

Grand Theater Urbanism

“In ‘Grand Theater Urbanism’, Professor Charlie Xue and his team document China’s current shift towards a culture of consumption and leisure, symbolized by the construction of multi-use Grand Theaters in major cities. ‘Grand Theater Urbanism’ reveals the unexpected variety and complexity of this contemporary cultural drive in a series of exemplary chapters with highly detailed, local, case studies.”

—Professor David Grahame Shane, *Columbia University, New York*

“Jane Jacobs likened city life to a performance. This book goes a stage further and analyses the actual performance spaces within cities in China. In doing so it makes a valuable connection between urban design and the cultural life in cities. This is an important and often forgotten dimension of urbanism and I heartily commend this book to readers.”

—Professor Matthew Carmona, *The Bartlett, University College London*

Charlie Qiuli Xue
Editor

Grand Theater Urbanism

Chinese Cities in the 21st century

 Springer

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Preface

A construction boom has swept through China since the 1980s, and landmark buildings are constantly emerging and frequently achieving new records. After the Shanghai Grand Theater was completed in 1998 and construction of the National Performing Art Center (“The Duck Egg”) in Beijing began in 1999, cultural mega-structures sprang up like mushrooms throughout China. This phenomenon was described in my earlier book, *Building a Revolution: Chinese Architecture since 1980* (HKU Press, 2006). Motivated by curiosity, I started to record the grand theaters built in China in the twenty-first century. The number had reached 150 by early 2010.

For most Chinese people emerging from the darkness of the “cultural revolution” at the end of the 1970s, seeing a film or performance was a luxurious experience that required leisure time, money, the right mood, and a sufficient number of films and performances. In Mao’s era, few theaters existed in towns and cities, and performances were infrequent, monotonous, and dull. Most people did not have the money, the leisure time, or the inclination to attend the theater. In the years of the open-door policy, many grandiose theaters were planned and built in a very short time and were filled with various colorful performances. This phenomenon illustrates the leaps forward in Chinese people’s living standards, freedoms, civic life, and cultural production.

Fabulous cultural facilities and mega-structures are now part of the new town centers in many cities. The municipal government uses cultural buildings to boost the economy, people’s confidence, and branding in fierce competition between cities. The precursor to this book, *Chinese Urbanism in the 21st Century* (edited by Li and Xue 2017), revealed various emerging trends in Chinese cities, including shopping malls, university cities, artists’ loft spaces, and villages in cities. These are all new typologies for China in the new millennium. Although I myself was a member of the design team for theaters in Shanghai in the 1980s, I view the rise in grand theater construction as part of the urbanism movement in China. These facilities sometimes lead to the development of new towns and become sources of pride and symbols of progress and modernization. Based on this understanding, I tentatively term this trend “Grand Theater Urbanism.”

The study of Grand Theater Urbanism has been echoed by colleagues, friends, and students. Thanks to the support of the Research Grant Council, Hong Kong Government (Project No., CityU 11658816), and particularly the kindness of five anonymous reviewers, we have traveled to and investigated grand theaters in more than ten Chinese cities of the first, second, and third tiers. In my travels to overseas cities, my study targets included theaters and opera houses. There is much pleasure to be had in wandering in the external and internal environments of these artistic palaces, enjoying performances at home and abroad, and accumulating an understanding of various cities, city centers, and cultural buildings.

Professor Lu Xiangdong, an authority in theater study, kindly contributed the chapter on Beijing. His seminal book on Chinese theaters was an inspiring resource for my initial research. Professor Chu Dongzhu gave advice on the development of Chongqing and provided an overview of the mountainous city. Li Lin, Xiao Jing, and Ding Guanghui were my partners in conceiving Chinese urbanism. I have greatly benefited from working closely with them. My students Sun Cong, Zhang Lujia, and Xiao Yingbo have carried on the study of grand theaters from different angles and with various examples, and our continuous discussions push forward the study of theaters and relevant architectural topics. Chang Wei and Wan Yan assisted in preparing materials and drawings. My colleagues Carmen Tsui, Lu Yi, Gianni Talamini, and Louie Sieh are panel members for doctoral students who are taking grand theaters and design institutions as their thesis topics. Their timely guidance and discussions have shaped students' theses and the direction of this theater study.

I am indebted to my mentors Profs. Dai Fudong, Sivaguru Ganesan, Stephen Lau, and Chris Abel, who introduced me to the field of architecture and urban design many years ago. I have learned a great deal from my discussions with friends and colleagues Profs. Gu Daqing, Pu Miao, Jia Beisi, Jianfei Zhu, Paul Sanders, Leigh Shutter, Zhonghua Gou, Stan Fung, Per-Johan Dahl, Longgen Chen, Tao Zhu, Zhu Jingxiang, Weijin Wang, Shiqiao Li, Tan Zheng, Zou Han, Yin Ziyuan, Liu Xin, Zang Peng, Wang Yijia, Wang Zhendong, Li Yingchun, and Wang Zhigang.

I am grateful to the theater designers and managers in Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, and Zhengzhou. Their names are acknowledged in relevant chapters. Professors Matthew Carmona and David Grahame Shane took time out of their extremely busy schedules to read the manuscript and endorsed the book enthusiastically. Their many books and articles are valuable texts on urban design, to which I frequently refer and from which I draw inspiration. Thank you so much to the editorial team at Springer, Lydia Wang, Fiona Wu, and the two anonymous reviewers who gave kind encouragement and constructive suggestions.

On a personal note, I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of my father, who meant to treat his two sons to an Albanian film, one of the few entertainments during the stifled time of "Cultural Revolution," however, his wallet was stolen on the trolley bus in that hapless Sunday afternoon; and to my mother, who lavished her sons and family with expensive admission tickets and gave me the opportunity to see the Russian ballet *Swan Lake* at Shanghai Grand Theater in 2002.

Introduction: Grand Theaters and City Branding—Boosting Chinese Cities

With the opening ceremony held on August 27, 1998, Shanghai Grand Theater marked the beginning of a unique movement of theater construction in China. Until 2015, the total number of new theaters including new additions is 364, in which 200 theaters are new constructions with an auditorium of 1200 seats or more (see Appendix A).

The name “grand theater” first appeared at a cultural center in 1989 in Shenzhen, a special economic zone bordering Hong Kong. In 1994, an international design competition of “grand theater” was held in Shanghai. Four years later, a French designed theater clad with crystal clear glass and flying roof monumentally stood at the People’s Square—the heart of Shanghai. The design of Shanghai “grand theater” was selected through international architecture competition—its quality and image were well worth and admired as “grand” by people of Shanghai and China. Since then, grand theaters were planned and built in various Chinese cities, from coastal metropolis to provincial city, from prefecture city to rural town center. “Grand theater” in this context is not only an auditorium. It usually contains an opera house, a concert hall and a multi-functional theater. Most of these grand theaters have a gross floor area between 10,000 and 50,000 m², and the total construction cost is about RMB 100 billion yuan (around USD 16 billion).¹

Half of these prominent landmark buildings in China were designed through competition and by overseas firms. As Shanghai Grand Theater is the first theater designed by a foreign architect since 1949, Fuzhou Strait Culture and Art Center, which was opened in October 2018, certainly is not the last one. The newly built grand theaters in China may outnumber the sum of similar buildings constructed in Western Hemisphere since World War II. No other country has constructed so many grand theaters and cultural buildings in such a short period, which raises a number of issues of general concern. Parallel with the heat of grand theater, China donated around 15 national theaters in Asia, Africa, and the Oceania in the

¹The data is collected and calculated by the authors’ team.

twenty-first century. These fabulous state gifts in overseas were designed and constructed by Chinese professionals.²

Performing art is part of entertainment activities of the human being. From ancient Greek to Shakespeare's era, dramas were played at amphitheaters which were semi-open environment. When Garnier's opera house was built in Paris in 1861, it was a high-class venue of performance and social life. Its Baroque image was part of the Parisians' pride. In the first half of the twentieth century, American and European cities had accumulated wealth from industrialization and built opera house and "movie theaters" in Art Deco style, to accommodate the burgeoning film industry and amazed audiences. Decorated with neon lighting, theaters are designed like palaces for showing off and enticing lust (Blundell-Jones 2016).

