

OVERSEAS EXHIBITIONARY EVENTS AS THE DICTATOR OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ARCHITECTURE: “TU MU: Young Architecture of China” in a World Media System

Dijia Chen
University of Virginia

Abstract: Focusing on the first European exhibition staging independent Chinese architects “TU MU: Young Architecture of China”, I investigate the process in which overseas architectural exhibitions instigated the recognition of the neglected, marginalized, and suppressed independent Chinese architects, both at home and abroad. Curated by the Europeans, the exhibition appropriated the peripheral Chinese practices into the discourse of world contemporary architecture, established the architects’ advantaged position in the design market and academic institutions, and ultimately empowered the creative class, instead of the state-owned institutes, to represent China on the world platform. In this research, architectural production is approached as a mediated culture phenomenon rather than the construction of physical buildings in a local setting. I first analyze the distinctive media systems in China and Germany as the prerequisites of the exhibition; I then identify the empowered and disempowered institutions, entities and individuals in the constructed narrative. Positing Chinese participants as voiceless object, I conclude the paper by problematizing the consolidated discourse in terms of subjectivity, identity and authorship, and evaluate its broader impact on the younger generations in China’s architectural circle today.

Keywords: Contemporary Chinese architecture, exhibitionary event, narrative, transnational cultural communication

1. REVISITING THE NEGLECTED EXHIBITIONARY EVENTS

In the late 1990s, independent Chinese architects emerged as a resistance to the dogmatic functionalist buildings mass-produced by state-owned, mainstream design institutes. Due to its marginalized position, the group was unknown to the world until a series of exhibitions held in Europe. Starting with “TU MU: Young Architecture of China,” an exhibition held at Aedes Architectural Forum, Berlin in 2001, the overseas exhibitions worked as manifestos to push forward the self-adjustment, maturation, and recognition of a previously “out-of-the-system” architectural practice in China. The independent Chinese architects, an underrepresented and even suppressed group in the dominating planned economy (despite the marketization of real estate since the 1990s), rapidly obtained popularity and recognition in the domestic market, governmental projects, academic institutions, etc. While the design institutes took up the majority of the construction works at the time, this small group of independent architects became the accepted representatives of “contemporary Chinese architects”, both at home and abroad. The transnational exhibitionary events in the transitional period of the late 1990s to early 2000s, therefore, play a decisive role in the making of contemporary Chinese architecture as a cultural phenomenon in the world media system.

The so-called “independent Chinese architects” is a vaguely defined group that generally refers to the

individual designers that are not attached to any state-owned design institutes. Since the 1950s, the design institutes have been in charge of all the design and construction works in China. Like most of the other production institutes under China’s planned economy, the design institutes produce architectural works that are efficient, functionalist and anonymous. All architects are cogs in the giant system, and no individual designer is credited for the work.

The context in which architectural experimentation took place was characterized by the transformation to a socialist market economy in Deng Xiaoping’s time. In the 1990s, the re-opening of the quasi-capitalist market and the gradual establishment of a licensing system for individual architects have enabled the preliminary development of the first privatized studios. The “out-of-the-system” architects, in this context, started to explore alternative practices as scattered individuals. This group of architects, commonly referred to as “experimental architects” (Wang and Shi 1998; Rao 2000) or “avant-garde architects” (Li 2004; Vlassenrood 2006) in China, are generally underlined by their overseas architectural education experiences, affiliations to universities in major Chinese cities, small-to-medium-scale, privately or university-commissioned projects, and a critical attitude towards the rapid large-scale urbanization process promoted by the design institutes. Due to the ambiguity of both terminologies that defines them, I use the term

Overseas Exhibitionary Events as the Dictator of Contemporary Chinese Architecture

"independent Chinese architects" to articulate the group as insubordinate rebellions opposed to the mainstream, collectivist system in China.

The independent practices were peripheral and marginal back in the 1990s. Mainstream academic journals focused on reporting the large-scale, state-planned projects and posting brief introductions to western architects, while the writings and design works of the independent architects were never published. The debut of this group, the 1999 exhibition "Experimental Architecture by Young Chinese Architects (Zhongguo Qingnian Jianzhushi Shiyan Zuopin Zhan)" curated by Wang Mingxian during the UIA Conference was half-closed. Nevertheless, the German architect and curator Eduard Koegel was fortunate to have observed the staged architects before the exhibition opened, which marked the first western encounter with the independent Chinese architects and inaugurated a series of exhibitions on the same group of architects in Europe in the following years.

