“Experimental Architecture” in China

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In the past twenty years, a new generation of Chinese architects, many of whom have carved out an independent practice, have challenged the dominant ideology of architecture in China by offering an alternative experience, visual, tactile, and spatial. Since 2000 their exploratory practices, described as experimental architecture (shiyan jianzhu) by architectural critics, have been covered extensively in the Tongji University–based journal Time + Architecture (Shidai Jianzhu).

This article sketches the conditions that fostered the emergence of experimental architecture in the 1990s and the role that Time + Architecture played in presenting experimental architecture in the early 2000s. I focus on two special issues of the journal in which editors and contributors collectively formulated a critical ideology of experimental architecture. These special issues demonstrated both a critical attitude toward architecture rooted in the Beaux-Arts tradition and an alternative publishing practice focused on emerging independent architectural practitioners rather than well-established figures inside the state system.

The Emergence of Experimental Architecture in China

Experimental architecture emerged along with the discourse of experimental art (shiyan yishu). Experimental art in China during the 1980s cannot be described either as “unofficial” or as “avant-garde,” because, as Wu Hung remarked, the first term exaggerates the political orientation of this art, and the second, its artistic radicalism. The term “experimental architecture” first appeared in the symposium “Dialogue between South and North: Young Chinese Architects and Artists” (Nanbei Duihua: 5.18 Zhongguo Qingnian Jianzhushi he Yishujia Xueshu Taulunhui), held 18 May 1996 in Guangzhou, where architects, artists, critics, and academics discussed the possibility of experimental architecture in China. That same year the journal Architect (Jianzhushi) published a review article on this event and on projects by emerging architects (Figure 1). Wang Mingxian, the deputy editor in chief of the journal Architect, and Shi Jian, an independent architectural critic, in their key text of 1998, “Chinese Experimental Architecture in the 1990s,” characterized as experimental the work of emerging architects who resisted mainstream practice and the discourse of architecture in the late 1990s.

Dramatic social and political transformations characterized the 1980s, and the term “experimental” suggested both the extent and the kind of changes taking place in the cultural realm. The appearance of Art Movement in 1985 (85 meishu yundong), experimental novels (shiyan xiaoshuo), and avant-garde drama (xianfeng huaju) demonstrated a repudiation of socialist realism (shebei xianshi zhuyi) that expressed...

Figure 1 Yung Ho Chang, Atelier FCJZ’s Xishu Bookstore, Beijing, 1996 (cover of Architect, no. 10 [1996]; courtesy of Architect)
the dominant ideology of the Mao era. Although experimental architecture lagged behind experimental arts, both were influenced by the international exchange of ideas of the post-Mao era. Experimental artists absorbed the latest concepts and expressed their own ideas with a degree of freedom, whereas architects practiced in conditions that were largely dictated by the pragmatics of socioeconomic, technology, clients’ requirements, politics, and their own profession.6

The context in which architectural experimentation took place during the regime of Deng Xiaoping was shaped by the transformation from a planned economy to a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. Schematically, Deng’s policy changes stimulated consistent economic growth, maintained political stability, and unleashed a wave of private entrepreneurship that continues to drive China’s economy. The system for registering professional architects was re instituted in the mid-1990s after four decades in abeyance, and the authorities gradually permitted private design firms to operate,6 although state-owned design institutes, with considerable advantages in design, technology, scale, and organization, still dominated the profession of architecture.

Professional reforms in the 1990s were part of the shift away from a Beaux-Arts tradition derived from the United States in the 1920s and the Soviet Union in the 1950s.7 The Beaux-Arts system dominated architectural practice and education despite the resistance of a few modernist architects such as Feng Jizhong and Xia Changshi.8 Although a revised Beaux-Arts model absorbed modern principles in material and pedagogical practices in the age of reform and openness, the architectural mainstream continued to follow eclectic approaches. When postmodernism was introduced in the 1980s, Chinese architects struggled to reconcile the Beaux-Arts legacy with modern and postmodern architectural fashions. The buildings constructed in response to Beijing’s mayor Chen Xitong’s call for “Recapturing the Style of the Old Capital” (duobui gudu fengmao) and the so-called European Continental styles (sulufeng) then proliferating in the property market exemplified the turn toward stylistic fetishism. Emerging architects were rejecting the status quo and exploring the ontological aspects of architecture and the indigenous cultural tradition.