After Sydney Opera House erected in Bennelong Point of Sydney Harbor in 1973, municipal leaders and people began to learn how a cultural landmark had helped promoting the image of a city significantly (Murray 2004). In Europe, there is a trend to merge the competing interests of bourgeoisie and the working class after World War II. Cultural halls were extensively built as a "result of the transformation of public welfare from a collection of class-based civil-society initiatives to a bureaucratic state-led regime of mass provision" (Cupers 2015). In France, President de Gaulle believed that bringing high culture to the masses would contribute to creating a more educated and productive society (Grenfell 2004). In the 1980s, Mitterrand's state projects in Paris revitalized this economic and cultural capital of Europe. The old facilities were rebuilt, like the Louvre; and new facilities were constructed, like opera house in Bastille and the national library. The historical city emitted a refreshed and vital glow with these flagship projects. In 1997, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, greatly revitalized the originally derelict industrial town, population around 250,000, and attracted more than one million tourists annually, creating the so-called Guggenheim effect. Cultural buildings and theaters have always been strongly tied with progression of urbanism and city status (Kong et al. 2015).

All those foreign landmarks, events, and city spectacles have been inspiring China when the country got away from political turmoil and returned to normal life in the 1980s. The movement of constructing grand theater in China is accompanied and fueled by constant economic growth, rapid urbanization, new town construction, and old town renewal. In 2017, China's gross domestic product (GDP) was recorded over RMB 80 trillion (US\$13 trillion), second only to the USA. In the same year, GDPs of all four tier-1 cities—Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen—were more than two trillion RMB, surpassing the prosperous Hong Kong.³

²China's construction aid to developing countries is a different discourse. The data of China-built theater projects in overseas is collected by the authors. See Ding and Xue (2015).

³See news "Jingji wuqiangshi chongqing huo jiluo tianjin" (Five strong cities in economy, Chongqing may replace Tianjin), *Ta Kung Pao*, Hong Kong, January 22, 2018, A6. Shenzhen's GDP in 2018 was 2.4 trillion RMB, *Ta Kung Pao*, Hong Kong, January 20, 2019, A5.

As the provincial and municipal officials were rewarded with the growth of local economy from building new infrastructure and cultural facilities, they aggressively wanted to build more for uplifting the city’s status in a region and in the nation, or even in the world. When planning new town or new zone, the city usually develops many different types of building, for example, museum, library, stock exchange center, office tower, shopping mall, and mass transportation terminal. Among them, grand theater often is the most impressive project with distinct design, state-of-the-art technology, and expensively built (Rowe 2005). It is considered as jewel in the crown by the general public and associates with “high culture”—European classical performing arts, which are totally different from traditional Chinese folk plays in teahouses or community stages (Fig. 1).

In particular, such massive and extensive construction of grand theaters is a special phenomenon of urban development which demonstrates four characteristics:

- (1) Urbanization and city advancement;
- (2) Globalization and competition;
- (3) Consumerism in cities; and
- (4) The role of foreign architects.

Urbanization physically is a large-scale development that demands and constructs many new buildings and new urban fabrics in the city. Globalization creates the inter-city competition that pushes cities individually looking for fame and status in order to have a leading position, while consumerism prepares the market of

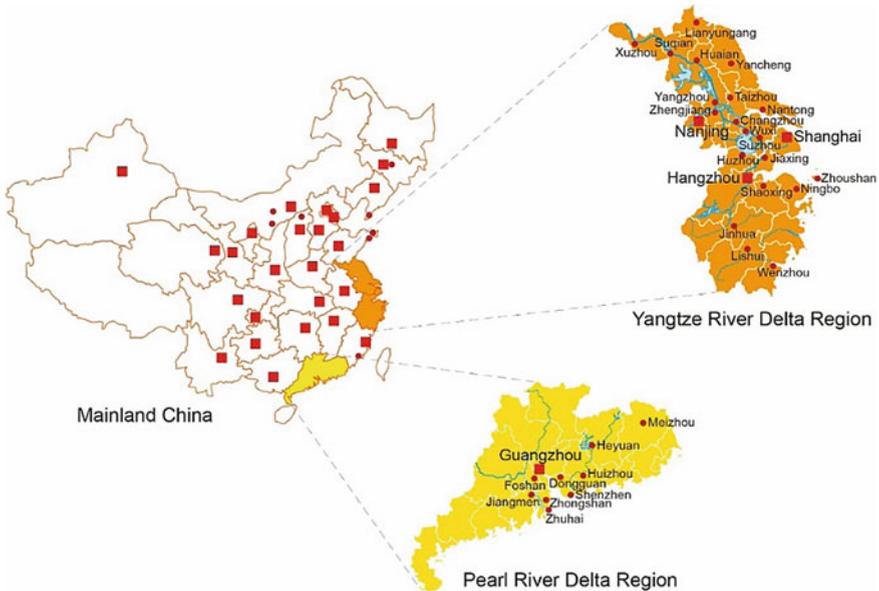


Fig. 1 Dot distribution map of grand theaters newly built in China 1998–2017 (by Sun Cong)

cultural productions for both theater operators and goers. Finally, globalization enables international architects, new technologies, top-class facilities, and performing events entering China. All these characteristics contribute to China's modernization and international participation. The following sessions provide more in-depth analysis of the four factors.

Urbanization and City Advancement: Urban Design of Cultural Centers

In the mid-twentieth century, China was still an agricultural society. Chairman Mao Zedong (1893–1976) and the communist government had attempted to realize a strong industrial economy, but new factories mostly were located in remote mountain areas for the purpose of national defense, so this early industrialization program had little impact on cities. When China launched the “reform and open-door” policy in 1978, the urbanisation ratio was only 18%, but later it jumped to 47% in 2009 and reached 57% in 2016. Almost one billion Chinese people will live in urban area in the near future. One of the most stunning statistics able to illustrate this singular urbanization is the consumption of cement. According to statistics from the United States Geological Survey (USGS), from 2011 to 2013, the three-year usage of concrete (6.6 gigatons) in China was more than the total usage of concrete (4.5 gigatons) in the USA during the entire twentieth century.⁴

Building the city for integrating global economy is the ultimate goal of Chinese urbanisation, so new urban designs should not only accommodate the population explosion in the city, but also improve the living and working environment. Many old towns with mono-multi-story residential buildings are incapable of providing sufficient spaces and compatible facilities for modern lifestyle and business. Today high-rise housing estates, office and commercial zones, shopping and entertainment centers are seen everywhere either in new town or old city. For example, in 2018, among the 143 newly built towers over 200 m tall worldwide, there were 88 towers completed in the burgeoning Chinese cities, this accounts for 61.5% of total number. Shenzhen was No. 1 in building largest number of 200-meter-plus skyscrapers consecutively from 2016 to 2018. The city recorded 14 completions in 2018.⁵

⁴See Bill Gates, “Have You Hugged a Concrete Pillar Today?” *Gatesnotes: The Blog of Bill Gates*, Available Online, <https://www.gatesnotes.com/Books/Making-the-Modern-World>, June 12, 2014; also Vaclav Smil, *Making the Modern World: Materials and Dematerialization* London: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014.

