

**AN EXPERIMENT FOR THE MARKET:
THE INTERTWINED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
ARCHITECTURAL AUTONOMY AND THE MARKET FORCE
IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA**

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Abstract. In contemporary China, ‘experimental architecture’ depicts the rise of independent architectural explorations offered by a group of young Chinese architects in the mid-1990s. These young Chinese architects claimed to have established an autonomous architecture, distant from commercial interventions. This research examines the credibility of architectural autonomy stated by these architects in light of the field theory put forward by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Through this interdisciplinary perspective, the paper focuses on the often overlooked interpersonal networks of critics, architects, and publishers. Through analysing their roles in promoting these experimental architects on the basis of professional publications, this research argues that the notion of architectural autonomy is constituted by a symbiotic collaboration among these actors through a discursive approach and architectural autonomy, despite indicating an architectural resistance against commercial forces, serves a commodity sold in the cultural market.

Keywords: experimental architecture, architectural autonomy, Pierre Bourdieu, the field, consecration, capital exchange, architectural commodification

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1. Introduction

In contemporary Chinese architecture, the term Experimental Architecture (*Shiyan Jianzhu*) was first put forward by architecture and art critic Mingxian Wang to characterise the emergence of a group of independent young Chinese architects from 1993 onwards. Through this term, these architects, exemplified by Yung Ho Chang, Jiakun Liu, Wang Shu, Tang Hua, Zhao Lei amongst others, expressed dissatisfaction with the state-sanctioned design institutes and the mainstream architectural production dominated by commercial forces. In response, they began to produce small-scale designs with cubist and minimalistic appearance. Via these designs, they identified themselves as counterforce against the invasion of economics into architectural practices, seeking an autonomous architecture in China.

This Chinese movement of architectural autonomy, since its birth, quickly drew the attention of the media. From 1999 onward, experimental architects, especially Yung Ho Chang, Jiakun Liu, and Wang Shu, became frequenters of domestic and international architectural and art exhibitions and magazines. Meanwhile, they were also invited to present their works at renowned architectural colleges such as the Architectural Association in the UK, Harvard Graduate School of Design, and the Cooper Union in the USA. In 2011, Chang became the first Chinese architect to serve as a jury member for the Pritzker Prize, the most prestigious award in the architectural profession. In 2012, Wang Shu became the first Chinese architect to win the Pritzker Prize, making them leading Chinese architects and rendering the CEA as a discernible phenomenon in contemporary Chinese architecture.

The increasing influence of the CEA has also begun to attract the attention of academia, and various scholars have presented fruitful analyses of those experimental architects and their works. In 1998, through the journal *Architectural Theory Review*, Chinese architectural scholar Jianfei Zhu introduced the Beijing Xishu Bookstore designed by Yung Ho Chang as an attempt of ‘breaking from the Beaux Arts paradigm’, and oscillating ‘between modernist abstraction and regionalist, vernacular representation’ (Zhu 1998: 62). Later, through a panoramic presentation of Chang, Jiakun Liu, and Qingyun Ma’s works, Zhu labelled the CEA as the ‘new criticality in China’, opposing ‘commercial purposes’ (Zhu 2005: 495). For Zhu, he believed that these experimental architects could achieve an autonomous architecture in China through a ‘tectonic modernist’ approach focusing on ‘architecture in itself’ (Zhu 2008: 118).

Following Zhu, Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan reviewed Chang and another experimental architect Tang Hua as a new generation of Chinese architecture, who ‘willfully deploy modern architecture without feeling a need to confront the burden of tradition’ (Row and Kuan 2004: 172). For Rowe and Kuan, Chang and Tang’s employment of architectural modernism implies the architects’ distance from the real estate industry’s abuse of architectural forms. Similarly, by taking the Xiangshan Campus designed by Wang Shu as an instance, Botz Bornstein argued that Wang was conducting critical regionalism, a notion put forward by Kenneth Frampton, as a resistance against the prevailing architectural commodification in Chinese

metropolises (Bornstein 2015: 108). Last but not least, by examining coverages of Chang and Liu's works in mainstream Chinese architectural journals, Guanghai Ding labelled the CEA as an 'intermediate criticality', reflecting experimental architects' anxiety when facing the market (Ding 2014: 36).

While these existing studies significantly enriched our academic understanding of the CEA, the architectural movement's claim of architectural autonomy is accepted as an established fact and is unquestioned by these studies, even though this notion has been proven problematic by recent academic studies.

To fill this knowledge gap, the current study, in the light of Bourdieu's field theory of cultural production, aims to address questions, including (1) how was the architectural autonomy claimed by the CEA discursively constituted by the symbiotic network of critics, architects and publishers? (2) how did they consecrate specific architects as representatives of the CEA and legitimate their objective narratives as canonical statements through the professional media? (3) what was the relationship between market forces and the notion of architectural autonomy?

2. Literature review: architectural autonomy in controversy

In the history of architecture, especially contemporary architecture, architectural autonomy has been an influential notion. In 1933, this notion was firstly introduced by the Viennese architectural historian Emil Kaufman. Through the book *'Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier: Ursprung und Entwicklung der autonomen Architektur'*, Kaufman employed the notion to describe architects Ledoux and Corbusier's break with architectural neo-classicalism (Kaufmann 1985). In the late 1970s, facing the rising wave of 'consumption of sheer commodification' of architectural production (Jameson 1992: 11), the notion was brought up again by a group of architects, exemplified by Peter Eisenman, Aldo Rossi, and Stanford Anderson and so forth. For these architects, architectural autonomy they advocated was a spatial object primarily focuses on its internal issues, including structural, material and most importantly, the formal aspect of a building. By identifying architecture as a purely technical neutrality, they aimed to present their rejection of the capital force's commodification of architectural creations (Scolari 2000: 131). Through the book *House of Cards*, Eisenman asserted that there could an alternative architecture exempt from external socio-economic influences, and 'exists solely in itself' (Eisenman et al. 1987: 181). Similarly, the Italian architect Aldo Rossi also believed that architecture is a cognitive process that in and of itself, in the acknowledge of itself. For Rossi, the way to achieve architectural autonomy is to find forms of ideal types from ancient classic architecture which had not changed over times (Rossi and Eisenman 1984: 127-131). The most straightforward definition of architectural autonomy is by Stanford Anderson, who argued that 'it is still possible for architecture to be other than a mere servant to commercial/capitalist/ideological forces through rediscovering the meaning of material form, space and light' (Anderson 2002: 30-35).

All these architects' statements, together with Frampton's call for a 'critical regionalist architecture' which rejected the force of commodification (Frampton 2007: 307), constitutes the overarching discourse of architectural autonomy in contemporary architecture. As both Jane Rendell and Diane Ghirardo observed, from the mid-1980s onward, this discourse quickly prevailed in the United States academia, and then became exported globally due to the US's dominant publishing industry (Ghirardo 2002: 39, Rendell 2007: 2).

While enjoying popularity in the architectural profession, architectural autonomy is not exempt from many scholars' criticism. The earliest criticism was made by the Italian architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri. As a scholar influenced by Marxism, Tafuri reviewed the capital force as a totalising system dominating the society and architecture acted as an instrument serving the capital force's production/reproduction of the space (Tafuri 1979: 181-182). For Tafuri, architects are powerless facing the production system as they were mere technicians within the building industry. Based on this diagnosis, Tafuri identified Eisenman and his colleagues' pursuit of an autonomous architecture as nothing but a contemplative game, showing the incapacity, or in his words, 'a crisis of ideology' of the architectural profession when facing the capital force (Tafuri 1979: 181).

Following Tafuri, the American sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson and architectural critic Peggy Deamer also deny the credibility of architectural autonomy by unveiling the inseparable entanglement between architecture and the capital force. For Larson, those architects' pursuit of autonomy is an imitation of their artistic counterparts, such as a painters, musicians, and sculptors, who could claim to be the only creator of their artwork. However, as Larson states, 'architecture is never, and cannot be, an autonomous field, for buildings cannot be mere drawings...In most cases, architects must design for someone' (Larson 2004: 324). Deamer makes a more straightforward statement, as she says, 'because building a building costs so much money, construction – and within it, architecture – necessarily works for and within the monetary system. One could say that the history of architecture is the history of capital' (Deamer 2014: 2).