"TU MU: Young Architecture of China" was an exhibition project curated by two German architects: Eduard Koegel and Ulf Meyer at The Aedes East Forum. The exhibition features the works of six young private architects and artists from China (Aedes 2001). While it was the first overseas exhibition to break the western stereotype of China as "the biggest construction site in Asia", and to inaugurate new debates on the identification and categorization of emerging independent Chinese practices in world's contemporary architectural culture, "TU MU" is astonishingly understudied in the Chinese world. Only two brief newspaper reports in 2001 and a retrospective memo of the German curator in an academic periodical in 2016 are found. In Germany, on the other hand, the exhibition was reported with multiple perspectives in the major newspapers in 2001, a *Bauwelt* monograph accompanying the exhibition was published, and the director of the gallery still talks excessively about the exhibition in an interview in 2018 (Commerell 2018).

In this research, I investigate the exhibition "TU MU" as a transnational cultural event facilitated by diverse media systems, asymmetrical power structure, and uneven capitalist development, and radically re-examine the formation of contemporary Chinese architecture as an intellectual construct, a hybrid discourse, and a commodified and politicized image. First, I analyze the social, political and cultural characteristics of the media systems in China and Germany to reveal the determining prerequisites that instigated the exhibitions. I further center my study on paper-based media, the dominant medium of dissemination, both in mass communication and academic circles before the Internet. By identifying the empowered institutions,

entities and authors through a "close-reading" of the press release introductions, newspaper critiques, news reports, and monograph articles, I posit the Chinese participants as voiceless objects in the constructed narrative. Finally, based on Said's (1979) notion of Orientalism and Bourdieu's (1993) field of cultural production, I conclude the paper by problematizing the consolidated discourse in terms of subjectivity, identity and authorship, and evaluate its broader impact on the younger generations in China's architectural circle today.

2. CHINESE ARCHITECTS GO TO EUROPE: TRANSNATIONAL EXHIBITIONARY EVENTS IN A WORLD MEDIA SYSTEM

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw the formation of a global media system, when newspapers still dominated as one of the major mediums for mass communication before the popularization of the Internet (McChesney 2001, 2). With its major circulation within regional boundaries, the newspaper underlined an era when local distribution overwhelmed global influence. In this context, the media systems of different countries were more isolated than connected. Information flowed across national borders indirectly, yet dominant cultures still exerted ideological influences on the disadvantaged countries. In the case of "TU MU", the great difference between Chinese and German media systems facilitated the exhibitions of independent Chinese architectural works in central Europe.

The so-called "journalist freedom" in the west has long been absent in China. On the one hand, the Chinese media system is haunted by the Soviet model that works more as state ideology apparatus which rejects the multiplicity of voices. (Schramm 1964; McQuail 1994, 131). The journalists' official role-definition is ostensibly to be party propagandists (Zhao 2012, 162). The state has been in charge of ideological control since feudal China. On the other hand, since the first modern newspapers in China were set up by foreign colonizers in port cities during the early 20th century, privatized media threatened to be "capitalist restorations" in the socialist system. While a gradually capitalized media industry has been developed under great caution since the re-opening policy of 1992, over 95% of newspapers were still governed by national and local authorities. The very few privatized ones focused on lifestyle, business, sports, and information technology, which are generally a-political. News reports have always been under the tight control of state-owned press. The high "party-press parallelism" (Hallin and Macini 2004) characterizes the broader social background that prevented the circulation of Independent Chinese architects in domestic media reports.

Under mass urbanization and the burgeoning quasi-capitalist market, the identity of the independent

architects is inscribed with multiple significations. First of all, by criticizing the mass-produced, quick-finished building projects that ignore the urban-rural division, cultural traditions, and environmental issues, they stand against the image of a new, modern China constructed by the government. While the authority endeavors to accomplish large-scale projects to represent a modernized and powerful China, the independent architects appear politically dissonant by returning to small-to-medium-sized projects, traditional aesthetics and indigenous building materials. Furthermore, as practitioners that do not comply with the socialist organization of the design institutes, the architects' position is somewhat questionable in the society. Although they represent an emerging force on the blossoming marketplace, very few of them were registered architects, which raised questions before the exhibition on whether they should represent China- (Koegel 2019). Moreover, as public intellectuals based in universities under the avant-garde influence of the ideological emancipation of the 1980s, the group is closely related to the rebellious contemporary artists. Finally, since most of them received overseas education, the group modeled their professions on their western counterparts, while experimenting on the modern interpretation of traditional aesthetics. Their positions are incompatible with the mainstream ideology.