⁵Christopher DeWolf gives the number of 2016, in “Construction in China’s Skyscraper Capital Shows Little Sign of Slowing,” *CNN*, July 24, 2017.

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/07/23/architecture/shenzhen-skyscraper/index.html>; figures of 2018 is from “CTBUH Year in Review: Tall Trends of 2018,” <http://www.skyscrapercenter.com/year-in-review/2018>, accessed January 20, 2019.

When urban renewal in old districts faces bottlenecks, new town development becomes an effective option widely adopted by many cities. New towns or new zones are planned in almost every provincial capital city, with provisions of a new administrative center and a grand cultural center as the trend of urban design. The size of those new towns is ranged from 10 to 150 m², eroding huge amount of arable lands at the once suburban area.

In many cases, the cultural center is an essential element forming the civic heart of a new town, for example, at least one cultural complex associates with the civic core in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Shunde, Dongguan, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Zhengzhou, Tianjin, and Taiyuan, just naming a few cities here.

Guangzhou built a museum, a theater, a library, and a children's palace at Huacheng Plaza of Zhujiang New Town. Shenzhen built a music hall, a library, a children's palace and a museum of modern art at the Civic Center of Futian New Zone. Shunde built a theater, a library, and a museum at Shunde New Town. Dongguan built a theater, a library, a convention hall, and an exhibition hall at the Central Plaza. Hangzhou built a theater and a convention center at the Civic Plaza of Qianjiang New Town. Shanghai built a science museum and the Oriental Art Center at Century Square of Pudong New District. Zhengzhou built the Henan Art Center and a convention center at the central park of Zhengdong New District. Tianjin built a big cultural center including a theater, a library, a museum, an art gallery, and a children's center, etc., at Hexi district ...

The typical urban design of those cultural centers is an axial symmetrical layout with a central plaza surrounded by arts and cultural facilities, public buildings, or government complex. In Harbin and Ordos, the civic core with administrative complex, cultural facilities, and public transportation connections was built first as prior infrastructure and magnetic project during the development of the new zone, attracting potential investments, construction, and populations.

Globalization and Competition: Culture as Soft-Power

China was gradually influenced by Western civilization after losing the Opium War in 1860. The treaty-port cities along the coastal line were the first to witness modern lifestyle because of setting up foreign concessions and foreign trades. The reality of being defeated and colonized by Western powers had made many Chinese people begin to be skeptical about their traditional society and culture. They insisted that the old China was backward and should learn from the West in order to build a modern society technologically, economically, politically, and culturally (Xue 2006; Xue and Ding 2018). The social mainstream had always kept an eye on Western culture and ideology no matter democracy or socialism and communism were all imported from the West. We have no intension to discuss whether this is a right approach to modern China or not in this book. In fact, when the notion "globalization" was known to Chinese people in the early 1990s, it was accepted as a positive tendency and was converted into an attitude of "looking out to the West."

With the “open-door” policy launched in 1978, the mentality of Chinese people has been changed and freed, they tend to make reference to the advanced Western countries in fields of technology and management.

Globalization allows international trades and businesses to avoid obstacles as well as free circulation of capital, goods, and human resources. The impact of globalization on the city is assessed through that the “global city” as a distinctive type and an understanding of urbanization implements all city developments toward the globalized economy (Wu 2006, 2007; Jayne 2018). Building the city for global economy is the ultimate goal of urbanization. Under the circumstance of globalization, time and space are significantly shortened, greatly reducing the importance of geographical location and natural resources of a specific city. From this respect, almost every city has a potential to become an economic, political, or cultural hub, so each individual city is a potential competitor to other cities. Therefore, the competition between cities is inevitable. As a result, globalization has further increased the importance of establishing and promoting urban images. As John R. Short said, because of the fierce competition among cities, cities have to have positive new images to attract investment (Short 2004, 21–23). The globalization plays a vital role in shaping China’s modernization.

There is an inseparable relationship between the use of space, city marketing, and image making. In fact, based on political and economic reasons, the construction of urban image, and then the promotion of cities (places) to other countries or regions are the central links for each authority to govern the city (Broudehoux 2004, 25). Advanced cultural spaces, such as libraries, museums, and opera houses, are indispensable for promoting city and “connecting with the international level.” The government believes that when a city’s hardware (infrastructure, cultural buildings, housing, etc.) is well prepared, investment and talents from home and abroad will naturally flow in and activate the economy. Therefore, the Chinese leaders at the central and provincial levels had an urgent imperative to “be connected with the international track”⁶; that is, building like an international city and behaving according to international norms. Hundreds of cities claimed to be becoming “international metropolises” by 2005 (Xue 2010). If the “international” dream is too far away, the achievement of neighbor provinces and cities is the best model to catch up. For example, if Cities A and B have opera houses, City C must have one.

When commercial activities have considerably enhanced their economic powers, cities begin to seek for uplifting their reputations by building grandiose cultural facilities—libraries, grand theaters, and museums—in order to get a chance to be indicated and noticed in the map of China and the world. Culture is the best manifesto of prosperities and the metropolitan glamor, and a means of “defining a rich, shared identity and thus engenders pride of place” (Landry 2008). When manufacturing declined in old industrial cities, culture was regarded as a remedy and savior. Cultural and economic development can be benefited from each other

⁶“Connecting to the international track” is a Chinese saying that means “be in line with the international practice.” Before China joined World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, every trade of business was concerned with and hoped to be in line with the international norm.

and integrated—this has been proven by the world history in the past hundreds of years, as stated in a strategic paper for London, “culture is a strong force to promote understanding and forming the city’s identities. It can transcend the obstacles and gather people from different background. Culture can stimulate inspiration, bring education, and create fortune and endless pleasures.”⁷

In the 13th Five-year Plan of Shanghai’s Economic and Social Development issued in 2016, “Enhancing Cultural Soft-power” stands as a chapter. Cultural soft-power is seen as an important means of enhancing a city’s cohesion and “core” competitiveness. The important facilities, events, and leading master artists should be fully utilized for a better integration of culture, economy, and society. The aim is to build Shanghai as “an international cultural metropolis.” Aligned with London, New York, Tokyo, and Paris, Shanghai launched and issued “cultural monitoring report” in 2011. More than 60 indicators are recorded the same time in these world cities. Number of performing art places and seats is one of them (Owens 2013).

To realize the plan of “international cultural metropolis,” projects of cultural facilities are highly demanded in quantity and quality, and built at suitable locations. In addition to restore aged museums, grand theaters, theaters for indigenous operas, and libraries, Shanghai is planning and building the new annex buildings for municipal museums, libraries, and new opera house. Some are fitted in the old city center to consolidate existing cultural facilities, while more new projects are planned in Pudong and other new zones, so that the arts can serve and promote these brand new communities.

As a box for the performing arts, the grand theater should first meet the requirements of performing functions, such as number of audiences, comfortable sightline and acoustic effects, mechanical and automatic stage facilities, etc. Moreover, as a city icon, the grand theater represents hopes and dreams of the city and its people. It should symbolize the local identity, free ideas, and express a progressive gesture. In a news report on the proposal of Henan Art Center, local media claims that “cultural facilities are venues of carrying out cultural activity and enhancing people’s cultural education. They are necessary for international cultural exchange and standing as important symbol of the city’s cultural development and taste.”⁸ In the 1980s and the 1990s, local governments and decision-makers were more concerned about “improving environment for investment,” but in the twenty-first century, they emphasized more on “facilitating the spiritual and cultural construction and activating people’s daily life.”⁹

To fulfill local citizens’ specific imagination of the theater, architects frequently use a strategy of double skin—a shoe box concert hall to satisfy the acoustic requirements, and another skin wrapping the shoe box and forming the lobby space. The external skin is given plastic form so that it can easily be looked “like something.” For example, in the national theater of Beijing, three auditoriums are

⁷ From “London: Cultural Capital, the mayor’s cultural strategies,” February 2003.