More recent criticism of architectural autonomy comes from architectural theorists Nathaniel Coleman, Tahl Kaminer and Paul Jones. For Coleman, architects' belief in autonomy comes from a blind appropriation of Kant's philosophical narrative of transcendental and universal aesthetic and moral values enjoyed by human-beings. Nevertheless, as Coleman argues,

Architecture is not philosophy, at least not in the sense that permits the purity of argumentation in isolation from concrete experience and practices on the ground. So while arguments in philosophy might need not be troubled by that way in which the mundane inevitably taints practices, as architects we are so deeply embedded in the world that attempting to claim any such luxury is at best a misapprehension (Coleman 2015: 164).

Echoing Coleman, Kaminer argues that architectural autonomy serves as a disputed, exaggerated, and unsubstantiated claim. By taking the Jewish Museum in Berlin designed by Daniel Libeskind and the Guggenheim Bilbao designed by Frank Gehry as examples, Kaminer observes these so-called autonomous practices have deviated from their initial pursuit of resisting the capital force and have become deeply integrated into the commercial world through advertising, 'placing architecture at the centre of the cultural market' (Kaminer 2007: 70). In this perspective, Paul Jones argues that those autonomous practices have become a cloak of architectural commodification and 'obscure more than they revealed' (Jones 2009: 2522).

The divergence between pros and cons of architectural autonomy makes the notion a false dichotomy, either being accepted or denied. This dichotomy puts scholars of both camps facing a dilemma. On the one hand, the advocates of architectural autonomy fail to explain how a project appears autonomous while it is underpinned by the economic force *de facto* (Stevens 2002: 91-92). On the other hand, for those opponents, despite the fact that their idea of the capital force as an all-encompassing system and the impossibility of architectural autonomy sounds plausible, they cannot explain the prevalence of the notion in the profession lasting until the present. As Kaminer observes, 'while ideas of autonomy ought to have been exhausted by the twenty-first century, and era of flows, networks and inter-, post-, trans- and cross-disciplinarity, it nevertheless continues today to animate architectural positions, self-perception and discourse' (Kaminer 2021: 162). Moreover, although a few scholars, such as Kaminer, have pointed out that architectural autonomy has been commodified by the advertising industry, they still do not offer a detailed image of this process and explain the role of the notion in the cultural market.

To reconcile the divergence between the above two dichotomic perspectives, several scholars call for interdisciplinary approaches of studying the relationship between architectural autonomy and the capital force. For instance, Kate Nesbit argues that the stylistic analysis advocated by the architectural profession is incapable of interpreting the questionable architectural autonomy while a 'new and specific methodology' outside the profession is needed for investigating architectural activities (Nesbit 1996: 361). Likewise, Peggy Deamer suggests that the capital's connection with architecture, especially with those claimed autonomous architectural practices, is usually 'indirect, nimble and mutant', covered by a cultural cloak. As she says, 'while the construction industry participates energetically in the economic engine that is the base, architecture (particularly as a design practice) operates in the realm of culture, allowing capital to do its work without its effects being scrutinized' (Deamer 2014: 2). Therefore, the key of investigating the entanglement of architectural autonomy and the capital force, as Deamer argues, is to examine the relationship between the architectural culture, or more specifically, discourses used by architects and the economic power.

3. Theoretical framework: Pierre Bourdieu's field theory of cultural production

Echoing Nesbit and Deamer's call for interdisciplinary approaches, this research believes it might be helpful to engage with the field theory of cultural production put forward by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu due to its insightful revealing of the illusory independence of cultural activity and exposure of the notion of autonomy as a discursive apparatus facilitating the capital's production and reproduction. In this respect, this section will introduce Bourdieu's field theory, especially several key notions which serve as the theoretical framework of this study.

Bourdieu's field theory of cultural production contains a set of basic and crucial notions, ranging from 'field', 'four forms of capital', 'restricted-scale production', 'consecration', and 'mutual society'. The field refers to a social space within which a group of agents (individuals) collaborate or compete with others under a specific rule, aiming to accumulate as much capital as they can (Bourdieu 1993: 30). Agents who possess more capital than others hold dominant positions, having the privilege to set the rules of the field (Bourdieu 1990: 192). In his theoretical formation, the field serves as the fundamental element of the society, acting as an arena within which various social activities occur.

In the field theory, the notion of capital plays a significant role. Like Karl Marx, Bourdieu defines the capital as 'accumulated labour (in its materialized form or its incorporated, embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor' (Bourdieu 1986: 241). Simply put, the capital fuels the operation of every field and is the ultimate resource that all agents are chasing after. Considering the variety of fields it circulates, Bourdieu further subdivides the capital into four categories, namely the economic, cultural, social, and symbolic forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986: 242).

Building upon Marxian accounts, Bourdieu perceives the economic capital primarily as material assets possessed by agents, including money, property, land, stock, etc. (Bourdieu 1986: 242). In the field theory, the economic capital serves as the most fundamental force not only because it circulates in the overall social field but also because it acts as the root of other three forms of capital which can be reducible to the economic one under certain circumstances (Bourdieu 1986: 250-251).

Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, is a variant form of the economic capital which individuals gain through long-term family influence and systematic education (Bourdieu 1984: 2). Diplomas, certificates, professional skills, cultural taste, competence of deciphering artworks and so forth, are presentations of the cultural capital.

In the field theory, the social capital is employed to depict the social relations among agents in a specific field, and it can be perceived as mutual acquaintance and recognition in a network of individuals (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119). The function of social capital, as Bourdieu points out, acts as 'membership to a group'

(Bourdieu 1984: 247). For instance, through the social capital, one can be a member of an influential field, gaining his/her better positions. Moreover, having the social capital with multiple agents, one can gain the right to adjudicate upon the entry of other potential agents.

Lastly, the symbolic capital refers to an individual's accumulated prestige, celebrity, and honour. The primary function of symbolic capital is to legitimate social positions of powerful agents. Through the symbolic capital, the unequal positions between the dominant and subordinate agents in a field is converted to be difference between meritocracy and mediocrity (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2013: 298). Moreover, it is through symbolic capital that cultural and social capital can be converted to the economic one. As Bourdieu points out, "(Symbolic capital) is to be understood as economic capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimize, a credit which, under certain conditions, and always, in the long run, guarantees economic profits" (Bourdieu 1993: 75).

In different fields, according to their structure and rules, there are different types of capital that agents struggle for. For instance, in the commercial field, agents pursue economic benefit through producing commodities for the mass market, while in the academic field, the forms of capital that agents aim at become cultural and symbolic. The different appearances of four forms of capital shape the boundaries of various fields, making them seemingly independent from others. Nevertheless, in view of the above, all forms of capital are convertible and transmissible, the divergence among them is just a misrecognition as all other three forms of capital come from the economic one. In this sense, a field's independence, or in other words, autonomy from others, is an illusion. Moreover, through highlighting the convertibility of four forms of capital, Bourdieu reminds us that all fields, despite their different appearances, are dominated by the logic of capital proliferation, and agents in these fields are driven by the desire of accumulating more capital, which he delineates as 'the general science of the economy of practices' (Bourdieu 1977: 183).

Underpinned by the notion of field and four forms of capital, Bourdieu turns his attention to the cultural domains, aiming to expose the capital circulation behind those seemingly pure cultural artefacts. According to Bourdieu, cultural realms, including art, literature, music and architecture, are specific fields with complex structures and running regulations, producing cultural products to the market. Depending on different markets where cultural products are consumed, the cultural field can be further divided into two subfields, namely the field of large-scale and field of restricted scale production (Bourdieu 1993: 115).

As indicated by its name, the field of large-scale production aims at meeting the consumptive need of the mass-market, and agents in it long for economic success (Bourdieu 1993: 115). Examples of the field of large-scale production include pop music, popular literature, commercial movies, and the real estate industry. Contrarily, the field of restricted scale production acts as what Bourdieu calls 'economic world reversed' (Bourdieu 1993: 29). In this specific field, the public is not the target clients but professional peers. Agents in a restricted scale of production no longer pursue economic achievement but the accumulation of symbolic capital in terms

of professional reputation, recognition, and prestige (Bourdieu 1993: 115-117). Through discarding the value of the economic capital, cultural producers in this specific field claim that their creations are only for the sake of culture, and they thirst for the acceptance and praise of other elites of professional influence. Instance of the field of restricted scale can be found in high cultures such as avant-garde art, serious literature, art-house cinema and autonomous architectural practices.

