

# architecture institutions and change

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## The Transition of the Beijing Institute of Architectural Design (BIAD) in the 1970s

*The Beijing Institute of Architectural Design (BIAD) is one of the largest State-owned institutions in China. Originally established in 1949, it played a crucial role in facilitating the young People's Republic of China's construction programs. Official intervention in the Chinese architectural profession began in the 1950s, and the government has continued to maintain its power in the establishment of the country's design institutions. Government-planned and oriented systems in the profession had no obvious variation until the 1970s, and then the role of state supervision lessened following the commencement of internal reform. In the 1960s and 1970s BIAD underwent substantial transition following a series of social events. Such transition initiated transformation of the institution in design agenda, working mechanism, financial operation, as well as signalling a liberal trend in the evolution of the architectural profession.*

*Through the exposition of BIAD's transition in the 1970s, this paper argues that the status of architects in State-owned institutions manifested a dominant culture in the spirit of a socialist modernism in the Maoist era. In conjunction with economic reform and subsequent political turbulence, the working mechanism between power and practice inevitably changed from political engagement to more socially orientated practice following alterations to political structures in the post-Mao era. In the course of BIAD's transition, two contradictory influences coexisted in the same system – the rising market and the government with a long-term leftist tradition. The former influence promotes economic benefit, profit and efficiency of enterprise, whereas the latter is more concerned with social obligation, equality and services for the greater population.*

The practices of Chinese design institutions in the 1960s and 1970s were driven by complex motivations, including two major incentives – State intervention and an economic impetus. These largely shaped the formation of these design institutions and their development. The latter promotes economic benefit, profit and efficiency of enterprise, whereas the former is more concerned with social obligation, equality and services for the greater population. Official intervention in the Chinese architectural profession began in the 1950s, and the government has continued to maintain its power in the establishment of the country's design institutions. The government-planned economy and government-oriented systems in the profession had no obvious variation until the 1970s when the role of state supervision lessened following the commencement of internal reform. Focusing on the transition that the Beijing Institute of Architectural Design (BIAD) underwent in the 1970s, this paper argues that the status of architects in China's State-owned institutions manifested a dominant culture in the spirit of a socialist modernism in the Maoist era. In conjunction with economic reform and subsequent political turbulence, the working mechanism between power and practice inevitably changed from political engagement to more socially orientated practice following changes to political structures in the post-Mao era.

## Historical review of BIAD

BIAD is a state-owned, comprehensive, large-scale design institution in Beijing, which incorporates more than 4000 professionals in one design institute. The specialisation of BIAD includes city planning, investment planning, large-scale public architectural design, civil architectural design, interior decoration design, landscape design, engineering design of intelligent systems for buildings, budget estimations for projects, project supervision and contracting.<sup>1</sup> The BIAD was originally established in October 1949, known as one of the design offices at Yong Mao Design Company, and then became government-operational Yong Mao Design Company in June 1951. The government-operational Yong Mao Design Company then changed its name to Department of Beijing Construction Company in April 1952, undergoing another name change to Beijing Design Institute of the Construction Bureau in March 1953. Finally, the title Beijing Institute of Architectural Design was adopted in November 1954<sup>2</sup>, although there were some slight changes afterwards. In November 1954, the Beijing Municipal Government was the direct supervisor of the design institute, and then the administrative responsibility switched to Beijing Bureau of Urban Administration and Planning in November 1955.

The growth of BIAD was intimately tied to socio-political turbulence in the decades since the 1950s within which it underwent a series of transitions, as shown in Figure 1. In Figure 1, the A1, A2 and A3 columns indicate that no political movement occurred during these periods, and the B1, B2, C and D columns are full of discontinuous social events. Throughout the periods, from B1, B2, C to the D, political change exerted profound influence on the architectural profession in China, on BIAD and on architects' lives. During the 'Three-anti Campaign' and 'Five-anti Campaign', some architects were targeted as capitalists, were publicly criticised

Chronicle & Interactions							
YEAR	A 1949	B 1951-52	A 1954-57	C 1958-61	B 1966-76	D 1977-79	A 1980 & onward
POLITICS	Establishment of P.R.C	Three-anti Campaign & Five-anti Campaign	No political movement	Great Leap Forward & The Sino-Soviet Split	The Cultural Revolution	Political power was switched to Deng Xiaoping, and the Pilot Reform began	Economic Reform and the Openness
BIAD	Establishment of the BIAD	Some architects were targeted as capitalists, and were criticised.	Orientated by the Beijing Administrative Bureau of Urban Planning	Changed Name as Beijing Institute of Architecture Design	The architects were involved into political movements with 'Red-guards'	Beginning of reform	To go on with reform