⁸ *Henan Yishu zhongxin jianyi shu* (Proposal of building Henan Art Center), Henan Government, 2004.

⁹ Same as above.

with their own roof, while an oval titanium shell covers the opera hall, concert hall, and multi-functional theater. The shinning shell is lauded as “an opening curtain.” The Oriental Art Center of Shanghai is designed as “five petals of magnolia” (Shanghai’s city flower) to cover three performance spaces; Hangzhou grand theater as a “bright crescent moon playing jewel in West Lake”; Henan Art Center as “dinosaurs eggs and ancient musical instruments”; Guangzhou opera house as “two pebbles on the bank of the Pear River”; Chongqing theater as a “vessel ploughing the water”; Wuxi theater as a “butterfly”; Wuzhen theater as a “double lotus,” etc. Most of these theaters stand at the waterfront where their reflections in water create awesome impressions. For example, the two latest theater projects—Zhuhai Grand Theater and Fuzhou Strait Culture and Art Center—both were built at the riverside (Fig. 2).

Because of the unusual form and extensive decoration, construction costs of these cultural buildings are expensive and sometimes beyond the cities’ fiscal affordability. At the end of the 1980s, Shenzhen municipal government spent almost all of its budgets in building eight cultural facilities (see Chap. 4). In the beginning of the twenty-first century, Shanghai also faced financial stresses in building its grand theater (see Chap. 2). As these projects are treated as prior political tasks from the top of the city government, the construction of them is resolute and allocated with all available financial, material, and manpower resources.

Roy and Ong wrote about this Asian and Chinese phenomenon and policy: “Caught in the vectors of particular histories, national aspirations and flows of cultures, cities have always been the principal sites for launching world-conjuring projects. Urban dreams and schemes play with accelerating opportunities and accidents that circulate in ever-widening spirals. Emerging nations exercise their new power by assembling glass and steel towers to project particular visions of the world” (Roy and Ong 2011, 1). Skyscrapers, grand theaters, and other cultural buildings in the Chinese cities are just among these “world-conjuring projects.” Roy and Ong (2011) further see this as an Asian only situation, “Urban-dwellers in Asia’s big cities do not read spectacles as a generalized aesthetic effect of

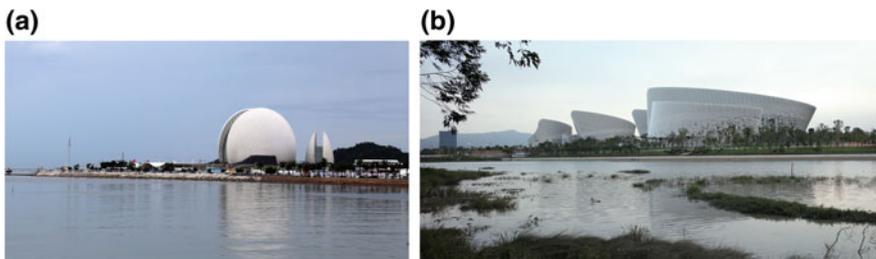


Fig. 2 Two grand theaters in waterfront. **a** Zhuhai Grand Theater, designed by Chen Keshi and Peking University team, opened on January 1, 2017, locates at an island of the Pearl River estuary. The architecture depicts the form of “sea shells”; **b** Fuzhou Strait Culture and Art center, designed by PES Architects, opened on October 10, 2018, facing the Minjiang River. The design takes inspiration from the petals of a jasmine blossom, the city flower of Fuzhou

capitalism, but rather as symbols of their metropolis that invite inevitable comparison with rival cities.”

Cultural industry, together with cultural accumulation (historic heritage), cultural management, cultural potential, and exchange are factors to assess a city’s cultural competitiveness.¹⁰ In the national ranking of Chinese cities in cultural competitiveness, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing are listed as the top five. This is also compatible with their ranking in GDP per capita.

Consumerism in Chinese Cities—The Emerging Elite and Middle Class

Coincide with the economic development and shifting to post-industrial era, consumerism is seen as locomotive in the capitalist society (Featherstone 2007). Only when workers became consumers, they would spend money on purchasing large quantity of consumer goods and therefore stimulating capitalist productions. The consumerist behavior expresses people’s desire, provides motivation for economy, and brings personal satisfaction. According to Pierre Bourdieu, consuming distinguishes a person’s economic capital, and also his education, taste, living style, social status, identities, and differences. In the post-modern period, consuming is more seen as a symbolic activity instead of utility and money (Bourdieu 1986). The booming of shopping mall and commercial space development shows how consumerism has influenced urban design and architecture.

During Mao’s era before 1978, a guideline of political correctness for Chinese people was “to work first, enjoy life later.” There were shortages of housing in most cities, while decent performance space was extremely rare. However, the focus of government administration was shifted and translated to modernize China and to improve people’s living standards in the 1990s. At the same time, civil servants, institutions, and big companies changed from six working days to five working days a week. Since then, the number of high-income urban elites has gradually increased and the middle class has emerged. They have a strong purchase power of high-end cultural activities and boosting the show and performance business. In 1996, the central government issued an instruction to build 50 or more cultural facilities nationwide, such as libraries, museums, and theaters “which are compatible to economic level and represent the image of the state and relevant cities.”¹¹ Through going to concert, opera, Xiqu (folk opera), and other kinds of entertainment, audiences have shown their preference, choice, and taste in cultural and

¹⁰ From “*Zhongguo chengshi wenhua jingzhengli yanjiu baogao*” (Report of cultural competitiveness of Chinese cities, 2016), Research Institute of Cultural Development, Communication University of China, August 2017.

¹¹ Ministry of Culture, *Wenhua shiye fazhan jiuwu jihua he 2010 nian yuanjing mubiao gangyao* (Development plan of cultural affairs and the vision of 2010), Beijing, Ministry of Culture, 2007.

leisure activities. “When cities are dominated by the service economy, aesthetics plays an important role in the use of space and lifestyles” (Zukin 1993).

In 2016, the box office turnover of various performances recorded RMB 47 billion yuan (US\$7.5 billion) in China. There were 6.3 million audiences in concerts, 2.3 million in dancing, 3.2 million in drama, 3.2 million in Xiqu, 2.5 million in children’s theater, and 1.2 million in acrobatic and folk art. Ticket prices range from US\$10 to 3000, depending on different types and classes of performance and troupes.¹² According to the data, total theater audiences were equivalent to one-ninth of Chinese population in 2016. In the same year in the UK, there were 19 million theater audiences, close to 30% of her 65 million populations.¹³ The GDP per capita in the UK is US\$41,602 in 2016, five times higher than that of China.¹⁴ Although China’s GDP per capita is around US\$8000, the distribution of wealth is unbalanced among cities. The Engel’s Coefficient in China was once over 60% and dropped to 29% in 2017. In “rich” regions, cultural and entertainment expenditure of a family in average was about 11.4% of total household budget.¹⁵ The tier-1 cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen have recorded the GDP per capita of \$20,000–\$30,000 USD and catch up the economic level of developed countries. People have extra money after food and clothing. Immense theater goers have created a strong demand on new spaces for the performing arts. Grand theaters are built with great expectations, especially from young parents with kids.