Through disavowing the economic capital, the field of restricted scale production manages to distinguish itself from the field of large-scale production. It is through the distinction of cultural purity versus commercial vulgarism that the autonomous appearance of the field of restricted scale of production emerges. However, Bourdieu points out that the absolute of autonomy of free-from-constraints does not exist as agents in the field of restricted scale of production, including painters, musicians, poets, and architects, etc., 'do not act in a vacuum, but rather in concrete social situations governed by a set of objective social relations' (Bourdieu 1993: 6). On the one hand, all fields, either economic or cultural, as aforementioned, are to assist agents to accumulate capital and legitimate the hierarchical difference among individuals. The ultimate purpose of culture, instead of establishing transcendental aesthetics free from external influences, is 'predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences and thus contribute to the process of social production' (Bourdieu 1984: 6). In this sense, all fields are deeply bound together to sustain and legitimise the structural inequity of the whole societal field, leaving no exit for any specific field to escape.

On the other hand, the field of restricted scale of production's disavowal of the economic capital is not an absolute negation. Although agents in this field favour the symbolic capital, which appears different from the economic one, these two forms of capital, as introduced above are fundamentally homologous as the former derives from the latter. More importantly, these two forms of capital are convertible, as the symbolic capital is a unrecognised form of the economic one and can generate economic profit eventually.

The transformation from symbolic to economic capital, as Bourdieu delineates, is through the process of 'consecration', meaning a creator's work becomes accepted and propagated by authoritative cultural organisations (Bourdieu 1993: 112). These organisations range from renowned publishing houses, galleries, museums, competitions, etc. Due to their long-term accumulated institutional reputation and monopoly of distributing cultural products to high-level cultural consumers, being accepted, and then canonized by these organisations will confer the creator a significant amount of symbolic recognition, which would help them draw the attention of a wider audience, including real-world clients who want to buy their works.

The process of consecration is conducted in the name of culture. For instance, buying a painting from a high-end art gallery should not be understood as an economic investment, but the buyer's sincere love of the art and his/her cultural competence to appreciate the aesthetic value of the painting. Through the sophisticated process of canonization, promotion and finally consumption, the creator finally converted the

symbolic reputation to economic profit. For Bourdieu, this process of consecration and the time difference of the transition from symbolic to economic capital contributes to the concept of autonomy (Bourdieu 1993: 81). In other words, autonomy builds itself on the non-recognition of the symbolic and economic capital, acting as a relative notion.

Moreover, Bourdieu observes that the process of consecration acts as a prism, 'translating all external determinations in conformity with a field's own principle of functioning' (Bourdieu 1993: 115). In the field of restricted scale of production, it means translating the economic force into symbolic languages, and this translation is always discursive and is achieved through the collaboration among creators, critics, and publishers. To consecrate a specific piece of artworks, creators, critics, and publishers forge a 'mutual admiration society' (Bourdieu 1993: 116). Within this small society, all members cooperate with others, constituting a symbiotic relationship. Critics and publishers highlight the value of the creator's work through their 'creative interpretations', while the creator echoes critics and publishers' rhetoric, labelling it as the characteristic of his/her creations (Bourdieu 1993: 116). In this perspective, Bourdieu helps us to unveil the discursive nature of autonomy. As he asserts, 'it is significant that the progress of the field of restricted production towards autonomy is marked by an increasing distinct tendency of criticism and interpretation' (Bourdieu 1993: 116). Through this Bourdieusian perspective, Larson also argues that the notion of architectural autonomy is also built on critics, architects, and publishers' collective interpretations.

The architectural elite is anointed by critics, historians and certainly not the least by other architects. Their standing is thus established by relatively autonomous players in a discursive field within which the statements – word and stone – of the famous architects have the authority to constitute architecture: they make it by declaring not only what good architecture is but also who are the producers worth considering (Larson 2004: 320-321).

To conclude, through translating economic calculations into symbolic expressions in terms of highly aesthetic and esoteric terminologies, the symbolic groups of agents in a field of restricted scale production discursively forge the image of autonomy while serving the symbolic/economic exchange in the real world.

Through above introduction, is it obvious that Bourdieu's field theory of cultural production has a great potential for studies of the interaction between the capital force and the so-called autonomous architectural practices. Firstly, through notions of field of capital, the field theory offers us practical and micro-level analytical tools for empirical interrogations of architectural practices. By emphasising the importance of the role of agents and their interactions in the formation of social activities, the field theory enables us to avoid overgeneralising the capital as an intangible force and to examine its penetration in architectural practices in detail.

Secondly, the field theory helps us to understand that the relationship between autonomy and the capital force is not a yes or no question. Instead, by unveiling the

discursive nature of autonomy it guides us to focus on the key issue of how this notion is constituted by agents in a field of restricted production and what kind of strategies they take to accomplish this discursive formation. More specifically speaking, this theoretical lens keeps us from falling into accounting an architectural practice wholly by forces external to it and incorporating specificities of an architectural practice by focusing on the interpersonal interactions among critics, architects, publishers and even the clients into consideration. To achieve this aim, we should stay distant from the heroic narrative of the architect as the sole creator of a building and avoid taking various interpretations offered by professional media as granted.

Lastly, through unveiling the convertibility among cultural/social/symbolic/economic forms of capital, the field theory reminds us of paying attention to the capital exchange beneath the discursive formation of architectural autonomy, which enables us to textualise and theorise the relationship between an architectural practice and the capital force.

4. Research case

To offer a detailed image of the interpersonal interactions among critics, architects and publishers and the discursive strategies they took in constituting CEA's autonomy, this research locates the real estate businessman Du Jian and two professional publications he sponsored, namely the *Next Wave* magazine (2001) and the *Beisen Library Architectural Series* (2002), as the primary cases of analysis. On the one hand, through these two publications, the CEA and experimental architects, including Yung Ho Chang, Jiakun Liu, Tang Hua and Wang Shu, became systematically introduced to the Chinese architectural profession and canonized as leading Chinese architects. On the other hand, several critics of the CEA, especially Mingxian Wang, also actively participated in publishing these two prints. These two points make Du Jian and his two publications suitable instances with this research's analytical framework.

5. Research methodology

In general, the current research locates itself alongside the ongoing discussions of architectural autonomy, aiming to offer a clear image of the suspicious entanglement between architectural autonomy and the capital force. To achieve this aim, this research adopts Bourdieu's field theory of cultural production as the theoretical lens. Through this lens, the research identifies the CEA as an architectural field of restricted-scale production composed of critic Mingxian Wang, architects Yung Ho Chang, Jiakun Liu, and Tang Hua, and publisher Du Jian. Through tracking their interpersonal interactions in publishing Du's two professional publications and their interpretations demonstrated via these two publications, this research aims to unveil how the CEA became a movement of architectural autonomy by the symbiotic

network of Du, Wang, and experimental architects via these two publications, and how to delineate the role of architectural autonomy in this discursive process.

5.1. In-depth interview

In social scientific studies, in-depth interviews allow researchers to investigate details of a social activity by recording and contextualising individual perspectives, experiences, actions and interactions. As Uwe Flick points out, this qualitative approach enables us to enter the subjective domain of agents' world, and we can restore a relative world through reinterpreting agents' interpretations (Flick 2014: 149-150). In the current research, this approach is adopted to analyse interpersonal interactions of Du Jian, Mingxian Wang, Yung Ho Chang, Jiakun Liu, and Tang Hua' in the preparation stage of publishing, through which we can explore the detailed trajectory of the birth of Du's two publications.

Individuals, including Du Jian, Mingxian Wang, Jiakun Liu and Yung Ho Chang were interviewed by the author between December 2018 and June 2019, and the duration of every interview is at least one and a half hours. All questions of the interview are around interviewees' reflection of their participation in the publications and details of their interactions with others.

Meanwhile, to avoid falling into the pitfall of recounting the 'accounts which agents produce' (Bourdieu 1977: 5), data collected from interviews are analysed through the Bourdieusian framework of four forms of capital. For instance, an agent's reflection of interactions with others is reviewed through the notion of social capital; agents' capacities of design and interpretation are reviewed through the notion of cultural capital; their professional positions and awards are reviewed through the notion of symbolic capital; and agents' economic input/gains are reviewed through the notion of economic capital. By doing so, all data via interview is used to aid the examination of capital circulation among all relevant agents in the CEA.