Fig. 1 Socio-political turbulence and BIAD.

and forced to leave their jobs.<sup>3</sup> During the time of the Great Leap Forward, BIAD undertook a large volume of design tasks in order to accelerate the growth of the young People's Republic of China's (PRC) undeveloped building industry. In 1966, Mao and his allies launched the Cultural Revolution, sparking a period of political recrimination and social upheaval, which lasted until Mao's death in September 1976, with the arrest of the faction known as the Gang of Four. Inevitably, the profession was interrupted discontinuously during this period.<sup>4</sup> The Cultural Revolution had deconstructed design institutions and their staff members both organisationally and individually in terms of personal dignity, professional management and working mechanisms, including the devastation caused by Leftist criticism of many architects as 'Rightists or Capitalist'.<sup>5</sup>

In such a social context, with the constant reoccurrence of political change, internal criticism and crises in international affairs, BIAD's development was regularly disturbed, with the interruption of the careers of its architects. Although BIAD was a professional design institute, it had sometimes been impelled to become a political site for social changes. At the beginning of the 1970s most architects resumed their routine work. Nevertheless, the scope and the content of projects began to vary. Architectural practice, based on an institutional model, was required to fulfill not only aesthetic, functional and feasibility requirements, but more importantly, it carried the responsibility of political expression required from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Thus, accompanying the emergence of historical sociology in Chinese urbanism, BIAD's architects' work in the early post-revolutionary and more recent periods (the 1970s) included consciously or unconsciously both disciplinary design and socio-political issues.

### The formation of BIAD

Under the authoritarian supervision of the Beijing Municipal government, the formation of BIAD had to strictly conform to the imperative of governmental policies and the planned-economy system in the Maoist era. In other words, the operation, finance, project allocation of BIAD depended largely on government planning. Although the role of supervision switched between different official departments, the CCP Government retained controlling power for three decades to compulsorily maintain government-orientated practices within the profession. From an institutional aspect, the organisation was structured on collective and egalitarian principles, as the institutions provided services divorced from the pursuit of profit. In terms of management, the early structure of BIAD comprised three main

departments in the 1950s, namely Design Department, Department of Planned Economy, and Political Office, with six design groups that specialised in different fields. Group One focused on commercial buildings; Group Two was good at designing residential and office buildings; Group Three specialised in sports architecture and Group Four was responsible for Security Construction<sup>6</sup>; Group Five concentrated on educational buildings; and industrial buildings were allocated to Group Six. The Department of Planned Economy was the agent between the Political Office and the six design groups, mediating design tasks and conflict as an internal agent.

In terms of design, the design thinking of the architects was highly unified and regimented, leaving no space for individual expression. From the time when the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship was set up in the 1950s, experts from the Soviet Union had imported a set of standard drawings of residential buildings to BIAD. Based on these drawings, the Standard Design Office at BIAD made a package of drawing standards<sup>7</sup> each year for internal staff to use after the 'Sino-Soviet Split.' For quality supervision, BIAD adopted the method of 'Three Stages Design, Three Hierarchies Management and Three-time Drawing Auditing' to ensure drawing quality and feasibility, with techniques learnt from the Soviet Union to reinforce a hierarchical structure for design, team management and progress control. There were three classes – the institutional class, the group class and the individual class, for the production of each project, which operated like a 'chain of command'.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the heads of each group, each office, and each institution were responsible for the auditing of each project. Some grand projects also required multi-disciplinary joint-auditing to proceed in an orderly manner phase by phase. Architectural output at that time embodied both nationalist spirit and political expression, facilitating the reputation of the CCP by means of the techniques of the assembly line. This helped considerably in building up the socio-political fame of the national government and also of the Beijing Municipal Government, rather than in the careful consideration of efficiency, aesthetic style, proper materials and advanced technology.