The above statistics just provide an average figure of how popular the performing arts in China. However, there is a great social disparity in the country, which is confirmed by the fluctuated level of GDP per capita among different provinces and cities. For example, in the four tier-1 cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen), a theater can schedule 300–400 events annually, but in certain cities, a theater can hardly organize a couple of events in a month.¹⁶

¹²Annual Report of China’s Performing Art Market, 2016. Ministry of Culture, 2017.

¹³The number of audience in the UK is from “There is no business like show business,” BBC 4, Saturday, July 29, 2017. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08yqb9r>. The population of the UK is from Office of National Statistics, “UK Population 2017,” <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/ukpopulation2017>. Accessed on February 8, 2018. The statistics of audience counts the number of tickets. Some people, for example a musical teacher, may attend concert for 5 times a year. The number could not perfectly reflect how many people really entering theaters.

¹⁴The GDP per capital of the UK is from “Trading Economics,” <https://tradingeconomics.com/united-kingdom/gdp-per-capita>; the GDP per capita of China is from Xinhua News Agency, April 20, 2017. http://www.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2017-04/20/c_129556927.htm. Accessed on February 8, 2018.

¹⁵“Quanqiu 22 guo enggeer xishu yilan: zhongguo yicheng fuyu guojia” (Engel’s Coefficient in 22 countries: China becomes rich country), March 13, 2013. <http://money.163.com/13/0313/16/8PS3DI2200253G87.html>, Accessed on March 28, 2018. National Development and Reform Commission, “2017nian zhongguo jumin xiaofei fazhan baogao” (2017 Report of Chinese residents’ consuming development), Beijing: People’s Press, 2018.

¹⁶The number of performance was counted through Web sites of various theaters or from annual report of theaters by the author’s research team.

For hundreds of newly built theaters, are there so many performances to fill in? China's theaters are mainly managed by two groups, one state-owned and another with government background. As mentioned in the following chapters, the Poly Theater Management Co. Ltd. (with government and military background) manages 63 theaters in 55 cities. The group organizes art performances, programming and sends them itinerating in various cities. For example, a foreign symphony orchestra may travel to 15 cities in the Christmas and New Year season from north to south. Poly Group built some theaters and also invested some programmes, but not many. Vernacular opera (like Peking opera or Cantonese opera, with less young fans) or indigenous performing art troupes could hardly afford to rent luxurious grand theaters. Their activities are limited in old small neighborhood auditoriums run by state-owned companies (see Chaps. 1 and 7).

Foreign Design and Urban Mirage

Since fourteenth century, the royal performing arts had declined inside the palace of Beijing, while folk music, dances, and plays were exuberant and public or commercial performances took place at outdoor spaces, or at simple roofed stages with outdoor sittings, or inside teahouses. The theater with indoor stage and auditorium was not a conventional building type in China, until the late nineteenth century when folk operas were popular. The first modern theater in Western style, Teatro D. Pedro V, was built in Macau in 1860. In the early twentieth century, movie theaters were spread over China along with the incoming of foreign especially American movies and the establishment of Chinese film industry. At the same time, large-scale modern auditoriums for assembly, meeting, and performance began to exist. The best example was the renowned Dr. Sun Yat-san Memorial Hall, built in Guangzhou in 1934. This milestone project with a 4000-seat auditorium was designed by Lu Yanzhi, a representative of the first generation of foreign-trained Chinese architects (see Chap. 3).

In the past, professional theaters and concert halls were hardly constructed in China, except Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. As the national capital and political center, Beijing in 1954 built the Capital Theater which was exclusively used for dramas, and converted a movie theater into the Beijing Concert Hall in 1960. As the biggest metropolis in China, Shanghai had formed an excellent philharmonic orchestra since the concession era, the Shanghai Concert Hall formally the Nanking Theater opened in 1959. As the host city of the annual China Import and Export Fair since 1957, Guangzhou built the Friendship Theater in 1965, it was considered as a top-class multi-functional hall for the performance of music, ballet, and other productions, and its design was included in the architectural textbook at the time.

However, assembly halls of various sizes, primarily used as venues of conducting Communist Party conferences and political meetings, were once widely built all over the country by different organizations including municipal governments at all levels,

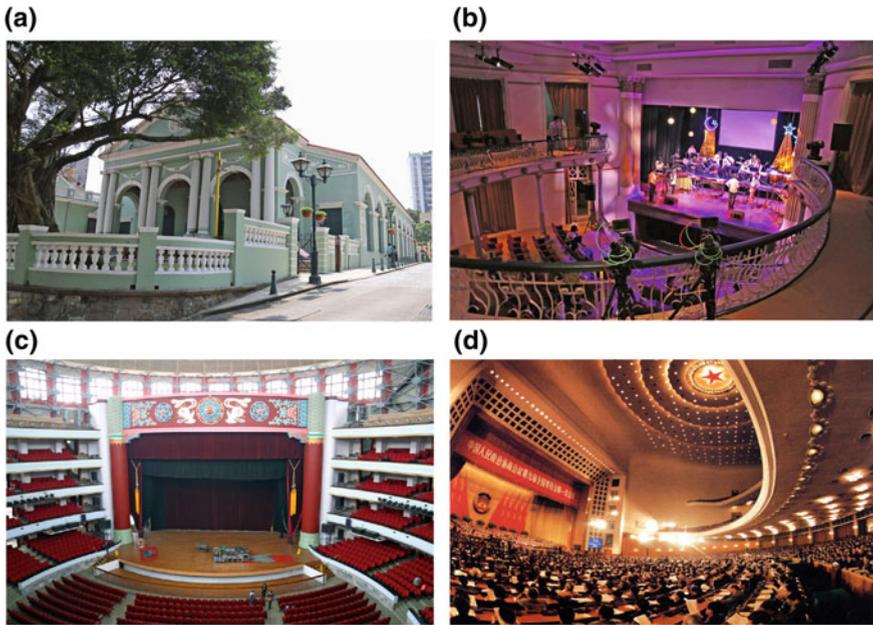


Fig. 3 Theaters in history. **a** and **b** Teatro D. Pedro V, Macau, 1860; **c** Great Hall of People, Chongqing, 1954; **d** Auditorium for 10,000 people, the Great Hall of the People, Beijing, 1959

large government agencies and state-owned enterprises, or headquarters of military bases after 1949. The architecture of those halls was similar to a theater with a stage and a big auditorium, but the basic function of the stage was to set up seats and tables for the party cadres making speeches, and the auditorium was a sitting area for the delegates, so there was little acoustic design because to run meetings was the main purpose (Lu 2009). However, the assembly hall was also used for major performing and entertainment events during the socialist period (Fig. 3).

Key constructions of this type are exemplified by two projects of the Great Hall of People. The Great Hall of People in Chongqing completed in 1954 is a municipal building and exhibits the style of traditional Chinese architecture, whereas the Great Hall of People in Beijing completed in 1959 is a state building for national legislative and ceremonial activities such as meetings of the National People’s Congress, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, and the National Congress of the Communist Party. Its design shows the influence of the Soviet Union architecture. Both halls stand for the government authority and as political symbols, but at different levels. The Great Hall of People in Beijing with a 10,000-seat auditorium was also used for special events, for example, during the evening of October 2, 1964, it was the venue for the premiere of the “Red” epic *Dong Fang Hong* (The East is Red), a monumental musical production regarding the history of Chinese Communist revolution. During the “Cultural Revolution” period (1966–1976), performances and repertoires were extremely rare. Apart from

the dominant and frequent political meetings, eight major “Revolutionary Modern Model Plays” (including five new productions of Peking Opera, two new productions of ballet and a new composition of symphonic poem) were those limited lists that could be staged in assembly halls occasionally (Cheng 2015).