It is no coincidence that the positions suppressed at home found their way out in a different cultural context. The German media system, as is analyzed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) under the category of "democratic corporatist model" in North and Central Europe, contrasts with the Chinese system in its high professionalization, low state-interference, early maturation of press freedom and strong criticality. Due to its traditions in limiting state power, early and strong development of liberal institutions and the early formation of civil society (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 197), Germany is one of the Central European countries which has developed a strong commercial media market with "a journalistic culture in which the role of opinionated editor and commentator" has an important place (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 158). On the one hand, the Protestant ethics of self-organized churches and the capitalist spirit instigated the rebellious traditions in journalism; on the other hand, the journalistic autonomy and criticality in the media system became a major guarantee for pluralism after WWII. The competitive commercial media markets and the multiplicity of political voices push forward the professionalization and criticality of journalists, who are explicitly oriented towards market interests compared to that of China, where major newspapers depend on institutional subscriptions.

Therefore, the German media institutions and individuals welcomed the Independent Chinese architects, either as a rebellious gesture to break stereotypical views and evoke debates inside Europe or as a supportive act to empower the Chinese participants by emphasizing their critical stance. The Chinese participants, on the other hand, yearn for the opportunity to be involved in world-class cultural events. The event thus stands as a transcultural communication instigated by the unparalleled development and the political, social and market forces in the world media system.

3. IDENTIFYING "TU MU" IN A EURO-CENTRIC CONTEXT: AUTHORSHIP, SUBJECTIVITY AND THE IMAGE

To understand an architecture exhibition as an "event" is to recognize its complexity in constructing historical moments and hybridizing asymmetrical power relations between different institutions, entities and individuals. As is defined by Dayan and Katz (1994), media events include "epic contests of politics and sports, charismatic missions, and the rites of passage of the great", as "high holidays of mass communication" (1), which gather mass audience to suspend their everyday routines to join a pseudo-event. Architectural exhibitions, in comparison, have no such appeal to the general audience, but they construct an event that is held in a designated time period, synthesize various media approaches, gather professionals, critics and architecture lovers, appeal to media coverage, evoke disciplinary debates and critiques, and, if successfully organized and reported, become hallmarks in promoting architectural discourse. Based on the definition given by Dayan and Katz, I see architectural exhibitions as media-saturated occasions in an imagined community that constructs the assemblage of meaning. As "events," the influence and effectiveness of the exhibition are determined by the dissemination, circulation and interpretation of its media content, either in the forms of mass media reports or professional critiques.

In the case of "TU MU", an exhibition held in 2001, major reports and critiques were disseminated through paper-based media, including the press release, catalogs, newspaper articles and critiques in academic periodicals. These texts sufficiently reflect the power structure that looms over the exhibition. In China, the major institutions and entities involved included the Chinese government, the state-owned newspapers, newly established architecture schools in universities, emerging private galleries in big cities and academic periodicals in architecture; in Germany, the gallery, the curator, the journalists and the editors of the academic periodicals all have a voice in shaping the event.

Overseas Exhibitionary Events as the Dictator of Contemporary Chinese Architecture

As is discussed above, the general socio-political environment back in China was hostile to independent architects. The Chinese government and the mainstream architects were actively promoting the modernized urban image of China. According to an interview with the curator and his retrospective commentary in 2016, "TU MU" in this context was suppressed by both the Architectural Society of China and the Government of China. During the preparation works, "TU MU" was deleted from the Asia-Pacific Week event by SCIC (Koegel and Su 2016), since the selected architects "were not able to represent China" due to the small scale of their projects and their unlicensed status. Even after the German curators endeavored to work things out, right before the exhibition, the officials refused to ship the models with all other materials for the Asia-Pacific Week (Koegel 2019).