The scale of BIAD is huge – it is the result of both internal expansion and government-supported extensions. BIAD enlarged itself by means of the absorption of new staff and mergers with other design institutions. In April 1952, the Yong Mao Design Company had around one hundred staff members, and moved to its current location – Nan Li Shi Road, where the land was allocated by the government. During the early stage of BIAD, productivity was challenged by a pressing scarcity of human resources, so that BIAD absorbed staff members from multiple sources; and in 1952, BIAD even organised its own educational institution with the support of the Beijing Government. The Beijing Government coordinated with the Chinese Ministry of Education to permit the institute to grant accredited academic degrees in 1961.<sup>9</sup> Hence the practitioners in BIAD came from heterogeneous backgrounds, including university graduates, graduates from polytechnic schools, and the recruitment of 'Unemployed Youth'<sup>10</sup> as drafting staff. Political movements, such as the 'Three-anti Campaign', the 'Five-anti Campaign', and the 'Cultural Revolution', had forced young students to abandon their educational opportunities, and some students became 'red guards', so that the scarcity of human resources was intensified. On the other hand,

the government urged BIAD to merge with the Civil Design Institute of Urban Ministry of Construction in 1957, with 1159 professional staff all together, including 842 professionals, giving BIAD the status of being the largest among Chinese design institutions in the early 1960s.<sup>11</sup>

## Form and content of BIAD's practice

BIAD designed a large number of civic, administrative, large-scale, government-owned projects against a background of shortages of materials and human resources. The architects who worked in BIAD had to maintain their mission to make buildings under particular socio-economic conditions and to service the state authority. In retrospect, BIAD's works were based on the response of the practice to the 'mainstream', in which the mainstream functioned in the process of socio-political transition. In the Maoist era, BIAD designed eight of the 'Ten Great Buildings'<sup>12</sup> – large-scale public buildings that integrated 'socialist modernism', nationalism and Chinese culture into the design concept. Although Beaux-Arts based historicism<sup>13</sup> and a socialist modernism had formed a dominant culture in architectural practice at that time<sup>14</sup>, such design agendas had been altered to incorporate the continuity of 'socialist modernism' in parallel with 'independent innovation', which implied a sense of self-cultivated nationalism in the growth of professionalisation. The design agenda for architects followed the system of the planned economy, but resisted the dominance of the market in design practice with rigorous and restrictive design approaches.

Architectural design at BIAD followed the 'Third National style' of Chinese nationalism, which had complicated functional requirements for large-scale buildings and was influenced by the idea of simplification of form originating from Western modernism. Architects interpreted 'socialist modernism' in the form of 'People's Architecture'<sup>15</sup> with political expression. For example, the Beijing Friendship Hotel (1955) combined Chinese traditional elements with a modern design concept, having traditional elements on the façade and the roof (Figure 2). The material used for the façade was grey artificial stone with rubbing texture. The porch of the central entrance is decorated by monotone drawings, the top of which is made of a glazed double eave roof, while the grey tiles on the eave are shaped into the dove of peace, which implies an atmosphere of simplicity and ethnic features. The construction of the Great Hall of the People (1959) was completed within one year,<sup>16</sup> and it was the most



**Fig. 2** Beijing Friendship Hotel.  
[www.bjfriendshiphotel.com/  
uploadfiles/20120921095912156.jpg](http://www.bjfriendshiphotel.com/uploadfiles/20120921095912156.jpg).

important building of 'Ten Great Buildings' in the Maoist era. The material selection was natural marble for the wall, for the ground, the columns and the interior decoration. The plan was symmetrical, and the façade had traditional elements, including a stylobate, colonnade and eaves, which reveal Chinese culture (Figure 3).<sup>17</sup>



**Fig. 3** Great Hall of the People.  
[www.61tours.com/files/image/dk/人民大会堂.jpg](http://www.61tours.com/files/image/dk/人民大会堂.jpg).