After the devastating “Cultural Revolution” (1966–1976), every trade of business in China was eager to resurge. Chinese people have worked hard at improving economy, civic infrastructure, and living standard in many respects including education, arts, and cultural developments. In the early 1980s, the Ministry of Construction announced a national design competition of medium and small size theater/cinema to call for feasible and affordable schemes that could be built in small cities and towns with available construction technology. At the time, China started to invite foreign design firms, and the overseas design was trickling into Chinese cities. Through star hotel and office edifice, architects from Japan, the USA, and Europe set up benchmark of high design/technology and classy living quality. Furthermore, China began to follow the international norm in the development of new arts and cultural projects by organizing architecture competitions opened to international architects.

On one hand, “to learn from foreign advance technology and experience” as a social understanding accompanied by the yearning of Western culture was the background to invite foreign architects and specialists participating in the design of arts and cultural facilities such as opera house and concert hall. Local architects had little knowledge at such types of buildings and especially were unfamiliar with the design and technology of large auditorium acoustics and the mechanized back stage, which formed the most important parts of theater. Foreign design firms had shown unparalleled advantages and skills in terms of experience and technical expertise.

On the other hand, the urge to improve and upgrade the city image, the motivation to promote the city as an international metropolis, the ambitions to build world-class cultural facilities in comparison with other existing landmarks, the chasing of extraordinary looks and striking form to attract public attentions, were decisive factors and justifications to mobilize the city including its officials and people investing huge money on the development of a grand theater. People were somehow quite obsessed with foreign famous architects or “Starchitects” not just based on their talents and success, but also on a perception or a prediction that once the design of a Starchitect gets built, the city would be recognized as an international city and notable to the world. They believed that the work of a foreign master certainly was what the city deserved to have in the twenty-first century and a representation of the city’s achievement in becoming classy, tasteful, and cultivated, apart from pursuing and building wealth.

These mirage-like buildings are also glorious achievements of “capable” municipal officials during their tenure and will help these officials to ascend in career ladder. With the wave of urban renewal and new town construction, cultural district with fabulous museums, theaters, and libraries were tabled in provincial and municipal government, and got resolute support. In the trend of appealing for new mirage, local architects are generally regarded less competent of undertaking the

task. Well-known foreign architects were sought after and eagerly welcomed for bringing new ideas.

Indeed, the large-scale, multi-functional grand theater project that funded with ample budget, located at a prominent site, asked for design of high-profile and bold statement, has challenged and attracted some reputable, talented foreign architects and well-established, leading international firms to submit high-quality and fresh competition entries. In terms of creativity, originality, innovative idea, and integration of state-of-the-art technology and building systems, facilities, and equipment, international teams often have the edge over local architects in winning competitions.

International design competitions were held and celebrity design firms of Japan, Europe, and America were invited. Some design competitions saw at least five shortlisted firms, some might be 40, like national theater design competition in Beijing in 1998. However, in the first five years of the twenty-first century, only several design firms were able to win projects in China—Paul Andreu (Aéroports de Paris Ingénierie or ADPi, three grand theaters), Jean Marie Charpentier of France (two), gmp of Germany (four) and Carlos Ott from Canada (four). The list above shows an interesting phenomenon that some architects repeatedly were chosen to design grand theaters by either winning competitions or invitations. Moreover, they are/were all internationally renowned, well-established, brilliant, and accomplished architects and firms. Their artistic talents, creative minds, architectural insights, professional knowledge, and practical experiences were fully exemplified by those compelling theaters that they designed. Some design firms upheld their consistent design rationales and approaches, and some only managed to please the Chinese decision-makers. The innovation in telecommunication technologies has liberated architectural production from territorial domains, as graphic drawings can be transferred instantly between design centers and construction sites across the globe (Ren 2011). Among all theaters of overseas design, although there were a few controversial projects, many stood for outstanding designs.

In addition to skillfully handle the issue of creating a tremendous, spectacular, and alluring theater space with a hi-tech building structure and elegant building materials, foreign design solutions tend to define sensible, inviting, inclusive, and liberal public spaces and public images better than local proposals. This is particular helpful to cities aimed at promoting city pride, by launching grand theater projects. In fact, news and reviews of the completion of a grand theater often mention how the project enhances the city, e.g., regarding the Guangzhou Opera House, (it) “has been the catalyst for the development of cultural facilities in the city including new museums, library and archive. The Opera House design is the latest realization of Zaha Hadid Architects’ unique exploration of contextual urban relationships, combining the cultural traditions that have shaped Guangzhou’s history, with the ambition and optimism that will create its future.”¹⁷ For the latest Fuzhou Strait Art and Culture Center designed by Pekka Salminen just opened on October 10, 2018,

¹⁷Guangzhou Opera House, from <https://www.archdaily.com/115949/guangzhou-opera-house-zaha-hadid-architects>, accessed October 17, 2018.



Fig. 4 Grand Theaters designed by DDB Architects Shanghai led by Xiang Bingren. **a** Hefei Grand Theater, 2009; **b** and **c** Datang Cultural District including concert hall, cinema city and art museum, 2009, and grand theater, 2017. Courtesy of Teng Luying



Fig. 5 Harbin Grand Theater, designed by MAD, 2016. Photograph by Sun Cong

Fuzhou Daily regards it as a new cultural landmark of the city, “with significant meanings in the field of expressing cultural confidence, building the city image, elevating soft-power, improving civic facilities, enhancing the competitiveness and the status of Fuzhou, promoting a balanced development of economy and society.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Opening of Fuzhou Strait Art and Culture Center, from *Fuzhou Daily*, <http://fj.leju.com/news/2018-10-11/09246455961074029362811.shtml>, accessed October 17, 2018.



Fig. 6 Nelum Pokuna—national theater of Sri Lanka, 2012

Through collaboration and Chinese peers' observation in near distance, this overseas impact positively fosters the upgrading and progress of general design standard in China. Chinese architects grew up through learning and started to grab the design of grand theaters in some cities, for example, in Hefei, Xi'an, Harbin, and Nanjing after 2010. This building type also becomes "gift," designed by Chinese design institutes and donated to foreign countries, for example, national theaters in Senegal (2011), Sri Lanka (2012), and Algeria (2016) (Figs. 4, 5 and 6).

Methodology and Structures of this Book

The intension of this book is to discuss the relationship between grand theater developments and urbanization in China, with a focus on foreign designs due to the leading role of international architects in building venues for the performing arts. We examine theater projects beyond architecture, functions, and construction technology, and put them in the context of urban development.¹⁹ As outlined above, the grand theater as a key project undoubtedly is included into the city's master planning, together with other cultural facilities forming a new urban center as the catalyst for new town development. Therefore, we tentatively entitle this study "Grand Theater Urbanism." There are plenty of articles and books discussing urbanism and theater design, but almost none specifically links this building type with urban design. We aim to fill this academic gap.

What is urbanism? According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is the way of life characteristic of cities and towns, and the development and planning of cities and towns.²⁰ In observing the construction movement of cultural buildings, we have

¹⁹Although this book does not go further into the theater design technology, we have generally scanned literature on theater design, for example, Izenour (1996a, b), Hammond (2006), Kronenburg (2012), and Short et al. (2011).

²⁰The definition of urbanism is from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/urbanism>, accessed February 25, 2018.

noticed that the municipal government always takes a leading role in initiating and planning cultural buildings and the grand theater, which usually locate in a prominent site of new towns. Although the realization of grand theaters is inseparable from sophisticated technologies, we are not going to assess this dimension, but contextual urban relationships, “the way of life characteristic” and “the development and planning of towns.”