5.2. Document collection

There are two kinds of documents collected by this research. On the one hand, governmental policies of economic changes between 1990 and 2000 are collected and analysed. By doing so, the research aims to delineate the fundamental landscape of China's social field, offering a backdrop within which the position of the CEA in society can be examined and contextualised.

On the other hand, the *Next Wave* magazine and *Beisen Library Architectural Series* locate the centre of all documents. These two documents serve to support and complement the subjective interpretations of various agents, which helps to restore CEA. More importantly, through analysing these documents, we can track the discursive strategies adopted by above agents, which enable this research to textualise and theorise the constructive process of the notion of architectural autonomy.

6. Du Jian and his involvement in the CEA

In 1998, the State Council of China issued document No. 23, which stopped offering state-owned enterprises (SOE) worker public housing. Since then, the direct distribution of housing through the working unit system was abandoned (Man et al. 2011: 4). Consequently, the real estate industry served as the dominant force in housing supply for the whole of society (Wu et al. 2006: 6). Along with rapid urban expansion since the late 1990s, the real estate industry quickly became the central engine for the nation's economic development, and became one of the most profitable economic domains, giving birth to a group of new millionaires.

Du Jian is one of them. As one of the first generation of post-1978 college graduates, Du got his first job as a civil servant at the municipal government of Chengdu city, the capital of Sichuan province. However, as Du recalls: 'this job was a little boring for me. Everything was fixed and all you had to do was to repeat what others had done' (Du 2019). Therefore, in 1992, Du quit the official system and founded the Beisen Real Estate Company, as 'the housing market was the most promising industry back at that time' (Du 2019). Due to the rapid expansion of the housing industry in 1996, he had already made a fortune of over fifty million Renmibi (RMB, equivalent to three hundred thousand Sterling Pounds). His business was so successful that one street in central Chengdu was named after his company.

While being a successful businessman, Du was also keen to participate in cultural activities such as contemporary art and architecture due to his parent's influence. As he recalls:

As a boy who grew up in the Cultural Revolution, I was lucky that my parents were able to cultivate me interests in painting during that tough period. Although I finally went to an engineering school during my college life, I never gave up my interest in art. When I got my first salary in 1992, I bought an album of Monet's paintings and a book introducing modern European architecture. I was impressed by Le Corbusier's sketches of ancient Roman temples (Du 2019).

This family influence and long-term interest helped Du attain the cultural competence in deciphering and appreciating artworks, or in a general sense, a cultural taste. In Bourdieu's field theory, no matter whether referring to an individual's preference in dress, music or art and so forth, functioned to distinguish one from others, presenting the objective class distinction of the society. As he argues:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifiers. Social subjects, classified by their classification, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed (Bourdieu 1977: 6-7).

In the case of Du, his cultural taste helped him to distinguish himself from other real estate merchants. He refused to be identified as a mere businessman interested in economic success. As he argues: ‘the fundamental issue for running a business is not mere money but belief. Unlike other profit-chasing merchants, I want more than just economic payback. I want to invest in something that interests me’ (Du 2019).

In Du’s opinion, his educational background and cultural taste outplayed many other competitors, as he contends: ‘back to the early 90s, there were few businessmen like he who attained an undergraduate degree and had a sincere appreciation of culture’ (Du 2019). Moreover, during a meeting with Shiyi Pan, the owner of China SOHO, one of the biggest private real estate enterprises in China, Du mocked Pan for his ignorance of contemporary Chinese art. As Du says:

I said to Pan that he should not only focus on selling houses. Instead, he should have at least one piece of artist Lijun Fang’s painting in his office, as I have already collected Fang’s artworks for a long time. Being rich economically does not mean you are rich mentally (Du 2019).

The economic success brought by his housing business enabled Du to realise his taste in art. Since 1996, he frequently flew from Chengdu to Beijing to attend art exhibitions and auctions, as ‘Beijing is the cultural capital of the nation gathering most of the talented artists’ (Du 2019). During his frequent stays in Beijing, he started to reach out to elite Chinese artists, including Xianting Li, Lijun Fang, and Jianwei Wang. As Du reflects: ‘these artists were impressed by my appreciation of contemporary Chinese art and generosity in supporting its development, and we quickly became close friends’ (Du 2019) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Portrait of Du Jian drawn by artist Lijun Fang. In the year 1995 alone, Fang drew four portraits of Du, showing their close social connection. Source: from Lijun Fang’s official website <<https://fanglijun.artron.net/works>>. Accessed on 25.03.2023.

Like art, architecture for Du is another vehicle to showcase his cultural taste and economic power. In Du's understanding, architecture is highly aesthetic, equivalent to art, and different from the commercially-produced houses he sold in the market. As he argues: "In China, we have numerous buildings but no architecture" (Du 2019). In 1997, Du had the opportunity to realise his longing for 'good architecture' as he decided to build a new headquarters for his real estate company. To fulfil his architectural dream, Du urged his employees to go through profiles of any creative and talented architects in the market, and finally, Tang Hua, a young architect, was commissioned by Du.

As a close friend of architectural critic Mingxian Wang, Tang Hua was labelled by Wang as an experimental architect in the 1999 "Exhibition of Experimental Architecture by Young Chinese Architects" held in Beijing. Tang, together with Yung Ho Chang, Jiakun Liu, Wang Shu, Zhao Bing, Wenyi Zhu, and Weiguo Xu, were propagated by Wang as the new generation of contemporary Chinese architecture. However, unlike other experimental colleagues, Tang Hua was not an absolutely independent architect. On the one hand, he held a lectureship at Chongqing College of Architecture and Engineering, active in attending Wang's private salon and architectural exhibitions. On the other hand, he served as a practicing architect at the Shenzhen Haiyi Architectural Design Corporation, an affiliated semi-independent company of China State Construction (the biggest SOE in the Chinese building industry).

Due to these dual identities, Tang could enjoy being regarded as a talented young architect different from others wholly institutionalised by state-sanctioned design institutes. Meanwhile, holding a position in a marketing design company enabled Tang to participate in many commercial projects, while other fully independent experimental architects like Yung Ho Chang and Jiakun Liu could not. For Du Jian, it was also this duality of Tang's identity and situation that triggered his decision, as Du reflects:

Tang Hua was already a well-known young architect back at that time. His design was much more modern and interesting than other state-sanctioned counterparts. Meanwhile, he was very experienced in designing commercial buildings such as hotels, shopping complexes and official buildings (Du 2019).

The collaboration between Du and Tang, as Du contends, 'was ideal' (Du 2019). As the client, Du set almost no constraints in Tang's design and 'met every requirement the architect proposed' (Du 2019). Form spatial arrangement, façade design, to constructional materials, all were determined by the architect. For instance, in Tang's design, all facades of the headquarters were decorated with red bricks, and he had a particular requirement for the texture and colour of the brick. To fulfil Tang's quest, Du bought over twenty samples of different bricks nationwide (Figure 2). However, none met Tang's need. Due to Tang's insistence, Du bought bricks from Germany which 'had never been used in any Chinese buildings before' (Du 2019). Finally,



Figure 2. A perspective photo of the Beisen Headquarters Designed by Tang Hua.
Photo taken by author on 24 May 2022.

this project with a building area of less than 1300 square metres, cost Du over five million RMB (equivalent to half a million Sterling Pounds) and was completed in December 1998.

Nevertheless, behind the ideal story of the collaboration between Du and Tang, traces of different forms of capital exchange can be found. For Du, building this project fulfilled his personal preference of ‘good architecture’, which seems a cultural and aesthetic pursuit. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that his investment in the headquarters was not due to any economic calculations. However, what Du attained through this project was the recognition and reputation from the architect, and more importantly, from other members of the CEA. For instance, after the completion of this headquarters, Mingxian Wang, the initiator of the CEA, reached out to Du and praised him as the ‘best client in China who knows how to collaborate with architects respectfully’ (Wang 2019). Moreover, through Tang’s introduction, Du began to develop contacts with Jiakun Liu, another experimental architect and Tang’s college classmate. Through the seemingly selfless investment, Du gained the symbolic capital that helped him enter the restricted field of CEA. This project served as the vehicle for the exchange between Du’s economic capital, which is disavowed by the CEA, to the symbolic one, which is welcomed by the same field.