The unsupportive attitude from the Chinese authority is further reflected in the media reports on the exhibition in state-owned newspapers: very few reported on the event, despite its groundbreaking significance in Chinese architectural world. The only news report in *China Daily*, a national newspaper published in English, merely provided a brief introduction to all the architects and quotes from the director, the curator and the architects (Li 2001). The article was written in a neutral tone, eliminating any "inharmonious" descriptions with political implications and revealing no particular journalistic bias. The other report, which appeared in a professional newspaper *Construction Times*, was a brief introductory piece translated from the catalog preface released by Aedes (Sun 2001). Both reports revealed a cautious attitude, which might be regarded as low journalistic professionalism in a western sense. It wasn't until one year later that critical comments regarding the event emerged in a retrospective report in *New Weekly*, a newspaper published in the relatively liberal southern part of China:

A handful of experimental architects have built up a small experimental building circle, which is also a "small" force, but they really want to use their own efforts to counter the "design" of the design institute system. In the anger and disappointment brought by the ruthless construction in China's large and small cities, we may be looking forward to the difference they promised. (Huang 2002)

In contrast to the media silence in China, the exhibition was reported at length in several major newspapers in Germany, including *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. As the hallmark of western modernity and bourgeois rationality, the newspaper was still a vivid reflection of the media system in Germany at the turn of the century. Some journalists marvelled at the achievement of Chinese architects as a "revolution" (Hoffmann 2001) and criticized Chinese authority for their

"complete lack of understanding of the concept of an architectural exhibition" (Elser 2001). Others questioned the originality of the exhibited works, pointing out the obvious citations of western Modernism and calling the Chinese designs "replicas of the west". Seeing Le Corbusier in Jiakun Liu, Aldo Rossi in the works of Zhang Lei and Louis Kahn in Yungbo Chang, the critic asserts that "[the curators] show some architectural firms whose work at first glance could also stand in Rotterdam, Switzerland or even in Berlin" (Bernau and Hoffmann 2001). Either open-minded or critical, the compulsion to evoke criticality is demonstrated in the radical and opinionated tone of the journalists in the German democratic corporatist media system. Representing the interests of the German press in instigating debates and attracting audience, the newspapers successfully provided multiple interpretations of the event and ignited wide discussions on Chinese architecture, whereas little attention was aroused in China.

The Chinese and German academic circles reacted differently as well. Although all participants were affiliated to major universities in China, no relevant reports or critiques appeared in academic periodicals. "TU MU" was barely mentioned except for as a listed-overseas exhibition among other similar events. It wasn't until 2016 that the first retrospective commentary on the 2001 exhibition "the Perception of Chinese Architecture in the West: TU MU-an Exhibition at the Aedes Gallery in Berlin and its Context" written by Koegel was published in the core architectural magazine *Time + Architecture in China*. As the only scholarly article on the exhibition in Chinese, the paper recalled the preparation work, the coordination work and the success of the exhibition during its opening ceremony (Koegel and Su 2016). The exhibition, therefore, is never theorized or put into a broader historical framework in Chinese academic works. Meanwhile, although the following-up exhibition "TU MU Back Home" in 2002 brought back the whole exhibition to Shanghai with a small forum on experimental architecture, no further attention was attracted either in newspapers or academic periodicals. It was not even formally reported.

On the German side, however, a monograph on the exhibition was published by Bauwelt, one of the major architectural journals in Germany, with an introduction emphasizing the overseas educational backgrounds of the group and their disadvantaged position in the socio-political environment in China:

When young Chinese study architecture in Zurich, Darmstadt or New York and then return to the People's Republic of China, cultural-political importation is not without consequences, especially since the collective self-isolation of recent decades has brought about an all-embracing move into the private sector of planning and architectural design. (Bauwelt 2001, cover page)

Highlighting the Chinese participants as rebellions to the "collective self-isolation" in the Chinese system, the position of the monograph is controversial in itself. Out of the five thematic articles, two were irrelevant to the exhibition and sarcastically criticize the large-scale practices of foreign architects in China: the National Opera House and Beijing Jian Wai Soho. The former is described as "a student's semester homework which is less gifted than ambitious" (Edelmann 2001, 37). The overall tone of the monograph is generally conservative, underlined by a stereotypical impression of China under sweeping development. During the late 1990s to 2000, most overseas exhibitions and publications emphasized China as "the biggest construction site in Asia", e.g. Koolhaas' research "the Great Leap Forward" that investigates urban development in the Southern part of China, shown in Kassel Dokumenta, 1997; the 2G monograph on Chinese architecture which mostly reported on foreign practices in China; and the "Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen" exhibition held in Dessau, Germany, 2000 in which 16 out of 24 projects were designed by foreigners. The Bauwelt monograph aligns with the above literature and exhibition works despite its association with "TU MU" exhibition.