China is a big country of many cities which compete for keeping ahead in economic and cultural developments among them in order to achieve regional, national, or even international recognitions. They have individual approaches and strategies to promote and build the cities subject to their own specific size, location, and executive grade (or position in the city-tier system), providing us the ground of methodology. In this book, we look at ten selected cities, which represent the rapid development and the ever-changing dynamic of Chinese cities in the twenty-first century. They range from large to medium size, from tier-1 to tier-2 and tier-3, from state capital, directly administered city (under the central government) to provincial capital and prefecture-level city, from north to south, east to west, and from mainland to outlying island. The ten cities are paired up based on their similarities for easy comparison:

- Beijing (capital, political center, tier-1, northern region), Shanghai (directly administered, financial center, tier-1, eastern region);
- Guangzhou (provincial-level, tier-1), Shenzhen (former Economic Special Zone, tier-1), both are metropolises of southern region, pioneers of the “reform and open-up” policy;
- Chongqing (directly administered, tier-2, southwestern region), Zhengzhou (provincial-level, tier-2, middle west region);
- Taiyuan (provincial-level, tier-2, northwestern region), Wuxi (prefecture-level, tier-3, southeast region);
- Taichung, Hong Kong (both are cities of outlying island, with different lifestyles and political systems from the mainland).

These cities have diverse evolving trajectories and stories of cultural buildings in the past hundred years, but all concluded by recently built grand theaters designed by foreign architects. It could be a fashionable or normal way in the age of globalization, since international design competition was the common practice in the development of public especially cultural projects. We hope to present a diverse range of projects with distinct urban contexts, design approaches, and technical methods (Fig. 7).

Whereas Taichung and Hong Kong are under different political and administrative systems from the Chinese mainland, the reason or decision to build a new cultural complex may not be exactly the same as other mainland cities, due to different planning policies and urban development strategies. In addition to the public demand and practical needs for new performance space, both cities are also facing challenges from East and Southeast Asian cities, if not directly from China mainland, in the context of globalization. It is interesting to see how different Taichung and Hong Kong develop theater projects from their mainland peers.



Fig. 7 Map showing locations of the ten selected cities (by Zhang Lujia)

Each chapter of this book is a case study on a selected city, with the focus on key projects of either one or two theaters. The authors had conducted on-site investigations. With primary information and materials, they analyzed grand theaters from different perspectives, i.e., planning, design, construction, operation, and management, and viewed theater developments against historical and social backgrounds of the city. Most of the authors were born, studied, or work in the selected cities. They have witnessed the cities’ growth and how cultural buildings have contributed to people’s quality of life. Therefore, they are resourceful about the areas and cases.

Chapter 1 delineates the development of Beijing from late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) to the People’s Republic after 1949. No matter in the feudalist society, the capitalist or communist rule, two sets of performance space co-existed. One is the formal theaters and cinemas open to the public, another is internally used by official or royal families. In the 1950s when socialist movements replaced the private business, state-owned companies, government departments, or institutions run their

own small working and living world—“danwei” (unit). Hundreds of multi-purpose convention halls were built within such small world. This may be called workers’ club in the Soviet Union or cultural hall in Europe. Lu investigates these two systems of performing art space. His narrative of the National Center of Performing Art from 1958 to the twenty-first century describes an intricate interaction of state leaders’ will, old city renovation, design institute, designers, technical evolution, and global influences in a 40+ years’ period. The chapter traces the origin of prevailing three-hall method in a newly built theater. Lu himself is part of the design team of national theater; therefore, his analysis is engaged with personal experiences.

After the political and power center of Beijing, Shanghai is the most important economic and financial metropolis in the Chinese mainland. The city has long been a splendid cultural star in Asia. However, it was lag behind after the devastation of Communist rule. Chapter 2 describes how Shanghai rise culturally in the open-door policy through case studies of five grand theaters. These theaters, all designed by the international architects either through design competition or invitation, well punctuate the different transition periods and the urban mission they undertook. Amazing at the tremendous achievements of Shanghai in cultural building, Xue sharply interrogates the proper use of theater public space which the member of public should deserve.

In Chap. 3, Ding further comments that gated nature is the product of the dialectical articulation between politics and experimentation in the Chinese political and cultural context. Chapter 3 links several performance spaces in Guangzhou in southern China from the national government, communist government, open-door period to the global economic competition of the twenty-first century. Hadid’s design of Guangzhou Opera House was highly respected, expected, and built as a turning point for the city’s new economic and cultural center.

If Guangzhou is benefited from free “southern wind,” Shenzhen started its journey from a fishing town to metropolis of high-tech merely by bordering the capitalist Hong Kong in 1980. In Chap. 4, Sun traces the birth of the first “grand theater” in China when Shenzhen municipal government bravely threw half of its public expenditure to build eight cultural facilities in the mid-1980s. Shenzhen set up an example of urban design by planning its central axis in Futian area when American and Japanese architects were involved in planning and landmark building design in the 1990s. When districts and residents in Shenzhen become affluent in the twenty-first century, grand cultural mega-structures were built in several sub-centers. Shenzhen gives an example of fast-growing and resolute determination.

The development of China is uneven, and disparity between cities is obvious. Traditionally, the eastern and coastal cities enjoy higher developing rate and economic fruits. Therefore, cultural facilities are densely spread in these cities. On the contrary, cities in the western China are relatively backward. Chongqing is a city in the “west,” although it is still geographically located in the east side if drawing a line in the middle of Chinese territory. In Chap. 5, Chu and Xue delineate the performance space and city’s space from 1940 up to now. Chongqing Grand Theater and Guotai Arts Center typify two types of design, the former from

international design competition, and the latter from domestic one. Chongqing Grand Theater lonely perches on the tip of northern bank of Yangtze River, its masculine “tank” image dialogues with the CBD in Yuzhong peninsula crossing the water. However, its heroic gesture does not provide physical comfort for pedestrians who approach it. Guotai, located in the old city center, is destined to inherit its tradition from the national government and act as transition spot from city center to the riverside. Through these cultural facilities, Chongqing sends strong statement from the upstream of Yangtze River—it is both vernacular and international.

Compared to Chongqing, Zhengzhou and Henan Province have longer history of more than two thousand years and once nurtured the ancient Chinese civilization. However, it was lag behind in the modern era. In Chap. 6, Zhang looks at Zhengzhou, capital city of Henan, and its rising from a chaotic insignificant industrial town to locomotive of Central China. The driving force comes from the Zhengdong new district, next to the old town, planned by Japanese master Kisho Kurokawa. Zhengdong new district uses its own grid, regardless the fabric of old town. Its audacious design includes auspicious form of land division and artificial lake, where the Henan Arts Center is perched. The functions of performance and exhibition supplement each other and form festive atmosphere in the central park. After ten years, the rising housing price near the park partly reflects the increasing quality of life. The once called “ghost city” is enthusiastically embraced by Henan people.

Further north, Taiyuan is known as capital of coal mine. The city is usually associated with bad air quality and wicked bosses of “bloody coal mine,” where black gold is dug at the toll of numerous workers’ lives. Chapter 7 describes the development of local opera and its performing venues, similar as those in Beijing in the early twentieth century. Xiao and Ni investigate the building of cultural center in Taiyuan and how these cultural buildings change the image of the city. Through international competition, French ideas (from Paris) and design serve the goals and ambition of Central Chinese city. The authors show that cultural buildings and mayor’s lofty idea can bring the shift of industry and restore city’s glorious past and confidence.