On the other hand, for the architect, this project served as the platform to transform his cultural capital, in terms of his design skills and aesthetic preference, into symbolic capital. For instance, after its completion, the Beisen Headquarters served as one of Tang’s representative projects, presented in exhibitions including “2000 Peking, Shanghai, Shenzhen Exhibition” in Germany curated by Kai Vöckler and Dirk Luckow, and the “Zhuangtai: Exhibition of works of Eight Young Architects in Contemporary China” curated by critics Luzheng Huang and Zhengming Fang,

Beijing, 2004 (Gong 2004: 19-27). Consecrated by these cultural organisations, Tang received recognitions and reputations from a wide range of professional peers. More importantly, Du's unconditional coordination significantly helped Tang to be identified as the sole creator of the project, reinforcing the autonomous image of Tang's design practice and the CEA in a general sense. Therefore, it could be concluded the Beisen Headquarters is a vivid embodiment of the symbiotic relationship between the architect and the client.

As discussed in early paragraphs of this research, symbolic capital is a not recognised form of economic one as it will lead to economic benefit in the long run. For Du, the symbolic capital he earned from the CEA was also endowed with this economic intent, and this intent gradually became clear along with his intensive interactions with other agents in this field. For members of the CEA, especially for critic Mingxian Wang, although he had curated the "Exhibition of Experimental Architecture by Young Chinese Architects" between 22nd and 27th June 1999 in Beijing, the influence of this exhibition, as Wang reflects, 'was quite limited due to its small scale' (Wang 2019). Therefore, to further promote this architectural movement domestically, Wang, together with Jiakun Liu, planned to hold a conference in Chengdu, gathering other experimental architects from other cities. As Bourdieu points out, to enlarge its influence in the cultural sphere and widen the gulf between its cultural products with others, cultural creators and critics in the restricted scale field formulated a 'mutual admiration society', monopolising the right to interpret the value of their products in esoteric discourses (Bourdieu 1993: 116). The purpose of this conference, therefore, was to reinforce the solidarity of the mutual society of the CEA.

As Jiakun Liu recalls, initially the proposed scale of the conference 'was not very big due to issues of funding and place' (Liu 2019). By contacting a handful of friends, Liu raised twenty thousand RMB (equivalent to twenty thousand Sterling Pounds), which, as Liu says, 'was not quite enough' (Liu 2019). Meanwhile, the small office of Liu's atelier was chosen as the venue in the first place. It was at this point that Du got involved. As Liu recalls,

I did not know how Du knew that we were organising a conference and he contacted me out of the blue. To my surprise, he proposed that he would be responsible for all fees of the conference and was willing to offer the headquarters of his company as the venue (Liu 2019).

With Du's financial support, the "Academic Forum of Mid-Aged and Young Chinese Architects" was held inside the Beisen Headquarters designed by Tang Hua on 4th October 2000, Chengdu (Figure 3). Besides Liu and Wang, architects and critics, including Yung Ho Changm, Wang Shu, Tang Hua, Cui Kai, Jianming Meng and Xiaojun Rao, attended the forum. After this event, most attenders, as Du states, 'become my friends' (Du 2019).



Figure 3. The opening ceremony of the Academic Forum of Chinese Mid-Aged and Young Architects. 4th October 2000. As shown by this photo, this event was held in the lobby of the Beisen Headquarters. From Du Jian's private collections. Courtesy of Mr. Du Jian.

Unlike his investment in the Beisen headquarters, which earned him symbolic recognition, Du's seemingly generous sponsorship of this forum was closely connected with economic calculations. As Bourdieu points out, in the field of restricted scale production, the role of the cultural businessman is like a 'banker' (Bourdieu 1993: 77). In the first place, he will assist the promotion of cultural creators by means of the symbolic and economic capital he accumulated. Nevertheless, when the creators' works become regarded as valuable pieces by others professional peers, the businessman or 'banker' starts to get the payback from his previous investment.

7. The Next Wave Magazine

Less than ten days before the forum, Du founded the Beisen Cultural Development Company. As indicated by its website, this company focuses on business ranging from exhibition and conference organising, corporate marketing, and publishing. Du's sponsorship of Liu's forum was the first pilot operation of his cultural business. In June 2001, Du decided to expand the business of his cultural company by starting to publish a professional magazine on contemporary Chinese art, or more specifically, Chinese avant-garde art. As Du states, the decision to publish a magazine 'was due to the advice of art critic Xianting Li and artist Jianwei Wang', as 'back to that time, there were few domestic publications specifically focusing on works of talented Chinese

avant-garde artists' (Du 2019). To ensure the success of this magazine, Du moved the company's office from Chengdu to Beijing, mobilized all social connections with his artist friends and spent, as Du contends, 'almost all the profits he accumulated from the housing market' (Du 2019).

To attract a broad audience, the magazine focused on what Du states as 'pan-art', ranging from painting, sculpture, poem, music, film, installation performance art. On 1 July 2001, the inaugural issue of the Xin Chao (Next Wave) magazine was published, and nearly all the important names of the contemporary Chinese art scene were on its editorial board (Figure 4). Photographer Dajun Wang acted as the chief editor, art critic Xianting Lis served as the chief planner. Mingxian Wang was invited by Du as the magazine's chief advisor. In Du's calculation, architecture was also a form of art he wanted to exhibit. Considering the 'avant-garde attitude of the magazine', the CEA, as 'the representative of Chinese architectural avant-gardism', was the best opinion (Du 2019). This explains why Wang, as an architectural critic, became involved in an art magazine.

The Next Wave magazine offered Wang a powerful platform to promote the CEA. As Nikolaus Fogle argues,



Figure 4. The front cover of the Inaugural Issue of the Next Wave Magazine published in July 2001. Reprint from the Next Wave Magazine Vol. 1, 2001.

For most part, architecture achieves the desired distance from these activities by allying itself with the arts: what makes a building a work of architecture rather than a mere construction is its its embodiment of some form of artistic or cultural significance (Fogle 2011: 131).

In this sense, the privilege of being incorporated by this art magazine and getting juxtaposed with other avant-garde artworks enabled Wang to widen the gulf between the CEA and other architectural practices, as the former became consecrated by the magazine as a cutting-edge artistic expression rather than common design practices. For instance, in the inaugural issue, Wang introduced the exhibition of “The First Sicheng Liang Biennial of Architectural Design” he curated on 8th April 2001, Beijing (Figure 5).

In his interpretation, Wang coined this architectural exhibition as a ‘public presentation of the integration of contemporary Chinese art and experimental architecture’. Meanwhile, he labelled experimental architects, including Yung Ho Chang, Jiakun Liu, and Yungan Dong, as ‘eminent contemporary architects and artists’ (Wang and Zeng 2001: 24). All these architects’ exhibits, including Chang’s interior of the exhibition hall, Liu’s photographic presentation of Sicheng Liang’s House, and Dong’s printed work, were deliberately selected by Wang, all of which, as critic Zeng Li pointed out, ‘were very conceptual but less architectural’ (Wang and Zeng 2001: 26). Moreover, Wang invited artists, including Jianwei Wang, Song



Figure 5. Mingxian Wang’s introduction of ‘The First Sicheng Liang Biennial of Architectural Design.’ The picture on the left page shows the interiors of the exhibition which was designed by Yung Ho Chang Reprint from the Next Wave Magazine, Vol. 1, 2001, pp. 24-25.

Dong, and Xiuzhen Yin, to attend this exhibition. Through all these strategies, Wang blurred the boundary between the CEA and Chinese avant-garde art, rendering the CEA as a distinctive phenomenon offering architectural products of aesthetic significance.

At the same time, the magazine enabled Wang to reinforce his monopoly in defining the value of the CEA. In the magazine's forth issue, Wang published an article to defend his leading role in the CEA. As introduced above, in 1999, Wang curated the "Exhibition of Experimental Architecture by Young Chinese Architects" in Beijing. Besides Wang, there was another critic involved: Xiao Mo. Immediately after the exhibition, Wang published a short article in the regional magazine *Jinri Xianfeng* (*Avant-garde Today*), in which he claimed credit for the exhibitions and accused Xiao Mo of uncooperative behaviour in organising the event (Wang 2000: 6-8) (Figure 6).