Experimental architecture named no specific ideology, and the experimental architects mentioned by Wang and Shi—including Yung Ho Chang, Wang Shu, Täng Hua, Wu Yue, and Zhao Bing—represented diverse backgrounds and aesthetic preoccupations and constituted a relatively loose group.9 Although their individual concepts and methods varied—Chang’s exploration of architectural ontology, for example, clearly differed from Zhao’s preoccupation with transforming traditional calligraphy into architectural forms—they all made gestures of protest against the mainstream practice of architecture. Because Wang and Shi never defined “experimental,” the concept remained ambiguous, having the potential to incorporate different approaches to architectural practice, but also leaving space for debate.

The significance of the discourse of experimental architecture, however, lay in differentiating these young professionals as a group with a strong independent awareness, unlike architects working in state-owned design institutes in the 1990s. The young figures positioning themselves outside the official system shared their ideas by organizing seminars, symposia, salons, and exhibitions with the help of magazine editors who wanted to participate actively in reforming Chinese architecture. Wang Mingxian, who worked as an artist and editor in the official system, enthusiastically organized these events; he curated and critiqued them, and because of his personal connections with architects and artists, played a vital role in promoting these young architects.

The marginal position of the young architects, Wang and Shi emphasized repeatedly, reflected their lack of power at the end of the twentieth century. It was exemplified by their debut in the exhibition Experimental Architecture by Young Chinese Architects (Zhongguo Qingnian Jianzhushi Shiyan Zuopin Zhan), curated by Wang Mingxian during the 1999 Conference of the International Union of Architects (UIA) in Beijing. That debut turned out to be difficult. Although it was meant to be inconspicuous, it led to a struggle with state censorship.10 Most of the young architects’ clients were the newly rich individuals of the 1990s rather than big state-owned institutions. Many of their projects were temporary structures that were quickly demolished, interior designs for individual homes, and commissions from friends. The architects in this situation had relatively greater freedom, however, and felt fewer constraints on either individual expression or innovation. Indeed, their marginality became an asset, enabling them to develop a reputation for creativity.

Most of the emerging architects studied architecture after China resumed higher education in 1977 and were assigned to work for state-owned design institutes after graduation. Presumably because they were dissatisfied with the sterile process followed in the state-owned institutes and eager to display their individual creativity, they established their own design studios and firms in the 1990s, alternating between commercial production and critical exploration. Some of them launched the new departments of architecture at the turn of the twenty-first century: Yung Ho Chang established the Graduate Center of Architecture at Peking University; Wang Shu, the architecture program at the
China Academy of Art; and Zhang Lei, Ding Wowo, and their colleagues, the Department of Architecture at Nanjing University. These new institutional platforms surely gave them greater independence to pursue their own practice of architecture and initially provided an important source of commissions.11

After the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), several architectural periodicals were established: Architect (1979), World Architecture (Shijie Jianzhu) (1980), and New Architecture (Xinjianzhu) (1983). Together with the state-run Architectural Journal (Jianzhu Xuebao, founded in 1954), these periodicals, though controlled by the ruling Communist Party, helped promote scholarly communication. The journal Architect played a pivotal role in publishing the young architects’ projects and articles before 2000, and in the past decade other periodicals have begun to share that role. Time + Architecture, arguably the most important of them, was launched by the academics Luo Xiaowei and Wang Shaozhou and their colleagues in the Department of Architecture at Tongji University, Shanghai, in 1984. This journal owed its engagement with experimental architecture both to its editors’ sensitivity to the changing landscape of the profession and to Tongji School of Architecture’s long-standing modernist tradition.

