

***Building Globalization: Transnational Architecture Production in Urban China.*** By Xuefei Ren. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. 240 pp. \$30 (paper).

Through the lens of international architectural production, Xuefei Ren's *Building Globalization: Transnational Architecture Production in Urban China* examines the repositioning of power logics in urban China and proposes that "transnational architectural production has become a major force of capital accumulation in the process of making global cities" (p. 18). Ren offers detailed, well-illustrated case studies in her analysis of changing urban class structure in China, providing her audience with cutting-edge visual information of emerging architectures in Beijing and Shanghai. Ren suggests there is an increasing number of Chinese cities embedded in the global network of architectural production and thus offers new channels for international architectural companies, local developers, state bureaucrats, and cultural elites to benefit from the process of making global cities in China.

Chapters 1 and 2 theoretically discuss the transnational architectural production network and offer a good review of the history of transnational architectural practice in China. Ren examines the geographic separation between globalized consumption and production of design. Cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Abu Dhabi are distinctive consumption sites for enabling transnational architectural production, while cities such as Tokyo and many European cities are production sites that chiefly offer original design.

In Chapter 3, Ren thoroughly analyzes the case of SOHO China to describe how a local real estate developer benefits mightily from producing symbolic architectures in Beijing. Through employing stylish designs from international architects, adopting sophisticated marketing strategies such as holding cultural events and creating various cultural extravaganzas, SOHO China quickly became the "most publicized" (p. 61) private developer in China. In addition, SOHO China also packages every project as a new cosmopolitan lifestyle, which satisfies the emerging distinctive consumption needs of the new urban middle and upper-middle class, and thus becomes a fashion icon in urban space. In Chapter 4, Ren discusses the Shanghai Xintiandi, the top entertainment site and tourist destination in Shanghai. It originally comes from the remodeling of the Shikumen area, which comprises several old architectures. These old architectures

define the life of the old Shanghai citizens and symbolize the lifestyle of ordinary people. The case of remodeling Shikumen in Shanghai has shown that through “creatively preserving” the old architecture, private business could rediscover economic revenues. At the same time the state can not only gain revenue but also allay public anger over demolition of old architectures. Both constructing new symbolic architecture and remodeling the old have reinterpreted the power relationship in urban China. In Chapter 5, Ren talks about the case of constructing the National Olympic Stadium in Beijing in preparation for the 2008 Olympic Games. In this case, Ren argues that the Chinese government adopted a global architectural language to show its remarkable national progress to the world and prove its great ambition in forging a globalizing new Beijing before the 2008 Olympic Games.

Through these three cases, Ren clarifies the changing urban power relationship through architectural production. She proposes that the powerful developers, transnational design firms, and few cultural elites could influence national policymaking. However, it is not accurate to exaggerate the influence that commercial and cultural elites have on the state. After all, either by local developers or transnational firms, the prerequisite for implementing the massive production of symbolic architectures in urban China is to conform to national fundamental interests in general and policy orientation toward building Chinese global cities in particular. These cases in certain degrees all reflected “the role of the state in directing the developing of global cities” (p. 13). To be specific, the success of the first commercial project of SOHO China (SOHO Newtown) is highly related to its tight connection and engagement with “The Beijing CBD Master Plan,” which was proposed by the Beijing government. In the case of Shanghai Xintiandi, the state shift from the policy of demolition to preservation is not merely because of the successful remodeling in Shikumen by private business but also because of the political buffering it could provide. For the state, preservation is merely a newly explored effective instrument; the policy turning is pragmatic. Similarly, local intellectual elites’ ignorance about excellent design proposals in the process of implementing a preservation strategy with the Shanghai government made evident their powerlessness in negotiating with local government.

Chapter 6 is the most compelling part of this book. Borrowing from Bourdieu’s concept, Ren identifies *symbolic capital* in the context of current Chinese society as an overestimation of the value of

international design and a simultaneous underestimation of the Chinese architects. This overvaluing of Western design can be seen as symbolic capital and can be exchanged to other forms of capital. Overall, Ren's analysis of "the power of symbolic" thoroughly addresses two issues. First, it is clear that the practice of neoliberalism in China is becoming obscure but aggravating. Local developers mold themselves as the icons of Western urban living rather than as naked benefit-maximization enterprises while transnational architecture firms have employed more sophisticated tools to maximize profit, such as symbolic preservation and remodeling of Chinese cultural heritage. Second, the former power logics in urban China have changed. The territorial elites not only introduce and employ transnational architecture resources but also make an impact on state-specific policies to a certain degree. This phenomenon offered a multifaceted story in the global cities theory.

If one is interested in the latest postmodern urban architects or concerned about urban development in China, this book provides vivid description and value-neutral research tropism with straightforward language. However, Ren seems to ignore the massive architectural production involved in the practice of making second-tier Chinese cities into global cities. She also pays less attention to the excluded majority of urban residents who suffered most from the flashy architectural festival and whose living conditions were not fully addressed in this book.

■ Zhijiao Wang

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
Northeastern University*

***Civil Society Networks in China and Vietnam: Informal Pathbreakers in Health and the Environment.*** By Andrew Wells-Dang. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 248 pp. \$85.00 (cloth)

This book successfully challenges arguments that repressive regimes lack vibrant civil societies. Some views of state-led society, common to Chinese and Vietnamese regimes, point to the few civil society organizations operating independently of the state. What few organizations do exist, the argument goes, tread carefully to not criticize the government too much. Peering beyond the thin, perhaps barely existent, layer of formal civil society organizations, Wells-Dang argues that informal networks of individuals, and at times organiza-