun Street

Ms. Huang reviewed two rounds of renewal along Zhongguancun Street over the past decade, and introduced projects in its core area and at Zhongguancun West Zone.

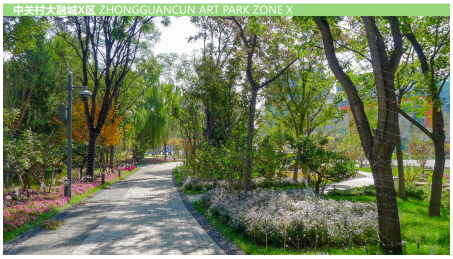
Reflecting on design practice at different stages, she explored how the meaning of "people-oriented" changes across eras and contexts. In the 2017 international competition to enhance Zhongguancun Street, Huang proposed reducing the road from eight lanes to six and shifting from a car-centred to a people-centred approach. Her idea—"slow down to discover beauty" and return the street to everyday life—won unanimous support from the jury. As Beijing moved into a phase of urban renewal focused on existing built-up areas, the Zhongguancun North Street upgrade largely retained the existing spatial structure while expressing care through details. A "street interface module system" used a modern, concise design language to connect varied scenes of street life and translate people-oriented design into practice. In the western core area of Zhongguancun Street, post-pandemic desire for a closer connection with nature informed Huang's concept of "urban renewal led by park activation." Its integrated landscape-and-architecture system of open, three-dimensional spaces preserves the site's public character and natural imagery. The project offers a forward-looking vision of coexistence and nature-first design in a post-human era. It has become one of the area's most vibrant commercial destinations and received the 4th Beijing Urban Renewal Best Practice Award.



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Zhongguancun west zone | Photo: Jane Huang

The lecture also turned to the era of AI innovation: as technology and urban life become increasingly intertwined, how can streets and public spaces foster innovation? What strategies can designers use to put people first, bring nature into the city, and ensure technology serves the public good?

Discussion and exchange

The lecture prompted lively discussion. Students and faculty raised valuable questions about the distinct challenges of street renewal and public-space activation in the different contexts of Hong Kong and Beijing, public-space design, and urban development in the age of AI. They also discussed how streets and public spaces can foster innovation, and how designers can uphold human care while making room for nature and ensuring technology serves the public good. Huang drew on her project experience to share insights and respond to the audience.

Through case studies and discussion, participants gained a deeper understanding of street public-space renewal and people-oriented design, and found fresh perspectives in the exchange. The lecture was a success, and students and faculty found it highly valuable.

Thanks for sharing, and shaping better urban spaces

Following the event, HKU's Department of Urban Planning and Design presented Huang with a certificate of appreciation, thanking her for sharing her expertise and insights with the course. Her experience enriched students' learning and gave them fresh perspectives for further exploring street renewal and urban-space design.

Starting from the renewal of a single street, the lecture opened up an ongoing conversation about people's needs, spatial experience, and the future city. We hope these observations and ideas will continue to inform future learning and design practice.

Certificate of Appreciation