During the Mao era, when standardized education based on the Beaux-Arts tradition dominated architecture schools, Feng Jizhong, a graduate of the Technische Hochschule in Vienna in 1941, who had chaired the Department of Architecture at Tongji University since 1956, explored modernist approaches, particularly the principles of space (kongjian yuanli).12 The new journal’s editors emphasized their pursuit of a modern project, proclaiming eloquently in their first editorial of 1984 that architectural modernism would play a crucial role in China’s modernization.13 Although the journal positioned itself to publish innovative and exploratory practice, its publications for some years were less remarkable than those of its rivals. Beginning in the late 1990s, however, when Luo’s pupil Zhi Wenjun became the executive editor in chief, Time + Architecture underwent a transformation that included a shift in solicitation policy to produce theme-based special issues.

The first special issue, on experimental architecture, was closely related to the 1999 exhibition (Figure 2). In its thematic editions the journal could respond actively to complex developments in the field and, by careful selection, display a clear editorial position. The journal offered the practice of emerging architects its best showcase. It not only published several special issues on experimental architecture during the next few years but also integrated theoretical debates, criticism, and buildings into an in-depth project analysis in each issue. The journal’s editorial statement for this 2000 special edition explained its approach to the new architecture as follows:

Contemporary Chinese experimental architecture, as a reflection on the status quo of city and architecture, throws off old architectural concepts, theories, and forms to create a brand new architecture. It tries to … restore architectural form and space, which have been contaminated and distorted by commercialization. The projects published here under the heading of contemporary Chinese experimental architecture pursue individuality and originality and promote the spirit of the avant-garde. These articles, including reviews and summaries of Chinese experimental architecture and criticism of architects and buildings, bring to light creations outside the mainstream: their pioneering spirit and creativity indicate future architectural trends.14

This statement is significant not only for evoking an alternative architecture but also for setting the journal’s tone. The emerging architects’ initial appearance in the journal
opened a new chapter both for this periodical and for the architects themselves. In this special issue, the journal’s editors invited the critics Wang Mingxian, Rao Xiaojun, and Zhang Wenwu to review the practice of experimental architecture in China, precisely because these writers had been involved in the relevant events or had published elsewhere on the new architecture. Their criticisms situated this architectural trend in its theoretical context and elucidated its background, origin, and possibilities. As Zhang suggested, the term “experimental” characterized the work of emerging architects more accurately than “avant-garde” because “experiment” referred to the exploratory, the uncertain, and the possible.15

The issue on the experimental architects also featured Yung Ho Chang’s project for the Xishu Bookstore and buildings by Wang Shu. Many of Chang’s projects, before they appeared in Time + Architecture, had won awards but were still only proposals for unbuilt structures. With their pure abstract modern vocabulary and preoccupation with reinterpreting traditional space, they had been widely published in Chinese architectural periodicals, including New Architecture, World Architecture, and Architect. Wang Shu’s small-scale projects, which he presented in his singular prose style, had been published in Architect.

A conversation between Yung Ho Chang and Peng Nu, who was then a postdoctoral scholar at Tsinghua University and had joined the staff of Time + Architecture in 2001, was included in the same special issue. In it Chang introduced his approach to space, construction, tradition, history, the city, exhibition, and installation, providing a theoretical framework for exploring the new possibility of a critical practice in the Chinese cultural context (Figure 3).16 As a point of departure, he used his design for the tiny interior of Xishu Bookstore, completed in 1996, to question mainstream architectural production. Chang later emphasized the ontological issues of architecture, such as construction, materiality, and space—largely overlooked by the Beaux-Arts program in China—in promoting basic architecture (jiben jianzhu).