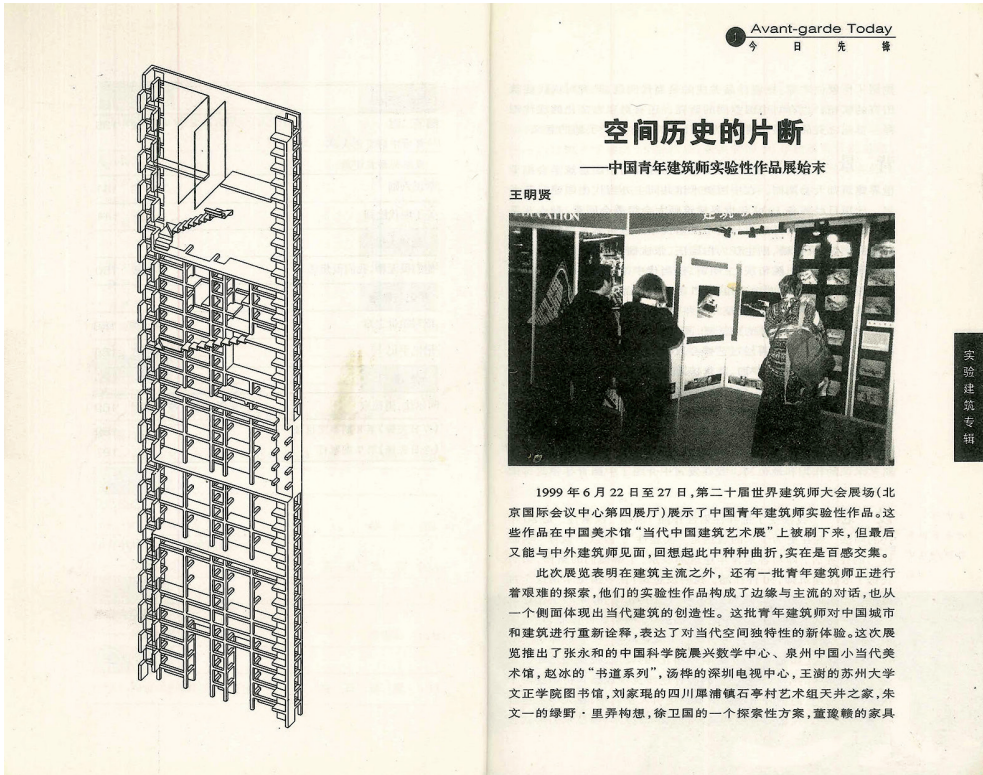


Figure 6. Mingxian Wang's introduction of the 1999 'Exhibition of Experimental Architecture by Young Chinese Architects' on *Avant-garde Today*, December 12, 1999.

In this article, Wang claimed to be the only curator of this exhibition.

The left page shows the conceptual design offered by architect Yugan Dong.

Reprint form the *Avant-garde Today*, Vol. 8, 1999, p.1.

However, Xiao fought back Wang's accusations by writing a public letter to Wang on the internet. It was under this situation that Wang, via the Next Wave magazine, published another accusing letter against Xiao. In this letter, which has an outrageous tone, Wang alleged that Xiao was 'dishonest' and 'does not understand the value of experimental architects' practices'. Meanwhile, he reasserted his contribution to the development of this architectural movement by depicting himself as the Chinese Eero Saarinen who had 'discovered the valuable design of Yung Ho Chang, the Chinese Jørn Utzon, in the waste heap' (Wang 2001: 35-37) (Figure 7).

现场报告 现场回放：中国青年建筑师实验作品展

再谈中国 青年建筑师 实验作品展

——答萧默



中国青年建筑师实验性作品参展作品：苏州大学文正学院图书馆，王澍

文 王明贤

萧默先生在 www.abbs.com (建筑论坛) 上发表了《历史片断的真相》，并预告此文将在《今日先锋》全文刊载，拜读萧默大作，谨作简要回答。

萧默说明他不会“故意刁难这些与我无冤无仇许多还是我的朋友”的青年建筑师和您，还表明他对青年建筑师作品的支持。我对萧默开明的学术态度表示敬意，并拟再作补充说明。萧文提到筹展办法规定：作品“经艺术委员会审查后决定”，补充推荐作品均应“补报艺术委员会执委会审查同意后入选”。萧文认为10件青年建筑师作品不符合此操作程序，而所有参展作品都应符合此规定。但萧默在1999年6月4号给我的信写道：“星期二我们去找吴（良镛）先生，是不是说只要经过吴先生和萧默过目，就不用再由艺委会审查了。这样不是和萧默强调的筹展办法相违背吗？当然，或许另有原因，那就是10件青年建筑师探索性作品不属于正式入选作品（入选作品均颁奖），可算是例外。然而萧先生6月4日没说要按照筹展办法办，6月19日却又坚持“原则”要求艺委会审查同意，并“逐一电话请示有关领导”。此一时彼一时也！青年建筑师作品被撤的真相不是很清楚了吗？”

萧文还说是我“按兵不动”，两次工作会“却都未到会”。萧默当时也知道我妻子病重，但他以学术工作为重，文中不谈我的家庭琐事，我非常理解。我妻子因甲亢引起心脏病在人民医院抢救，我用颤抖的手在病危单上签字时，作为第一秘书长的萧默，如果不用我寄送材料，就亲自并直接到装裱车间看看青年建筑师作品展板，而不是最后一天才到中国美术馆审查，真让我感激涕零。

退一步讲，即使青年建筑师作品送展违反展览操作程序，一

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Figure 7. Mingxian Wang's open letter to Xiao Mo. In this letter, Wang reasserted himself as the only curator of the 1999 exhibition of the CEA, excluding Xiao from this movement.

Reprint from the Next Wave Magazine, Vol. 4, 2001, p. 35.

For experimental architects, on the other hand, the magazine offered a channel through which they could freely, or even boldly, interpret the value of their works. Also in the magazine's fourth issue, experimental architects Jiakun Liu and critic Xianting Li introduced the "Crossroads: 2001 Exhibition of Urban and Environmental Art" in Chengdu city (Figure 8). Li and Mingxian Wang were curators, and over 14 architects and artists, including Jiakun Liu, Jianwei Wang and Song Dong, etc., contributed to this exhibition. Yung Ho Chang, although offering no exhibits, also got involved in this event as a consultant. Again, Du's cultural development company offered financial support by sponsoring the exhibition's operational fees.

According to Liu and Li, this exhibition acted as a counterforce against the nation's rapid urban expansion, expressing their dissatisfaction with the commodification of architectural creation. Liu's exhibit, a flyover made of scaffolding poles and planks, as he interpreted, served as an 'artistic mockery of the endless and crazy urbanisation in China' (Liu: 2001: 23). In Li's interpretation, the exhibition unveiled the paradoxical nature of China's urban development, 'rejecting modern Western art while wholeheartedly mimicking its appearance' (Li 2001: 24). For Li, various vulgar phenomena, including 'European towns', 'traditional commercial streets', and all sorts of 'World Parks' prevailing in urban China, indicated the 'money-oriented nature' and the 'utilitarian position' of China's politics. Meanwhile, by taking the



Figure 8. Jiakun Liu's introduction of the 'Crossroad: 2001 Exhibition of Urban and Environmental Art'. Photos on both pages show the flyover designed by Liu.

Through this installation, Liu criticised the rampant urbanisation in urban China, which would lead the nation to a dead end. Reprint from the Next Wave Magazine, Vol. 4, 2001, pp, 22-23.

Tianzi Hotel, a skyscraper covered by exaggerating folk ornament, as the example, Li mocked the aesthetic taste of the hotel owner, a rural entrepreneur. As Li said: ‘the spectacular appearance of this hotel showcases the newly rich peasant’s miraculous imagination and embodies his dream of happiness’ (Li 2001: 27) (Figure 9).