In the monograph, "TU MU"s two curators expand extensively on the social changes in China and the rise of individuality, the major prerequisites for the gradual rise of the privatized architectural studios. (Koegel 2001; Meyer 2001) Meyer discusses the emergence of "Baukultur (Building Culture)" from the former "Technokratie (Technocracy)", in which design quality will be associated with the individual architects, and, therefore, change the anonymous state of designers in state-owned design institutes. Koegel emphasizes the pedagogical reforms in new architectural programs as sites for architects to form a new community, to receive on-grounds commissions and to present themselves as public intellectuals. In either article, no specific terms were articulated to describe the practices of this group of architects. While the curators excessively analyze the political, social and institutional conditions for new practices to thrive, neither are capable of positioning the architects in the larger framework of world architectural culture, or identifying the design language of the exhibited works, either in China or in the western world.

The avoidance of the group in Chinese academic circles and the controversial emphasis on their socio-political stance in the German critiques indicate that the so-called "Young Architecture of China" was not a mature, self-aware practice back in 2001. In the catalog of the exhibition, the practices of the first privatized Chinese studios are referred to as "alternative positions" (Koegel and Meyer 2001, 12) and "a kind of "hybrid" architecture, which combines historical types with new

impulses from the West, (Koegel and Meyer 2001, 15) and played with vague notions of defining the group as rebellions to the mainstream system. As is asserted by Bourdieu, "the struggle defines the author" in a western sense (Bourdieu 1993, 42). Given the historical fact that none of the participants were licensed, that most of the studios were established only one or two years before the exhibition and very few projects were built, the exhibition reflects the intentions of the German gallery to construct a manifesto that promotes and consolidates an emerging practice. It was not a faithful reflection of the urban and architectural developments in China, but rather advocacy to raise attention in the West and open up new discussions for the future.

The title "TU MU: Young Architecture of China" is ambitious in the German context, but also reveals the asymmetrical perceptions of the theme between the Chinese and German sides. As mentioned by the curator, the organizers of the exhibition abandoned the existing Chinese term "experimental architects", which was used to describe the group in a 1996 forum in Beijing, in order to "free it from the experimental situation" and cause "bigger impact" (Koegel 2019). On the Chinese side, the same message was lost in translation as the Chinese title "TU MU: Young Architects from China (Tumu: Zhongguo Qingnian Jianzhu Shi)" merely indicates the age level of the participants. "TU MU", or "Earth and Wood" in Chinese, was carefully chosen by Yungho Chang as the major title of the exhibition to emphasize the relationship to traditional building aesthetics (Koegel 2016), yet this was barely explained in the introductory paragraph of the catalog. In the director's words, "earth and wood" represented the past, which is no longer of concern in the new developments of Chinese architecture:

That wood and earth are no longer being used in China's metropolises, as the poetic title of this exhibit suggests, we have known for quite some time now. But the dimensions, socio-political background, and above all the dynamics with which architecture and urban design develop themselves in China are difficult to comprehend for us in Europe. (Feireiss and Commerell 2001, 1)

With a strong urge to push forward the architectural discourse, the general tone of the texts in the gallery's official documents is affirmative and even assertive. The press release defines the exhibited works as "the first promising hints for the development of an independent architectural language" (Aedes 2001, 1), and the curator powerfully asserts that "in terms of architectural aesthetics and conception, the young Chinese designers have arrived at the heart of the contemporary debate on architectural culture" (Koegel and Meyer 2001, 15). These texts reflect the intentions of the German institution to launch a discourse with the exhibition, despite the immature state of practices back in China.

