

The great strength of this book is its focus on the special rather than the temporal; Shanghai's urban spaces are brought vividly to life. The book contributes greatly to our understanding of what modernity really meant to the Chinese residents of Shanghai. Yet the book's self-conscious focus on fragmentary sources will perhaps also be considered its greatest weakness by those who like their histories purposeful, event-driven and firmly temporal. Similarly, those who struggle to be engaged by historical accounts so clearly informed by the language and theorizing of the field of cultural studies may find the book hard going at times. The contributions Liang makes to on-going debates on issues from the development of modernity to the effect of foreigners on Shanghai's publishing world and on concubinage are extremely valuable, but a more direct style of prose might have brought these contributions to the fore a little more obviously.

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Building Globalization: Transnational Architecture Production in Urban China

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Xuefei Ren, currently an assistant professor of sociology and global urban studies at Michigan State University, has spent a good part of the last decade steeped in the world of urban redevelopment in China, both as an observer and as a participant. She has been a regular commentator in *SOHO xiaobao*, a cultural and architectural magazine which started life as a sales brochure of SOHO China, a major real-estate developer that is also examined in this volume. Right from the outset, it is this intimate knowledge of the world of urban construction, consumption and commentary, which sets Ren's work apart.

At first glance, the work could belong firmly to the field of study of world/global cities in the tradition of Friedmann or Sassen (Ren's more quantitative second chapter undoubtedly does), but it is also distinctly multidisciplinary, with a thorough ethnography of key actors and a score of focused, in-depth case studies, exploring the question of globalization in China from a perspective of networks and actors, as well as the symbolic capital invested and accrued from the process of building the city in China.

Initially, Ren constructs an architectural taxonomy of world cities, dividing them into places of production and places of consumption. She uses a relational analysis to map out the position of Chinese cities in this world network in a novel way, focusing on architectural firms rather than financial services and their related business activities. Examining transnational architecture as the main criterion, Ren makes a salient comment on its importance in different parts of the world: while architecture is not a central feature of life in the developed world, Ren argues that it is in China, due to a comprehensive involvement of the state, business and professional elites in a national project of rebuilding. Modern architecture is a currency in this national project, the scope of which cannot be matched in the developed world's saturated real estate markets.

Ren furthermore leaves us with no doubt that first-tier cities in China have moved on from a formula of "glass + steel = modernity," and that place-making with the

intention of creating significant *symbolic* and *monetary* capital requires an additional value, one found in the prestige of engaging superstar architects and innovative boutique firms, many of which hail from smaller European cities or from Japan. Tables reveal that the most publicized and well-known major projects (and thus possessing a greater amount of symbolic capital) have been disproportionately entrusted to smaller architectural practices, hinting at an acute awareness on the part of the developers, state or private, of the value of first-rate architecture in place-making and consequently, at maximizing profits from redeveloped land.

One question which arises from Ren's network analysis is whether one shouldn't look more at the boutique firms that have designed much of the iconic architectural output in China, rather than the more anonymous corporate architectural offices which produce most of the volume. While practices such as Herzog & de Meuron, Foster Architects and OMA do appear in both lists, the predominance of corporate architectural firms in the main body of network analysis on centrality of global cities perhaps does not contribute much, especially since some of the results place Warsaw ahead of Tokyo in terms of the cities' power as measured by their centrality.

While the quantitative approach employed here is useful for setting the scene, the book's strength lies in the level of qualitative analysis, in the remarkable access that Ren gained to the field of architectural production in China and her sharp analysis of the repositioning of what she calls the "territorial elites": the entrepreneurs, the property owners, state bureaucrats, foreign investors and cultural elites. By examining the logic of architectural production, constructing a typology of architects as its producers and using this to look at specific cases, Ren weaves a rich narrative, which explains the built environment in China far better than any graph ever could.

Within such an environment, one comes across many urban phenomena familiar in the West, such as gentrification, conservation and so on, but which here take on a Chinese dimension. Ren takes care to unravel such deceptively easy, pan-global terminology. Preservation for instance, is as much a function of modernity as demolition, and both have been used in place-making. While this may be true of many preservation projects in the developed world, and especially in the US, Ren uses examples ranging from Beijing's "*hutong* chic" to the now infamous Starbucks Coffee in Shanghai's Xintiandi, to make the case that preservation is often another commodifying process harnessed for the creation of symbolic capital, and one where the interplay of local and foreign, state and private actors is well documented and symptomatic of the new logic of transnational architecture dominating China's urban space.

Perhaps one of the lasting impressions Ren's volume gives is the evolving complexity of the built environment, which cannot be reduced to a growth machine paradigm, nor one where the involvement of state bureaucrats is predictable; rather, as Ren shows on the case of SOHO China's more and less successful negotiations with the state, the networks of power are fluid and increasingly susceptible to public pressure. Such a possibility of an alteration of the three-decade long top-down developmental project is one that we must surely find very exciting.

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