The early 1960s saw a flourish of BIAD's design projects with a strong local flavour, which linked with synchronic temporality and shared spatiality. The content of design practices in the 1970s became broad – devoted to not only 'People's Architecture' but also civil projects that tied in people's everyday life. The Chairman Mao Zedong Memorial Hall (1977) continued the 'big roof' style, with yellow granite facade, and glazed eaves on top. There were granite colonnades, spaced using Chinese ancient modules: 8.7 metres, 6.6 metres, and 6 metres for the main, for the first, secondary and the end of branch respectively. Beijing Capital International Airport Terminal One (1979) was built on the basis of an existing structure. The terminal integrated modernism with Chinese traditional symbolism into one entity: the façade covered by blue tiles with geometrical patterns, and peacock blue glazed ceramic eaves architraves with white granitic plastered columns (Figure 4).<sup>18</sup> Interior decoration featured large glue-pigment frescos of Chinese folk people, providing the internal space with Chinese cultural and national images.<sup>19</sup>

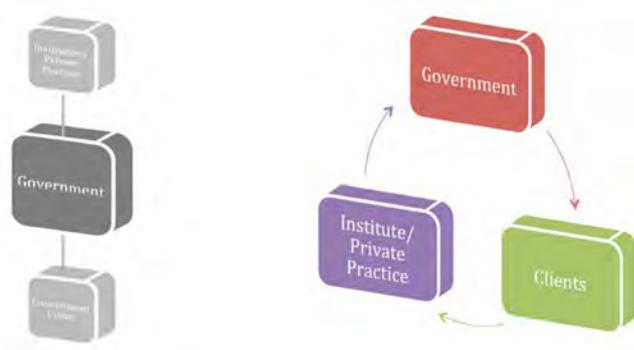


**Fig. 4** Beijing International Airport Terminal One. <http://style.sina.com.cn/news/2009-07-10/153944945.shtml>.

## BIAD's reform in the 1970s

After the *coup d'état* of the Gang of Four in 1976, the Chinese Communist Party politically rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping's position and appointed him as the head of the Internal Modernisation programs in 1977. While reversing Mao's policies (without attacking him), the politically moderated reforms began China's transition from a planned economy to a semi-capitalist mixed economy, which strengthened commercial and diplomatic relations with Western society. Chinese Economic Reform formally began in 1978, following the CCP's Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, which marked a milestone of China's economic system from a planned economy to a new system with an increasingly open market environment. In 1979, the Chinese government formalised a new policy of openness to the West, and endorsed institutional reform in most state-owned institutions, including BIAD. According to discourse in Chinese journals<sup>20</sup>, pilot reforms had been carried out as early as 1979, and since then, design institutes began charging clients' fees, and projects were based on contracts rather than government allocation. The main objective of this reform was to separate the design institutes from the governmental sectors and let the institutes assume sole responsibility for their profit or losses, to be independent of the government.

Reform in BIAD changed its working mechanism, mode of practice, financial operation and relationships with external parties. Economic reform that began in the 1970s gradually introduced the market economy as the practicing environment, a process that lasted until the 2000s. The working mechanism in BIAD was a highly collectivistic and government-orientated in the Maoist era, in which neither the institute nor the client had independent intentions other than the government working as a decision maker and a mediator. Since the beginning of the Maoist era, the state government had played dual roles in relation to large-scale design institutions where the government acted as both the owner and the client. The institute, whose income and funding of its projects were provided by the government did not charge fees from the clients, but followed mission allocation from the Economic Planning Office. Along with the reform, the relationship between BIAD and external parties in a project changed – BIAD provided design services to the client, who was supposed to pay fees to BIAD, and the government stopped providing funding to BIAD, and BIAD was required to pay income tax to the government (Figure 5). Thus, BIAD gradually acquired a chance to



**Fig. 5** The change of relationship before reform (left) and after reform (right).

be financially independent, and was allowed to pursue profit, although the rate of profit was standardised by the government (at a high taxation rate of approximate 55 per cent).<sup>21</sup>

The emergence of private clients and the financial and administrative separation from the government transformed BIAD into a more liberal working environment. Compared to the State-sponsored model, the alternation of the hierarchy sponsored by the market was more radical and fast. Thus, economic reform implied a possibility for BIAD to financially separate from relevant governmental sectors, as direct intervention from State power became relatively feeble. The CCP subsequently loosened governmental control over citizens' personal lives and their professions, communes were disbanded in favour of private land leases and used Dan Wei as preliminary planning unit.<sup>22</sup>

The motivations behind these changes were mainly two contrasting influences, which coexisted in one system. One motivation was driven by the rising market, while the other was by governmental incentives with a long-term leftist tradition. The former generated influence to promote economic benefits, profits and efficiency within the free enterprise market, whereas the latter was concerned more with social obligation, equality and services for the greater population. The bureaucratic forces that interacted with architects' practice affected the profession in complex ways, which changed over time and differed according to the circumstances of each individual. Both governmental support and reform underpinned a particular working mechanism of Chinese State-owned design institutions with socialist characteristics.