Theoretical Discourses and Practical Strategies

Time + Architecture in the early 2000s offered a distinctive approach to the discourse of experimental architecture. In 2001 the Wuhan-based journal New Architecture also published three articles in a single issue commenting on the projects of Zhao Bing, Yung Ho Chang, and Wang Shu. And at almost the same time, World Architecture, a Beijing-based journal that focused on international architecture, began to include a column at the end of each issue presenting the work of young Chinese architects. Time + Architecture’s 2002 special issue on experimental architecture, however, exhibited a broader ambition—to promote this architectural movement. Whereas the journal’s initial sixty-eight-page special issue in 2000 published small buildings, theoretical projects, and proposals, the 2002 issue expanded the number of works published, presenting, critiquing, and theoretically scrutinizing built projects by the emerging architects. The content of this special 135-page edition was “unprecedentedly rich.”17

In the thematic essay of this issue, “A Mosaic of Contemporary Experimental Architecture in China: Theoretic Discourse and Practicing Strategies,” the journal’s two editors, Peng Nu and Zhi Wenjun, summarized the features of experimental architecture: the attention to construction of Yung Ho Chang, Zhang Lei, and others; the focus on urbanism of Qingyun Ma and Urbanus (Liu Xiaodu, Meng Yan, Wang Hui, and Zhu Peij); a preoccupation with regionalism on the part of Liu Jiakun; and an affinity for conceptual architecture in the work of Li Juchuan and Wang Jiahao.18

For Peng and Zhi, Chang’s emphasis on basic architecture challenged architecture as a fine art (meishu jianzhu). In 2000 Chang had published in World Architecture an essay cowritten with Zhang Lufeng and titled “Learning from Industrial Architecture.” Chang and Zhang based their criticism on distinctions between industrial architecture and civil architecture, building and architecture, and architecture and fine art. More important, they questioned the legitimacy of the architectural orthodoxy established in China in the official guidelines of the 1950s, which called for utility, economy, and if possible, beauty (jingji, shiyong, zai keneng de tiaojianxia zhouyi meiguan).19 According to these guidelines, beauty was dispensable, extraneous. Chang and Zhang argued for “basic architecture,” in which construction was related to form; building, to site; and people, to space—as exemplified by the industrial architecture of Mao’s era, which had been erected without the reference to ideology.20

The journal’s editors who noted Chang’s interest in construction identified a similar concern in the writing of Zhang Lei and in the projects of Ding Wowo, Cui Kai, and Zhang Yufeng. Wang Shu’s discussion of amateur architecture (yezu jianzhu), although not mentioned in Peng and Zhi’s essay, demonstrated a comparable critique from a different perspective. Wang Shu noted that his interest was not architecture (jianzhu) but “only fangzi (house or building) or amateur architecture.”21 For him, the concept of amateur architecture suggested freedom from ideological constraints and the ability to withdraw temporarily from society.22 Wang Shu’s interpretation of amateur architecture—particularly his insistence that spontaneous, illegal, and temporary buildings were as significant as professional architecture—was

The work of Chang and Zhang is also characterized by “ziyi jianzhu,” or self-produced architecture.23 In his article, “A Mosaic of Contemporary Experimental Architecture in China: Theoretic Discourse and Practicing Strategies,” Peng and Zhi define this as a recognition of the “ontological issues of architecture.”24 In this understanding, architecture is not just a product of the built environment but a process of self-production, an act of creation that is both real and imaginary, physical and mental.25

The self-produced architecture of Chang and Zhang can be seen in their projects for the Xishu Bookstore, which was completed in 1996. The project explores the idea of a “critical practice” in the Chinese cultural context (Figure 3).16 As a point of departure, he used his design for the tiny interior of the Xishu Bookstore, which was completed in 1996, to question mainstream architectural production. Chang later emphasized the ontological issues of architecture, such as construction, materiality, and space—largely overlooked by the Beaux-Arts program in China—in promoting basic architecture (jiben jianzhu).

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在“安静”与“建造”与不解的实验之间——席殊连锁书屋系列访谈

Between Construction and Experiment——Interviews with Yung Ho Chang and Zhao Hui Wu on Xishu Bookstores

彭怒

摘要：专业和艺术的两个领域结合，执着地实践着“安静的”“建造”的独特理念。两位建筑师通过实验和设计，将建筑和城市空间的探索与实践，使建筑和空间的潜力，使之成为在

Abstract: In the three Xishu bookstores, Prof. Yung Ho Chang and Mr. Zhao Hui Wu both show their inner passion for architecture between construction and experiment.