王功新的录像艺术《一分钟纪实——一天子大酒店》，以录像的方式展示了这个天子大酒店的“建筑”，并以字幕的方式把天子大酒店自己的宣传文字摘录其上：“天子大酒店的外形是彩塑‘福禄寿’三星像，高41·6米，形象逼真，造型独特，气势恢弘，是我国目前独一无二的人文景致。福禄寿三星象征着‘幸福、进步、健康’，其设计为世界首创，是目前世界最大的具有使用功能的象形建筑，现已申报吉尼斯世界记录。”如果说中国城市建设价值支撑点，是文化破碎之后的发财梦想，最极端的莫过于这个坐落在北京郊区的“天子大酒店”了，它比阿斯维加斯模仿金字塔的酒店有过之而无不及，它所体现的“奇迹般的想像力”，肯定会让阿斯维加斯的同行们瞠目结舌，难怪天子大酒店要申报吉尼斯世界记录。而且，福禄寿作为中国民间尤其农民的幸福理想的化身，重新在中国成为精神的象征，也点出了中国的发财梦想——“农民暴发”的实质。正是这样的“文化现实”，这些富了的农民才给自己的酒店冠以“天子”，也让我们有幸大开眼界！（作品图片由王功新提供）



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Figure 9. Li Xianting’s introduction of the Tianzi Hotel.
Reprint from the Next Wave Magazine, Vol. 4, 2001, p.27.

From the above review of the magazine's presentation of the CEA, it is evident that both the critic and architects benefited significantly from this publication. As introduced in the literature review, the autonomy of a field of restricted scale production depends on agents, especially the critic's creative interpretations of the value of an artist's creation. As the magazine was almost exclusive from other architectural critics, Wang almost monopolised the right of interpreting experimental architects' practices. This monopoly of interpretation conferred Wang a superior position in the CEA, offering him, as a critic, professional reputation from other architects and artists.

Meanwhile, as Bourdieu points out, to ensure a higher position in a field of restricted scale production, a critic has competed with peers for the monopoly on the right of interpretation. As he elaborates:

All critics declare not only their judgement of the work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work art (Bourdieu 1993: 35-36).

This struggle can be found in the controversy between Wang and Xiao. Nevertheless, the *Next Wave* magazine enabled Wang to win this very public argument with Xiao as only his voice was disseminated by this authoritative cultural publication while Xiao could not reply, reinforcing Wang's role as the only legitimate critic in the CEA.

For experimental architects, this magazine enabled them to freely widen the cultural gulf between their creations and those of other architects. Their personal and elitist statements, including Liu's mockery of China's urbanisation and Li's cynical sarcasm towards China's politics and architectural commodification, consecrated through the magazine, became legitimised as their acute reflection on the society, representing their high cultural and moral taste superior to others. This artificial distinction is key in increasing the value of their works and reinforcing the autonomous boundary around the CEA. Moreover, through their deliberate distinction, they also gained symbolic appreciation and recognition from peers with similar cultural tastes.

For Du, the collaboration with Wang and experimental architects via the magazine helped his accumulation of the economic capital. Here, Du's identity was not that of a real estate merchant but a publisher, a cultural businessman. As Bourdieu argues:

The cultural businessman (art dealer, publisher, etc.) is at one and the same time the person who exploits the labour of the creator by putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing or staging it, consecrates a product which he has discovered and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource (Bourdieu 1993: 77).

In the case of the *Next Wave* magazine, Du's exploration of members of the CEA was not through selling buildings they designed, like he did in the housing market. Instead, through photos of architectural exhibitions, and articles written by Mingxian Wang, Jiakun Liu, and Xianting Li and so forth, the CEA became the cultural commodity offered through Du's magazine. In other words, through critics' and architects' discursive representation and reproduction of their works in the magazine, the CEA became commodified and served Du's cultural business. Interestingly, the discursive representation and reproduction was conducted in the name of cultural, especially the avant-garde in art, aiming to depict this architectural movement as an autonomous, or at least as a critical force against architectural commodification. It is due to this cultural cloak that traces of Du's commodification of the CEA became mute and challenging to detect.

8. The Beisen Library Architectural Series

The *Next Wave* magazine is not the only case indicating Du's exploitation of the CEA. As the discursive reproduction of the CEA proven feasible, Du decided to enlarge its scale. Since the late 1990s, overseas star architects had begun to participate in China's construction boom due to the country's desire of high-profile buildings (Kvan et al. 2008: 204). For instance, in 1999, the French architect Paul Andrew was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of China to design the new National Theatre. In 2000, via the artists Ai Weiwei's invitation, the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas participated in the design competition of the headquarters of China Central Television and won. Their designs, while provoking some controversies among Chinese architects, quickly drew significant public attention. It was under this situation that Du planned to publish a series of books on the CEA. As Du recalls,

Issuing the series of book on those experimental architects was due to my inner nationalism. Back in 2001, foreign architects were very welcomed by all levels of governments and the market. However, in my opinion, their designs were not superior compared to those talented young Chinese architects, including Yung Ho Chang, Jiakun Liu, Tang Hua, Wang Shu and so forth. Those young Chinese lacked a platform to promote their works, enabling a broader audience to understand that Chinese architects also have a great ability in contemporary architectural practices (Du 2019).

Du contacted Wang and asked him to take the position of the series of books' chief editor. As Du contends, "Wang was the only appropriate candidate for editing the book. Back at that point in time, Xianting Li was known as the godfather of contemporary Chinese art while Wang was the godfather of the CEA" (Du 2019). In Du and Wang's plan, they wanted to propagate five young Chinese architects by making portfolios of their creations and personal statements. Yung Ho Chang was chosen for his international reputation attained via the overseas publications. Yang

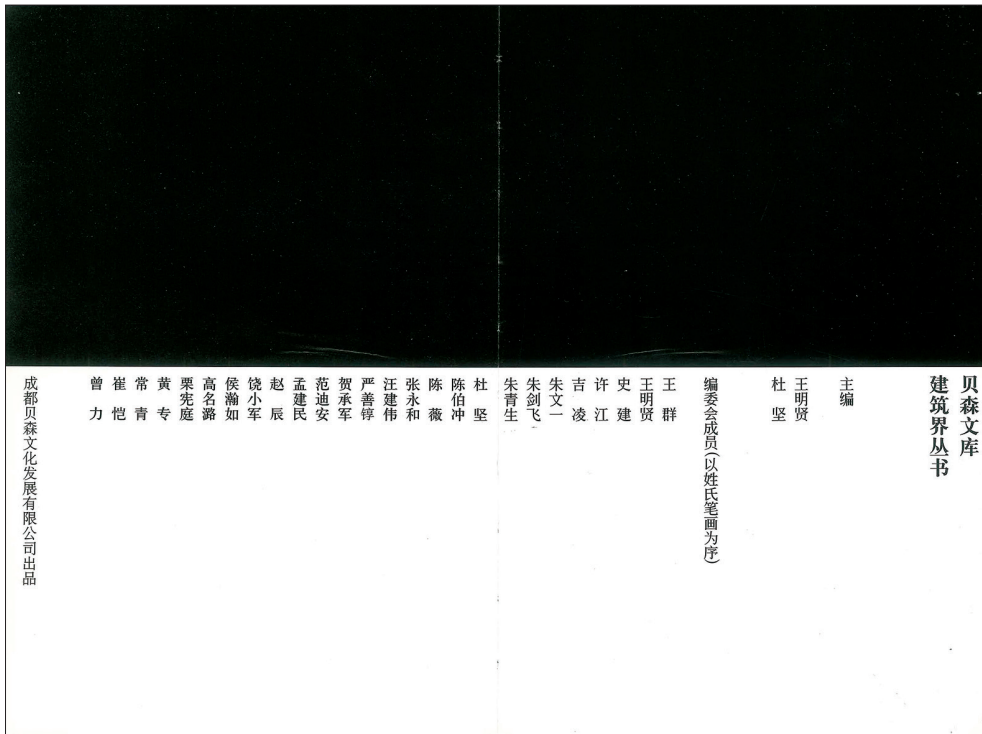


Figure 10. This picture shows all members of the editorial board of the Beisen Library Architectural Series. Du and Wang served as chief editors. Almost all eminent figures of architecture and art in contemporary China were included by the editorial board, showing Du's social connections with both realms. Reprinted from "For a Basic Architecture" by Yung Ho Chang, Editorial, China Architecture and Building Press, Beijing, 2002.

Hua, as the designer of headquarters of Du's real estate company, was nominated by Du. To choose the remaining three candidates, Du and Wang founded an editorial board of twenty-four editors. Artists, including Xianting Li, Jianwei Wang and Minglu Gao, architects, including Yung Ho Chang, Cui Kai and Jianmin Meng, and critics Shi Jian, were incorporated in this board (Figure 10).