Overseas Exhibitionary Events as the Dictator of Contemporary Chinese Architecture

The gallery brands itself as “synonymous with the great names in the world of architecture by continuously supporting new generations of upcoming practitioners” which has presented the works of “[m]any internationally acclaimed architects and Pritzker Prize Laureates... long before achieving international fame” (About 2019); thus the narrative constructed by the German gallery director and curator coincides with the goal of promoting architectural discourse. The exhibition proved to be a great success, with many German scholars and critics astonished by the exhibited works (Koegel and Su 2016). The event thereafter triggered a long-term cooperation between Chinese architects and the gallery resulting in four exhibitions from 2003 to 2007, and eight exhibitions from 2015 to 2019. The 2016 “ZAI XING TU MU (Reviving Earth and Wood): Sixteen Chinese Museums, Fifteen Chinese Architects” exhibition directly reflects the impact of the 2001 exhibition. Again in an assertive tone, the press release of the exhibition emphasizes “TU MU” as the catalyst for Chinese architects’ success in practice and in academic circles:

To our surprise we found out many years later, that the TU-MU exhibition ignited an intense and controversial discussion within China on architecture, building culture, identity, tradition and modernity. Today TU-MU is a synonym for an awakened and enforced self-consciousness and independency in Chinese contemporary architecture. (Aedes 2019)

In 2018, the director of Aedes discussed profusely the 2001 exhibition in an interview, again emphasizing the decisive role of the event in inaugurating an era for the recognition of independent Chinese architects in the European context (Commerell 2018). Compared to the German gallery’s enthusiastic references to “TU MU” as its own successful discovery of novel and diverse practices, the Chinese architects, critics and curators showed little interest in reflecting on the 2001 exhibition.

Judging from the above analysis, with an underdeveloped, unsupportive media industry and low instinct for publicity, the independent architects in China were not capable of establishing a coherent discourse by themselves. Placed in an alien context, the scattered, unorganized and underrepresented architects were assembled and edited into a powerful narrative by a strong, mature and liberal media system. The event, therefore, facilitated the worldwide recognition of the group, while consolidating the image of contemporary Chinese architecture in a Euro-centric context. It is worth noting that none of the Chinese architects presented their works in their own words at the opening ceremony or participated in the writing or editing of the catalog, the press release or the journal monograph. Their only presentations took place during the symposium one day before the opening, which was poorly documented with

no photos or records remaining. The voicelessness of the Chinese participants, despite their position in the exhibition as “protagonists”, questions the authorship and subjectivity of the constructed narrative. With most historical texts reflecting the interests of the German institutions, press and academic circle, the exhibition is emerged from the interests of the German organizers, despite its intention of supporting the Chinese architects. Further, as the first overseas exhibition that aroused great European attention towards contemporary Chinese architecture, the narrative constructed from unspoken power relations is not only problematic in itself but has also further influenced subsequent exhibitionary events, as well.

4. PROBLEMATIZING THE CONSTRUCTED DISCOURSE

Organized by a German curator and held in a German gallery, “TU MU” constructed an image of the rebellious, uncompromising Chinese architects as promising future leaders in architectural culture. The issues of how the group was perceived at home, how they got commissions, how much of the market they occupy, whether they intended to make social changes and whether they represented an expanding force or a small circle of elite intellectuals are irrelevant. In a postmodern world, knowledge must be packaged into media formats in order to be produced and disseminated, and those with the ability to sort through the vast amounts of information and repackage it with meaning decide on the current version of the “truth” (Lyotard 1984, 5-6). The legitimization of knowledge is, therefore, determined by the intertwining forces of power, authority and media approaches. “A narrator attains legitimation simply by being the narrator” (Lyotard 1984, 21-22). As the first overseas exhibition for Independent Chinese architects in Europe, “TU MU” constructs the criteria for contemporary Chinese architects to be selected. The exhibitionary event played a determining role in initiating a Euro-based discourse in which the practitioners could identify themselves.

The German intention of breaking through stereotypes and promoting diversity presumes itself as the decision maker empowering disadvantaged groups in the world culture system. As Said notes in *Orientalism* (1979), “they (the Orientals) cannot represent themselves. They must be represented” (Said 1979, xii). Based on the Foucaultian analysis of knowledge production, Said argues that it is necessary to “examine Orientalism as a discourse”... and “because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (Said 1979, 10). In the case of “TU MU”, the Chinese designs are described as a Western projection, which can only be communicated either through comparison or

contrast with European Modernism. The German critics marvelled at Chinese “achievements” in design qualities resembling European buildings that “qualifies” them to “enter the heart of contemporary debate on architectural culture” (Koegel and Meyer 2001, 15), and interpreted the “Chinese traditional elements” as an exotic, mythic oriental aesthetics frozen in time. The so-called modern or traditional, political or cultural, regional or global positions of the Chinese architects all depended on the media infrastructures and value systems of the West.