关键词： Civic, Experiment, Parallel City, Chinese Space, Interior Architecture, Installation, Collusion

Keywords: Construction, Experiment, Parallel City, Chinese Space, Interior Architecture, Installation, Collusion

Figure 3 Conversation between Peng Nu and Yung Ho Chang, images of Xishu Bookstore, Beijing, 2000 (from Time + Architecture, no. 2 [2000], 20; courtesy of Time + Architecture)
inspired by the well-designed spaces of ancient villages in the Jiangnan region of China, where individual dwellings and public buildings were closely associated with village life and with nature. Wang Shu, in his preoccupation with these “powerless” buildings, repudiated the traditional hegemony of architecture.

Both basic architecture and amateur architecture can be read as aesthetic critiques of architectural culture. Whereas Chang’s concept of basic architecture was a rigorous theoretical construction, Wang’s contention about amateur architecture can be characterized as an individual polemic. These architects’ creative efforts to break with the prevailing practice of architecture in their writing and building were supported by the introduction of such Western theoretical ideas as tectonics.

Chang’s work, cited repeatedly by the authors who contributed to the 2002 special issue, was key to the new interest in tectonics. For example, the architect Liu Yichun, having observed Chang’s experiment with architectonic elements, published an article titled “Window, Wall, or Not: Construction and Dialectical Thinking in the Works of Yung Ho Chang” in the journal. In it Liu traced Chang’s experimental ideas as they materialized in his series of projects erected about 2000. For Liu, Chang’s formal experimentation with the fundamental elements, including window and wall, explicated his logical approach to construction and materiality. Chang’s Southwest China Bio-Tech Pilot Base, a project erected in Chongqing in 2001 and published in this special issue with a comment written by his pupil Ming Ke, exemplifies such tectonic expression (Figure 4). Chang, in his experiment, emphasized the visual difference between the framework and the infill wall in order to show the building’s inner structural logic.

This project, partly because it seems to contravene tectonic expression, and partly because of the review of tectonics appearing in the short-lived journal Architecture + Design in 2001, became an important case study in the article “Promises and Assumptions of ‘Tectonics’: On the Emerging...
Notions of Tectonics in Contemporary Chinese Architecture,” published in the special 2002 issue of *Time + Architecture*. The text of the article was excerpted from a long polemical essay by Zhu Tao, first published on the Internet when Zhu was pursuing postgraduate studies at Columbia University. His approach to tectonics may have been influenced by Kenneth Frampton’s lectures. Using Gottfried Semper’s distinction between the tectonics of the frame and the stereotomics of compressive mass, Zhu suggested that Chang’s project assumed an aesthetic contradiction between a lightweight framework and the materiality of the mass, because the solid appearance of the brick-like facing tiles hid the dematerialization of the skeleton. For Zhu, Liu Jiakun’s Luyeyuan Stone Sculpture Museum manifested an analogous tectonic tension between the ontological and the representational. That museum, built in the countryside near Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province, was first published in the pages of *World Architecture* in 2001 (Figure 5). The contradiction between the technical and symbolic aspects of construction was manifest in the monolithic appearance of this building with a reinforced-concrete frame whose cast-in-place concrete walls hid the lightweight structure. Liu, the architect, had conceived the abstract architectural expression of the fair-faced concrete as a direct response to the exhibit of stone sculpture, resisting the ubiquitous trend in urban architecture toward overdecoration. The construction company in this less-developed area, however, never having done fair-faced concrete and lacking the expertise to pour the concrete into a vertical mold, improvised by constructing a combined wall: it built the shale brick masonry wall first and then used it as a template to ensure that the concrete on the outside was poured vertically. According to Zhu, the contradiction lay in the failure to separate the skeleton of the concrete structure visually from the combined wall on the outside: on the inside, the combined wall was covered by plaster. Zhu maintained that the architect, constrained by the preconceived aesthetics, did not display the wall’s complicated yet more expressive method of construction. Liu responded to Zhu’s criticism, reiterating that the construction of the building combined the concrete frame and the cast-in-place concrete walls, a technique the official building code did not recognize, and the interior plastered surface was meant to provide a simple background for the exhibits, not to demonstrate the expressivity of tectonics.

