Preface: Architecture in Transition

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Transition is certainty. If we can grasp anything thoroughly, it is to understand it in the flow of time and change. To see architecture in transition is to trace the trajectory of the discipline as it evolves. Architecture is one of the great humanist discourses through which we collectively observe and represent the human condition. Architecture gives form to self and society. It is inextricably linked to our everyday world of work, leisure, environment and well-being. Architecture has always been an inherently interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary practice, more than any others within the humanities and social sciences.

Transition maybe progressive, but it is not always the case, especially in Architecture. Architectural history has revealed less of a linear development, more of a reciprocal relationship among design, culture, science and technology. It is particularly interesting to see how transformations in science and technology have influenced design thinking and vice versa. The history of architecture also provides numerous examples of cross disciplinary individuals and innovations. Architectural design has expanded to include a broad range of scales and disciplines, shifting from the production of a single built object to the design of experiences, territories and systems. Architecture is not just a discipline but rather a way of looking at the world that promotes the synthesis of interdisciplinary knowledge across scales in order to create a built environment for the greater good.

A building is often thought of as being the creation of architects, that is as the conceptual product of a single master or of a small group. In real life situation, it is shaped by a much wider influence ranging from institutional organization, societal revolution to scientific innovation. Apart from this, more than ninety-five percent of the buildings around the world are constructed without architects at all. With this in mind, one of the most important areas of architectural research is to investigate into these anonymous vast majority, often regarded as architecture without architects, as both the source of information and condition of action. A built object, whether designed by architects or not, is enduring, while its occupancy is ever-changing. This paradoxical relationship has never been settled.

In the paper entitled 'Transition in Chinese Building Trade (1840-1937) and its Impact on Building Conservation in Present-day China', Yiting PAN projects back into the past in order

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to offer a historical reference to understand the present. She describes a unprecedent period of architectural fusion, as a result of the establishment of Treaty Ports and consequent transitions in building trades. The conflicting and mixing of Chinese and Western tastes, tools, techniques and materials created a special 'hybridity' of architecture. Nowadays this controversial and precious legacy has posed a new challenge to contemporary conservation ideology and methodology.

In '"Hygiene and Residence" (1880) and the transition of *weisheng* in contemporary urban China', Pingping Dou and Yuan Zhang explore how the meaning of *weisheng* (hygiene) shifted away from Chinese cosmology of nurturing one's life and moved to encompass scientific standards of collective environment and efficiency of urban infrastructure. The interpretive translation treatise "Hygiene and Residence" (*Juzhai weisheng lun*) interpreted by John Fryer (Fu Lanya), which elaborates spatial configuration and constructional details on optimizing built environment, marks the emergence of modern architectural and urban design principle in contemporary China.

In 'State• University• Market: Sixty Years' Evolution of University-affiliated Architectural Design Institute in China', Xiahong HUA explores the unique professional organization in modern China, often recognized in the west as the third world "social modernism". This distinctive institution of University-affiliated Architectural Design Institute (UADI) has largely shaped both the Architecture discipline in academic and professional practice in real estate. Therefore, by examining the three historical phrases of UADI, the essay unveils how the social and technological condition of the status quo lead to this one-of-a-kind form of organization, and how it has in turn generated a homegrown intellectual and cultural ground.

Transitions are conditioned, they also condition. The last two papers brought forward a series of predicaments the Chinese architects are facing today. In 'Towards a New Spatial Tactics: O-office's Architectural Practice in the Pearl River Delta', Duan WU focused on one the most developed regions that is now under a process of re-urbanization. Among contemporary Chinese architects, it is generally realized that it is no longer valid to act by the book or follow any existing models of practice. The previous paradigm of theory-to-praxis has been challenged. A new system of implementation and evaluation is called for. May it be everydayness-to-tactics? The three projects studied in the paper, conducted by an emerging young office in the Pearl River Delta, exemplified the endeavours towards this new possibility.

In 'The Emerging Urban Interiority', Andong LU notices that probably more than any western countries, China has been heavily influenced by emerging information technology, in the form of personal mobile devices, new modes of logistics, online shopping tools, payment methods etc. Realised or not, how we perceive the built environment has been revolutionised by these new technologies forever. The urban experience become more and more fragmented and dispersed. The case studied in the paper has left us with the question – what will be the new building types to match the 'new' human being?

As we can learn from the five studies in this issue, contemporary architecture is defined broadly and rhetorically by what we generally call "technology". Architecture relates to technology in various forms, as fabrication method, as material application, as formal inspiration, as communication vehicle, as organizational basis, and so on. The twentieth-first century omnipresent Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence has altered human perception to a great extent. We are not talking about the same human being as the nineteenth century humanists do.

In no doubt, we find ourselves in an epoch of transition. It is already too late to speak of the rate of change is accelerating, which has already been emphasized repeatedly in the discourses over the past fifty years since the techno-fantasist movements in the 1960s. Yet it is still too early to speak of a full Artificial Intelligent design and construction industry. This is perhaps the dilemma of the architects in our time. Future architecture offers a new possibility to synthesize the elements, systems, experiences, and environments for our increasingly complex world. The value of learning across a broad range of disciplines has never been so compelling.