

China's Architecture in a Globalizing World: Between Socialism and the Market,
by Jiawen Han. London: Routledge, 2017. xi+196 pp. US\$153.75 (cloth), US\$49.95 (paper).

This book vividly portrays a generation of mainstream Chinese architects of the past two decades through three very successful exemplar types of practitioners. It also critically places their agendas and architectural design strategies within a larger trajectory that has interwoven progressive socio-political reform and emerging globalization.

This author, a lecturer of architecture at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University who gained her PhD in Australia, presents a case study of architects who belong to an important transition generation, balancing the full embrace of globalization from the outside alongside recognition of the country's recent past.

The period detail is clearly from the 2000 decade, an era that saw China's full involvement in the process of globalization, marked by admission into the WTO in 2001. Since then the construction industry has flourished, and land-based financialization has become one of the driving forces of national GDP. Architecture as a profession has played an indispensable role in this dramatic process, contributing to a larger volume of urban buildings in a relatively shorter time schedule than their western colleagues would be accustomed to.

The mainstream architectural field has been dominated by state-owned design institutions with commissions from local governments at both provincial and city levels. With a more market-oriented architectural practice springing up from the 2000 decade onward, there has been more professional concerns and debates on previously silent issues *vis-à-vis* Chinese architecture and the cityscape, touching on the identity of the nation-state, the diversity of regions, the image of cities bolstered or damaged by landmark buildings, and more humanitarian ways to handle informal settlements.

These points set the scene and frame the author's rationale for deciding to analyze three exemplar architectural firms. They are the Chengdu-based privately-owned practice Jiakun Architects founded by Liu Jiakun; the Beijing-based state-owned design institution China Architecture & Design Group led by Cui Kai; and the Shenzhen/Beijing-based collaborative practice URBANUS cofounded by Meng Yan, Liu Xiaodu, and Wang Hui after their professional training in the U.S. All five architects are not only highly skilled professionals, but also contemporary cultural intellectuals with deep concerns relating to both the nation and grassroots urban society. All were born between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, experienced the socio-economic shift from a centrally-planned economy to a market economy, and witnessed the far-reaching impact and transformative power of architecture and urban design. Together they help lead a second generation of professional architects in a country which had turned to amateur literati master-builders to oversee its architecture and cities for thousands of years.

The repositioning of a hybridized contemporary Chinese architecture in a conflictual historical and globalized context is discussed in both its specificity and complexity. Mapping out the key trajectories of these selected practicing architects is helpful, so it is regrettable that the author fails to follow through with a sustained discussion about what might be the strategic way forward for the next generational architects, in a profession which is both

specialized and deals with fragile identities, and with a foreseeable trend of slower development in the years to come.

Xiang Ren,
University of Sheffield