Zhu’s criticism and Liu’s response revealed a disconnect between the discourse of tectonics and the reality of execution that is also reflected in Peng Nu’s essay “Beyond Tectonics: Discussions of Luyeyuan Stone Sculpture Museum,” published in *Time + Architecture* in 2003, which fueled continued criticism. Peng took the debate between the critic and the architect one step further, arguing that tectonics cannot be understood either as reflecting the architectural structure faithfully or as expressing the logic of construction. Her explanation of the project’s detailed design testified to the emerging architects’ preoccupation with the context of construction.

*Time + Architecture*’s commitment to experimental architecture was not limited to its publication of theoretical debates and projects. The journal also organized an architectural forum on contemporary Chinese architecture and presented six papers in this 2002 special issue (Figure 6). Wang Mingxian, who left the journal *Architect* that year, and Li Juchuan commented in their papers on the work of the emerging architects, exposing in their divergent attitudes the possibilities and limits of experimental architecture in the Chinese cultural context.

Wang, in his enthusiasm for the work of the emerging architects, curated exhibitions and promoted publications that engaged the discourse of experimental architecture. In 2002 he and his collaborators edited and published a series of anthologies: Yung Ho Chang’s *For a Basic Architecture* (*Jiben jianzhu*), Wang Shu’s *Beginning of Design* (*Sheji de Kaishi*), Liu Jiakun’s *Now and Here* (*Gisī Cǐdī*), Cui Kai’s *Projects Report* (*Gongcheng Baogao*), and Tang Hua’s *Building Utopia* (*Yingzao Wutuobang*). It was unusual in China to publish books by young architects writing about their own practice. Even many prominent architects in the official system did not see monographs on their work appear during their lifetime.

The younger educator Li Juchuan’s argument about experimental architecture seemed more critical and “pessimistic” than Wang’s. In his text, titled “Architect and Intellectual,” Li focused on the Commune by the Great Wall (2000–2002) project in Beijing, questioning the socioeconomic commitment of the emerging architects. Although Li did not name the architects involved in this project, it is not difficult to infer that Chang’s Split House was one target of his criticism.

As one of twelve villas built for a private property developer, each designed by a different emerging architect from Asia, Chang’s house transformed the traditionally introverted space of urban dwellings into a semipublic courtyard, enclosed by two separate wings of the house and a nearby mountain, so as to engage actively with the topography of the site (Figure 7). When this building was published in the journal, Chang’s colleagues interpreted it from the standpoint of materiality and construction, because of its glued laminated timber structure and nonbearing rammed-earth walls. In contrast, Li seemed more interested in the sociopolitical engagement of these projects than in their formal experimentation. For him, the whole project demonstrated...
Figure 5 Liu Jiakun, Jiakun Architects, design of Luyeyuan Stone Sculpture Museum, Chengdu (World Architecture, no. 10 [2001], 92; courtesy of World Architecture)

Figure 6 Forum of Contemporary Chinese Architecture (Time + Architecture, no. 5, [2002], 36–37; courtesy of Time + Architecture)
that the emerging architects dreamed only of expressing their individual ideas freely and creatively under the private patronage generated by corporate capital.\(^3\)

According to Li, even the most ambitious of these young architects anticipated becoming architects in the classic way, designing and building the best buildings, yet they could not envisage what architecture might be in today’s society.\(^4\) Li’s critique of the contemporary discourse on “architecture in itself”—that is, space, materials, color, and details rather than architects’ sociopolitical responsibility—revealed precisely the limitations of so-called experimental architecture.