Further, as Said failed to address, the process was not accomplished solely by the European side. Third-world countries, including China, contributed equally to European cultural imperialism in the world history equating Europe with “modernity”. As the non-mainstream architects were legitimized in the exhibition, their careers boomed at home in the years following, and the group expanded as younger generations sought to emulate this “big success story” (Koegel 2019). The formerly suppressed group not only became dominant in the marketplace but was also recognized as authorized to represent the national image in international cultural events, starting with the 2006 Venice Biennale. The narrative, therefore, goes far beyond theoretical discussions and debates on paper, but in turn dictates the perception of architectural culture and the commissioning of real-world projects back in China.

While independent Chinese architects flourished as representatives of contemporary Chinese visual culture (Architectuurinstituut 2006), few ever reflected on the fact that the discourse was built upon a transnational

exhibitionary event with almost a complete absence of Chinese voices. Although the circumstances of authorship and subjectivity have changed over the years with the increasing status of contemporary Chinese architects in the world, the same criticality and self-identification is repeated over and over again and consolidated as the underlining characteristics of the discourse. The events construct a “field”, a “separate social universe”, an area of the social world characterized by hierarchical organization, by internal relations of force, and by regulatory mechanisms that assesses cultural production in certain classificatory principles, as the Bourdieuvian notion of “habitus” (Bourdieu 1993, 162; Bourdieu 1990, 12-13).

After the success of “TU MU”, subsequent exhibitions in European countries basically invited the same group of people, instead of researching new ones, as “the circle of architectural discourse needs only a few protagonists” (Koegel 2019). The field of architectural production brings prestige, fame and financial rewards. On the one hand, more architects are attracted to follow the successful models, resulting in less media exposure of the “alternatives of the alternatives” and less diversity in practice; on the other hand, with a handful of established architects dominating the field, less space is left for the younger generations to be recognized, either at home or in the world. Therefore, the narrative started by “TU MU” not only defined the contemporary Chinese architecture in a displaced context, but also continues to dictate the ecology of contemporary Chinese architects, despite the changing social and financial status of the group today.

REFERENCES

- Aedes Architecture Forum. 2019. “About Aedes,” Aedes-arc.de. <https://www.aedes-arc.de/cms/aedes/about>
- Aedes ANCB Program. 2019. “Pre-Announcement for the Press: Zai Xing Tu-Mu Museum Fifteen Chinese Architects.” <https://stadtmacher4986.com/>
- Aedes East Forum. 2001. “Press Release “TU MU—Young Architecture from China.” Berlin: Aedes East Forum.
- Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso books.
- Ang, Ien. 1990. “Culture and Communication: Towards an Ethnographic Critique of Media Consumption in the Transnational Media System.” *European Journal of Communication* 5, no. 2: 239-260.
- Architectuurinstituut, Nederlands. et al. 2006. *China Contemporary: architectuur, kunst, beeldcultuur/China Contemporary: Architecture, Art, Visual Culture*. Rotterdam: NAI.
- Bernau, Nikolas, and Hans Wolfgang Hoffmann. 2001. “China als Abziehbild des Westens: Aedes zeigt und ein Symposium diskutiert erstmals Arbeiten chinesischer Privatarchitekten im Westen.” *Berliner Zeitung*, September 27th 2001.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Commerell, Hans-Juergen. 2019. “Interview.” *Aedes Architekturforum Archive*.
- Dayan, Daniel, and Elihu Katz. 1992. *Media Events*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Donsbach, Wolfgang, and Bettina Klett. 1993. “Subjective Objectivity. How Journalists in Four Countries Define a Key Term of their Profession.” *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)* 51, no. 1: 53-83.