## **Institution, supervision and transition**

BIAD represents the Chinese State-owned large-scale design institutions and their practices. The transition of such an institution and the way it interacted with the State authority is illustrated in Figure 6. The chart is an extension of Figure 1 and shows the waves of the design institute's transformation in response to political turbulence. The orange bold dash line shows to what extent political movements affected the architecture profession, which reached climaxes during two periods, 1951-52 and 1966-76. The trend became progressively weaker since the 1970s.

Through the exposition of BIAD's historical transition, this paper not only portrays the trajectory of design institutions in China, but also explores how this trajectory interacted with organised supervision from the State, and further questioned how BIAD facilitated the political objective of the state, and how governmental power shaped the evolution of the architecture profession. Through an observation of BIAD's transition in the 1970s, this paper reminds us that Chinese State intervention reshaped the direction of the Chinese architecture profession under the socialist regime, and enforced the collective formation of BIAD. The transition in the 1970s was a turning point, moving towards corporate enterprise. As mentioned, two driving motivations have been identified through the transition of BIAD's practice, which largely shaped the working mechanism of design institutions in the 1970s. The relationship between these two motivations are normally dialectic – independence and supervision between the government, market and civil society.

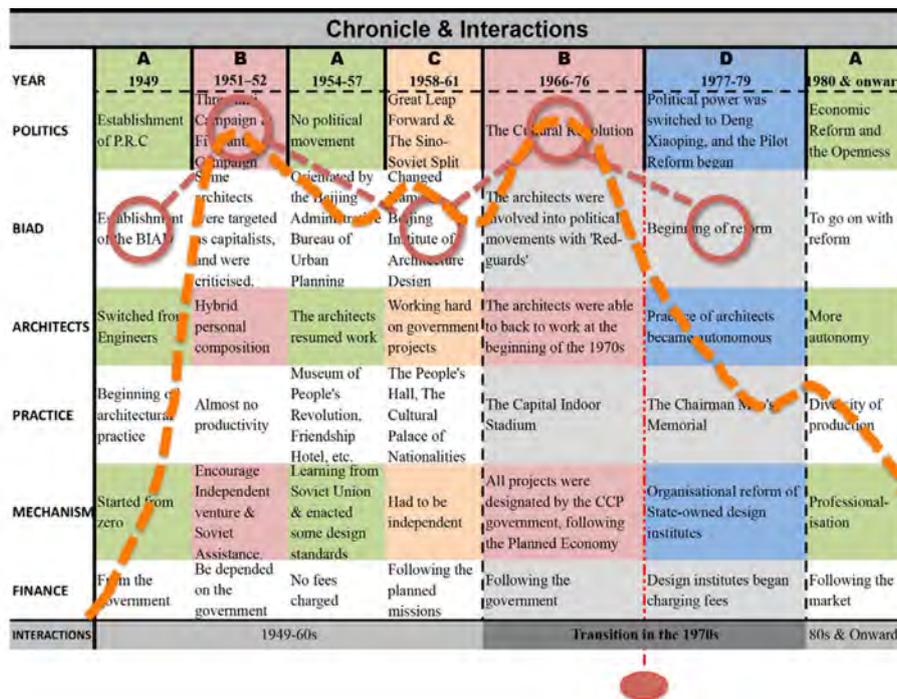


Fig. 6 Chronicle and interactions.

The design institution and the CCP government maintained interaction with each other in the course of institutional evolution since the 1970s. In China, it is an inevitable point that the practice of design institutions cannot exclude government-orientation and to serve socialist Communism. On one hand, political power oriented practice; on the other hand, practices endorsed political expression. The BIAD embodied a close relationship between architecture and the Beijing Municipal Government, as architects complied with the instructions of the State on behalf of the clients, rather than negotiation with the clients.