These criticisms resonated with the argument of Peng and Zhi, who both held that contemporary Chinese experimental architecture lacked the robust social critique of Western avant-garde architecture.\(^5\) Experimental practitioners, keen to move away from the social orthodoxy of the state, have found refuge in another, perhaps diffuse, aesthetic ideology.

The debates on experimental architecture in *Time + Architecture* reflected an anxiety—driven largely by the superficial stylistic alternation that has characterized the production of architecture in China—about meeting the requirements of power and capital. The emergence of architectural criticism in China, however, suggests that an architectural journal with a grounded editorial position could cultivate and enhance dynamic critical activity.

### Notes

1. This article derives from my PhD dissertation, “Constructing a Place of Critical Architecture in China: A Case Study of the Journal *Time + Architecture*” (University of Nottingham, 2013). My study was cofunded by the China Scholarship Council and the University of Nottingham. I would like to express my special gratitude to Jonathan Hale, Steve Parnell, and Darren Deane, who generously read various manuscripts and provided valuable suggestions; to Peter Blundell-Jones and Qi Wang, for their helpful comments; to Swati Chattopadhyay, the anonymous reviewer, and Stephanie Fay, for their constructive criticisms and thoughtful editing; and to my wife, Min Jia, for her useful advice and assistance.


5. While Zhang Wenwu has acknowledged this difference, he believed that the main reason for this lag resided in the mediocrity of architects. See Zhang Wenwu, “Experimental Architecture in Mainland China,” *Time + Architecture*, no. 2 (2000), 16–19.

6. When the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949, previously private design firms were gradually incorporated into state-owned design institutes, and architects became government cadres and technocrats (ganbu).


9. Given that these architects’ projects and articles had been published in the journal *Architect*, whose deputy editor in chief was Wang Mingxian, it is understandable that he chose these individual figures.

10. During the 1999 UIA Conference in Beijing, about fifty-five buildings completed to the design of senior architects from state-owned design institutes and universities over the past fifty years were selected by the official organization as representative architectural achievements and displayed at the state-run National Art Gallery. Beyond that, the organizational committee also wished to exhibit ten innovative projects to demonstrate fully the Chinese architectural landscape and to attract much more public attention. In that context Wang Mingxian curated the small exhibition. Because those experimental projects demonstrated an alternative to the dominant ideology of architecture, they were not accepted by the state-run National Art Gallery. After the curator Wang had negotiated with the conference’s organizers, however, the exhibition of the young architects’ work was eventually permitted in a small isolated room at the Beijing International Exhibition Center. This seemingly unremarkable event showed the ideological conflict between the well-established figures and the newcomers. See Wang Mingxian, “The Historical Fragmentation of Space: The Whole Story about the Exhibition of Experimental Architecture by Young Chinese Architects,” in *Avant-garde Today*, ed. Jiang Yuanlun (Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Science Press, 2000), 8:1–8.

11. Those commissions included, for instance, Wang Shu’s gallery restoration project at the China Academy of Art, Chang’s projects at Peking University, and Zhang’s buildings at Nanjing University.


20. Ibid., 22.


22. Ibid., 28.

23. Ibid., 29.

24. Chang’s criticism of the Beaux-Arts tradition was bound up with his American educational experience and his intellectual training in Western architecture; Wang’s attack on Chinese architecture was a strong protest from an inside perspective.


29. Ibid., 68.

30. Ibid., 69.

31. This method was previously used in the wall of a basement in China to prevent groundwater infiltration.


34. Ibid., 53.


37. Yung Ho Chang, Cui Kai, and other young architects from Asia were invited to design villas for the property developer SOHO China, to create both a commercial success to copy elsewhere and a cultural event to promote the significance of contemporary architecture in China. This collection of modern private dwellings, unveiled at the Venice Biennale in 2002 and awarded a special prize, was published in *Time + Architecture* with a descriptive comment in 2002. See Ye Bu, “Comment on the First Phase of the Great Wall Commune Project,” *Time + Architecture*, no. 3 (2002), 42–47.


40. Ibid.