Finally, the board selected Jiakun Liu, Wang Shu and Cui Kai from over forty candidates. As Du recalls, the selection of Liu and Wang was due to their active involvement in the mutual society of the CEA, and both architects were 'very good at writing' (Du 2019). Nevertheless, the selection of Cui Kai was beyond his expectation. As a state-sanctioned architect and then the chief architect of a state-owned design institute, Cui could hardly be reviewed as an independent and experimental architect. As Du states, 'after a short chat with Wang, I finally understood that the selection of Cui was due to his high status in the (official) system, and editors wanted to offer the audience an overall image of young Chinese architects rather than just experimental ones' (Du 2019).

Financially supported by Du, the *Beisen Library Architectural Series* was published in 2002 by China Architecture and Building Press, a state-owned publishing house responsible for producing textbooks for Chinese architectural colleges (Figure 11).

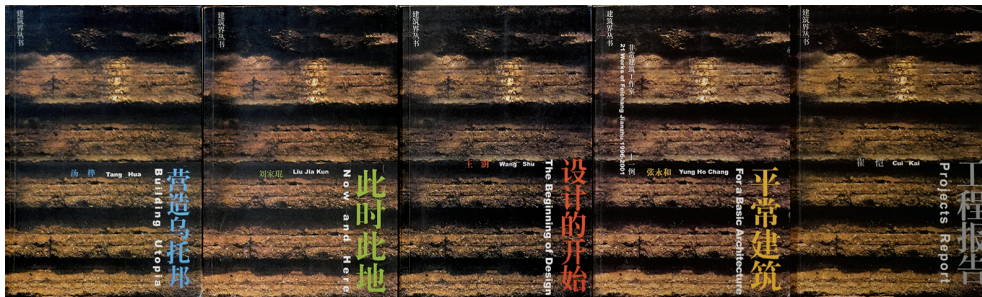


Figure 11. Front Covers of the Beisen Library Architectural Series.

(From left to right: ‘Building Utopia’ by Tang Hua; ‘Now and Then’ by Jiakun Liu; ‘The Beginning of Design’ by Wang Shu; ‘For a Basic Architecture’ by Yung Ho Chang; and ‘Project Report’ by Cui Kai.)

Like the *Next Wave* magazine, this series of books on the one hand offered those five architects a platform from which they could freely interpret the value of their works and the profoundness of their thought. For instance, in the book *For a Basic Architecture*, Yung Ho Chang straightforwardly argued that he pursued an autonomous architecture free of any constraints. As he wrote:

The boundary of the architectural discipline is blurred and is always overlapped with other disciplines (for instance, sociology, commercial management). This blurred boundary leads to many fundamental issues of architecture in confusion. As Kenneth Frampton and Chinese architectural theorist Wang Tan argues, we need to conceive an independent, or autonomous architecture... What is autonomous architecture? It means a building in itself; a concept derived from modernist architecture. Pure architecture equals autonomous architecture. Autonomous architecture equals independent architecture (Chang and Zhang 2002: 30).

Chang’s statement of autonomous architecture, as Mingxian Wang contends, ‘represents the very nature of the CEA’. Meanwhile, Jiakun Liu echoed Chang’s call. Through the book *Now and Then*, Liu contended that

Our practice is an architecture of resistance, resisting the vulgar commodification of architecture in contemporary China. to achieve this resistant position, we must go back to modernist architecture, which we have never embraced before. Through the modernist architecture, especially early European modernism, we could approach a more fundamental and simple architecture (Liu 2002: 17).

Consecrated by the Beisen Library, Chang and Liu's statements of autonomous architecture became legitimised as the authoritative interpretation of the CEA. Following the publication of the Beisen Library Architectural Series, architectural autonomy became the paradigm that other academic discussions of the CEA had to follow, and modernism became another label indicating the CEA's aesthetic distinction from other domestic practices. The privilege of being introduced by the series of books as leading roles of contemporary Chinese architects, and the approval of their statements, conferred upon these architects a great amount of symbolic reputation with the architectural profession. Moreover, with Du's special advertising strategy, these architects also received recognition from a broader range of audience.

When these five books were first published on 17 October 2002, Du held a launch at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, and the location was not chosen randomly. According to Bourdieu, cultural consumption 'is a stage of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of cipher or code... A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence' (Bourdieu 1977: 2).

For the CEA, as shown in previous paragraphs, its consumers were critics, architects and artists within its restricted field. Nevertheless, to enlarge the consumption of this architectural movement, a broader audience who had the cultural competence to decipher and decode experimental architects' creations. In Du's calculation, students in architectural schools were the most appropriate potential consumers, as they, due to the cultural capital they attained via professional education, had the competence as well as obligation to understand the value of experimental architects' practices.

Therefore, locating the book launch at a university was part of Du's commercial calculation. Besides the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Du, together with Wang, Chang and Liu, went to over ten architectural colleges to promote the Beisen Library Architectural Series by holding seminars and conferences. As Du recalls,

The Beisen Library Architectural Series received an active response from colleges students. In the first month after its publication, one thousand and six hundred copies of the book series were bought by those students. Those Architects, especially Yung Ho Chang and Jiakun Liu, became very popular among young students and their works became cases for students to study in several universities such as Chong Qing University (Du 2019).

Like the *Next Wave* magazine, this series of books served as an agency, variously assisting the critic, architects, and Du to accumulate different forms of capital. For critic Wang and especially experimental architects, this publication ensured their advanced position in the CEA. Through canonizing them as leading figures of contemporary Chinese architects, it amplified their influence with the architectural profession and helped them accumulate symbolic recognition from the younger generation of students. For Du, the book series once again boosted his cultural business through discursive reproduction of those architects' works. Architectural autonomy, as the cultural cloak of this discursive reproduction, was used on the one

hand by experimental architects to interpret the value of their works. On the other hand, it became the cultural commodity sold via Du's publication.

9. Conclusion

From the demonstration of the interactions among Du Jian, critic Mingxian Wang and several experimental architects, it is clear that the CEA was deeply intertwined with the market force, and its claimed autonomy is discursively constituted by the network of all these individuals through Du's two publications.

For Du, the CEA became the catalyst and commodity expanding his cultural business. In the first place, the CEA helped him realise his distinctive cultural taste and superior economic power. By commissioning an experimental architect and offering him a free reign, Du accomplished the exchange from economic to symbolic capital, which enabled him to enter the restricted field of the CEA. Through funding new authoritative organisations, in terms of his two publications, he incorporated a wider range of experimental architects and critics into his business world. In this process, the CEA became commodified by Du, not through the conventional way of space-making, but through the reproduction and representation of its resistance to market forces, including critics and architects' words, drawings, photos, and exhibitions.

Through Du's publications, critics and experimental architects attained an exclusive opportunity to freely interpret the value of their works, widening the cultural gulf with other architects outside the field of the CEA. Consecrated by Du's publications, they accumulated prestige from other agents with their mutual society. Moreover, while these publications reached out to a wider audience via Du's advertising strategy, they also received more symbolic recognition within the overall architectural profession.

The collaboration among Du, Wang and experimental architects was symbiotic as all stakeholders gained the capital they longed for. Here, architectural autonomy advocated by the CEA became the commodity that assisted the network of capital accumulation and a discursive cloak concealing the exchange of different forms of capital among above stakeholders. For most of the audience, they received this delicately fabricated discourse of architectural autonomy from Du's publications. Unaware of the capital stream behind the cultural appearance of the magazine and the book series, they, especially young college students, were most likely to take those experimental architects and critics' words for granted, reciprocally reinforcing the autonomous image of this architectural movement.

To sum up, through the case of the CEA, this research contributes to the ongoing academic discussions of architectural autonomy from two perspectives. On the one hand, through the lens of Bourdieu's field theory, this research argues that an architectural practice totally independent from external determinations does not exist. The concept of architectural autonomy enchanting the architectural profession is an artificial discourse constituted by a symbiotic network of stakeholders through the

media. On the other hand, by unveiling the dual functions of architectural autonomy – disguising the capital exchange between architects and their sponsors and serving as the commodity sold in the cultural market, this research offers a detailed image of the intertwined relationship between this notion and market forces.

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Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Ethical statements

This study was performed in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the University Research Ethics Committees (URECs) of the University of Manchester (Date 28.11.2018/No. 2018-5602-7606).

All participant in this study were given a formal consent form before the interview, and they were informed that their names would appear in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The consent form was reviewed and approved by the URECs of the University of Manchester on 28.11.2018.

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