With public ownership, BIAD represents those institutions that were influenced by governmental policies more than market factors. Its transition reveals the profound influence of social forces on the contemporary architecture profession. The architects working at design institutions play a coordinating role in balancing State demands and the pursuit of financial benefits. This unique way of operation make State owned design institutions different from the majority of Western countries' form of architectural practice – private practice as mainstream. In the post-Mao era, the role of architects had been re-defined as semi-autonomous rather than followers of the CCP. In other words, architects in Chinese design institutes became gradually autonomous. Architecture practice within institutions in the 1970s had to face the historical condition of scarcity after the failure of commune design. Despite the transition that occurred in the 1970s, architects' practice were shaped by the beliefs and values of political expression guided by the CCP rather than driven by impetuses such as the economy, materials, technology, rationality and other streams of modernism. This situation was again to evolve in the following decades, leading up to the present.

- 1 The English translation is from BIAD's website at [www.biad.com.cn](http://www.biad.com.cn).
- 2 Although there were slight changes in the title from 1954, the office title of Beijing Institute of Architectural Design was finalised in November 1954. See [www.biad.com.cn/page.php?id=13](http://www.biad.com.cn/page.php?id=13).
- 3 Shen Bo, "Recall the Establishment of BIAD," *Sui Yue* (2005): 5.
- 4 Gong Deshun, Zou Denong and Dou Yide, *Zhongguo Xiandai Jianzhu Shigang* (Tianjin: Tianjin Science & Technology Press, 1989).
- 5 *Chenjian Dangan 2* (2005).
- 6 'Security construction' means a particular architectural typology that related to national security, such as underground civil defense construction and Chinese embassy construction.
- 7 The design standards enacted by BIAD internally have gradually become well-accepted criteria for all practitioners in the Beijing area, which is equal to a legal design code.
- 8 J. R. Rizzo, R. J. House and S. I. Lirtzman, "Role Conflict and Ambiguity in Complex Organisations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (June 1970): 150-163.
- 9 Bo, "Recall the Establishment of BIAD," 9-13.
- 10 'Unemployed Youth' refers to young people who are temporarily unemployed, who have a high school education background, but have no opportunity for further education. This group emerged because of the 'Job Designation' policy, which could not allocate sufficient jobs to all young people, some of them were on the waiting list, but it is hard to determine how long they needed to wait.
- 11 "The Sixtieth Anniversary of BIAD," *Kaifa yu Jianshe* (2009): 43.
- 12 The 'Ten Great Buildings' are ten public buildings built in Beijing by 1959 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Most of the buildings were largely completed in a time span of ten months, by the deadline of 1 October 1959. They are the Great Hall of the People, National Museum of China, Cultural Palace of Nationalities, Beijing Railway Station, Workers Stadium, National Agriculture Exhibition Hall, Diaoyutai State Guesthouse, Minzu Hotel, Overseas Chinese Hotel, Chinese People's Revolutionary Military Museum. Apart from the National Agriculture Exhibition Hall and the Overseas Chinese Hotel, all the others were designed by BIAD.
- 13 This includes the architect Henry Murphy's work.
- 14 Zhu Jianfei, *Architecture of Modern China: A Historical Critique* (London: Routledge, 2009), 6.
- 15 Zhu Tao, "People's Architecture, Individual Architecture and Community Architecture," *Guangxi Chenzhen Jianshe* 3 (2012): 28-30.
- 16 Ruan Zhida, "Renmin Dahuitang Yinnian Nei Jiancheng Zhimi," *Jianzhu Xuebao* 13 (2000): 26-31.
- 17 *BIAD's Portfolio 1949-2009* (Tianjin: Tianjin University Press, 2009).
- 18 *BIAD's Portfolio 1949-2009*.
- 19 *BIAD's Portfolio 1949-2009*.
- 20 See Qi Di, "Development of Professionalisation: Exploration of Reform of Large-scale Design Institutes," *Time+Architecture* 1 (2004): 24-26; Zhang Hua, "Reform and Development of Large-scale Architectural Design Institutes," *Time+Architecture* 1 (2004): 20-23; Ming Jinlang, "Yanzhe Qiyehua Shehuihua de Daolu Kaituo Qianjin," *Jianzhu Xuebao* 3 (1985): 41-43; Editorial, "Strategy: Large-scale Architectural Design Institutes in China," *Time+Architecture* 1 (2004): 17.
- 21 John Hassard, Jackie Sheehan, Meixiang Zhou, Jane Terpstra-Tong and Jonathan Morris, *China's State Enterprise Reform: From Marx to the Market* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 74.
- 22 Dan Wei refers to Duanfang Lu, *Remaking Chinese Urban Form: Modernity, Scarcity and Space, 1949-2005* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).