Overseas Exhibitionary Events as the Dictator of Contemporary Chinese Architecture

- Edelmann, Friedrich. 2001. "Das Ei von Peking: Chronik eines französischen Exportartikels." *Bauwelt* 35: 37-29.
- Feireiss, Kristine, and Hans-Juergen Commerell. 2001. "Preface." In *Tu Mu: Young Architecture of China: Ai Wei Wei, Atelier Feichang Jianzhu, Liu Jiakun, MRMADA, Wang Shu, Nanda Jianzhu*, 1-2. Berlin: Aedes East Forum.
- Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini. 2004a. "The North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model". In *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, 143-197. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini. 2004b. "Introduction". In *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, 1-6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoffmann, Hans Wolfgang. 2001. "Bausteine einer Revolution." *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 27th 2001.
- Huang, Jingjing. 2002. "Revisiting the 'TU MU: Young Architects of China Exhibition, Berlin'" *New Weekly* 3.
- Elser, Oliver. 2001. "Schillernde Grauzonen im Schatten der westlichen Anmutung." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 25th 2001.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by AM Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Jacques, Martin. 2012. *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World [Greatly updated and expanded]*. London, UK: Penguin.
- Klauser, Wilhelm. 2001. "Ein Japaner in China: Das Beijing Jian Wai SOHO." *Bauwelt* 35: 34-36.
- Koegel, Eduard. 2001. "Die Einheit Loest sich Auf." *Bauwelt* 35: 16-17.
- Koegel, Eduard. 2019. "Personal Communication". Interview by Dijia Chen, March 6, 2019.
- Koegel, Eduard, and Ulf Meyer. 2001. "Positions far from the Architectural Crowd." in *Tu Mu: Young Architecture of China: Ai Wei Wei, Atelier Feichang Jianzhu, Liu Jiakun, MRMADA, Wang Shu, Nanda Jianzhu*. Berlin: Aedes East Forum, 12-15.
- Koegel, Eduard, and Ulf Meyer. 2001. "Sechs Beispiele aus sechs jungen Büros". *Bauwelt* 35: 20-33.
- Koegel, Eduard, and Hang Su. 2016. "The Perception of Chinese Architecture in the West: TU MU—an Exhibition at the Aedes Gallery in Berlin and its Context". *Time Architecture* 2: 26-30.
- Lee, Richard E. 2010. "Critiques and Developments in World Systems Analysis: An Introduction to the Special Collection." *Journal of Philosophical Economics* 4, no. 1: 5-18.
- Li, Xiangning. 2001. "Spirit of Earth and Wood Lives On: Young Talents Bring New Perspective to China's Modern Architecture." *China Daily*, August 10, 2001.
- Li, Xiangning. 2014. "Architecture as a Resistance—Wang Shu and his Architecture". *World Architecture* 8: 30-31.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Vol. 10. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- McChesney, Robert W. 2001. "Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism." *Monthly Review* 52, no. 10: 1-19.
- McChesney, Robert W., John Bellamy Foster, Inger L. Stole, and Hannah Holleman. "The sales effort and monopoly capital." *Monthly Review* 60, no. 11 (2009): 1.
- McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. "The Medium is the Message." *New York* 123 (1967): 126-128.
- McQuail, Denis. 1987. *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. New York: Sage Publications.
- Meyer, Ulf. 2001. "Die Neuerfindung des Architekten: Vom Technokraten zum verantwortlichen Entwerfer." *Bauwelt* 35: 18-19.
- Rao, Xiaojun. 2000. "Experimental Architecture: A Conceptual Exploration." *Times Architecture* 2: 12-16.
- Said, Edward. 2014. "Orientalism". In *Geopolitics*, 75-79. London: Routledge.
- Schramm, Wilbur. 1964. *Mass media and National Development: The Role of Information in the Developing Countries*. Vol. 25. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Sun, Tian. 2001. "Chinese 'TU MU' Staged in Berlin." *Construction Times*. October 12, 2001.
- Tiez, Juergen. 2007. "Zwischen Aufbruch und Ruckbesinnung: Junge Chinesische Architekten in Berlin." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, October 6th 2007.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 2008. "The Modern World-System as a Capitalist World-Economy." *The Globalization Reader*: 55-61.
- Wang, Mingxian, and Jian Shi. 1998. "Chinese experimental architecture in the 1990s." *Literature & Art Studies* 1: 118.
- Zhao, Yuezhi. 2012. "Understanding China's Media System in a World Historical Context." *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*: 143-176.
- Zhao, Y. and D. Schiller. 2001. "Dances with Wolves? China's Integration into Digital Capitalism." *Info* 3 (2): 137-151.