If the provincial cities just discussed have clearly deserved large-scale cultural structures, Wuxi, a city located in southern Jiangsu Province, would seem to have had less reason to follow suit. In Chap. 8, Li discusses the lakeshore grand theater designed by the Finnish architect PES in terms of its world-class architecture and facility in contrast to few performance events after completion. Wuxi is simply lack of a cultural atmosphere to sustain a grand theater normally built for classical performing arts. The grand theater project that proposed by the city government is a trend-goer more than a response to the current demand for new performance space. However, we would like to view this kind of projects optimistically as development-in-advance, but how to improve the low-usage-rate of the theater after its completion is a big challenge for the city. Indeed, most second- and third-tier cities face a similar embarrassing problem.

Although different in ideology, governments in both sides of Taiwan Strait are aware of the importance of landmark cultural building. Taipei has been building performing arts center in its busy old city area since 2012. The building designed by

Rem Koolhaas triggered debates and encountered difficulties in construction. Kaohsiung has built Weiwuying National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts, designed by Netherlands firm Mecanoo. The Center with opera, concert hall, play theater, chamber theater, and outdoor amphitheater opened in 2018. Before Taipei and Kaohsiung, Taichung was the early city engaging with global architectural design. Mayor Hu was known as “cultural mayor.” City council hall and plaza were rebuilt and designed by international architects (through competition) during his office. Chapter 9 checks out the landmark building—National Taichung Theater designed by Japanese architect Toyo Ito—whose scheme defeated many competitors including Zaha Hadid’s elaborated work. Xiao dates back the city’s history from Japanese colony, the United Nations-aid to the globalization era. He depicts the up and down of the project, and how it stood up after overcoming numerous technical challenges. Although the theater perfects itself by space and technology, the conceived “central park” is at the mercy of surrounding luxurious residential towers. The theater consolidates the city’s status as a habitable city in Taiwan Island.

Compared with the rapid development of Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, once “Asian dragon,” looks shabby in cultural facilities. The territory receives top-class performing troupes from all over the world. However, its most “advanced” venue is Cultural Center built in 1989. The colonial government’s main concern was to solve more urgent social problems like refugee and potable water. After the sovereignty handover in 1997, Hong Kong has embarked on democratic road, which made development pace even slower. Xue demonstrates the evolution of public buildings in Hong Kong in Chap. 10. The busy engagement with members of public in cultural buildings presents a sharp contrast with the scenario in the other Chinese cities.

Ten chapters may not fully reflect the panorama of “grand theater heat” in so many Chinese cities. Appendix I gives a database of design and construction of grand theaters in China. According to our definition of “grand,” that is an auditorium larger than 1,200 seats, almost 200 such grand theaters were completed in the first 18 years of the twenty-first century. Appendix II selects typical theaters in six cities to demonstrate how frequently and in what ways these theaters are used. They reflect the popularity of performance space in different cities, effectiveness and efficiency of cultural buildings.

Through reading this book, one can see the fast pace, decision-makings, motivations, ambitions, and phenomena of Chinese urbanization in the twenty-first century, which continuously boosts urban developments and promotes economic performance in China. Urbanization has changed the life of Chinese people and has formulated a development pattern with both positive and negative impacts on the society. The building of cultural mega-structures and progress in globalization and urbanization are eventually driven by the individual instinct and collective desire of recognition.²¹

At the end of each chapter, authors give a short piece of their personal encounter about the city and their experiences in cinema/theater. Performing art buildings

²¹ Here we use the definition of Francis Fukuyama, see Fukuyama (2018).

eventually serve people, the individual feeling gives a vivid scenario of Chinese cities and everyday life. If the Chinese Grand Theater Urbanism is specific, can we learn from their experimentations and experiences for a more reasonable and sustainable way in the development of cultural complex?

Charlie Qiuli Xue

Lin Li

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Editor and Contributors

About the Editor

Charlie Qiuli Xue has taught architecture at Shanghai Jiao Tong University; the University of Texas, USA; and City University of Hong Kong. An award-winning architect and writer, he has published 12 books, including *Building a Revolution: Chinese Architecture since 1980* (HKU Press, 2006), *Hong Kong Architecture 1945–2015: From Colonial to Global* (Springer, 2016), and *A History of Design Institutes in China* (with Guanghui Ding, Routledge, 2018), and research papers in international refereed journals such as the *Journal of Architecture*, *Urban Design International*, *Habitat International*, and *Cities*. His book “Hong Kong Architecture 1945–2015” was awarded by the International Committee of Architectural Critics (CICA) chaired by Sir Joseph Rykwert in 2007. Xue’s research focuses on architecture in China and design strategies for high-density environments.

Contributors

Dongzhu Chu is the deputy dean and Ph.D. supervisor of the School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Chongqing University. Chu was previously a visiting scholar at the University of Toronto and Delft University of Technology, and worked at Rotterdam and KPMB in Toronto. Chu has published five academic monographs and more than fifty academic papers, including *Integrated Mechanism of Generation—Evaluation in Sustainable Building Design Process* (2015), *Enigmatic Code of the Netherlands: Cities Architecture and Design through an Architect’s Vision* (2012), and *Starting Design on Architecture* (2011). Chu is now engaged in research, education, and design in the field of sustainable design, fine urban design, integration of architecture and traffic, and urban design for important locations.

Guanghai Ding teaches architecture at Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture, China. His books *Constructing a Place of Critical Architecture in China* (2016) and *A History of Design Institutes in China* (with Charlie Xue, 2018) were published by Routledge. His articles have been published by *Architectural Research Quarterly*, *Habitat International*, and *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. His research focuses on the history, theory, and criticism of modern Chinese architecture. Based in Beijing, he practices architecture both independently and collaboratively.

Lin Li a Hong Kong-based architect, has been involved in the design of numerous building projects in China since 1995. He is also the author or editor of numerous academic studies and publications in the field of Chinese architecture, landscape gardens, urban development, and heritage preservation, including his latest book *Chinese Urbanism in the 21st Century* (with Charlie Xue, China Architecture & Building Press, 2017). Li received architectural training at Pratt Institute and Columbia University in the City of New York.

Xiangdong Lu obtained a master's degree from Harvard GSD in 2001, and a Ph.D. from Tsinghua University in 2005. He teaches architecture at the School of Architecture at Tsinghua University. His research focuses on the history of modern theater in China under the influence of culture, politics, technology, and business, against the background of the modernization movement in China beginning in the twentieth century. His book *On the Evolution of Modern Theaters in China: A History from Grand Stage to Grand Theater* (in Chinese) was published in 2009 (Chinese Architecture and Building Press, CABP). He is also an active architect, and his experience in theater design in China has helped him to understand the dilemma of modern theater in Chinese over the past three decades.

Min Ni is an instructional assistant in Tourism Department of Normal College, Shenzhen University. In 2017, she became the first holder of master's degree in Piano Performance from Shenzhen University. As a Shenzhen-based pianist and piano teacher, she has received 55 awards of piano competitions and prominent teacher, including 15 international awards. Her piano students won several prizes from the domestic and international piano competition. She has also accumulated a wealth of experience during the concerts where she appeared as pianist and performance consultant.

Cong Sun is currently a Ph.D. candidate and works as a research assistant at the City University of Hong Kong, with interests in the linkage of cultural facility distribution and urban expansion, and the tension between urban policy and architectural practice. She holds a master's degree in Urban Design from the University of Hong Kong and a bachelor's degree in Architecture from Shenzhen University, where her graduation design received an award of excellence. Before joining CityU,

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Jing Xiao received his Ph.D. from the University of Nottingham, UK, in 2013. He has held the position of assistant professor of architecture at Shenzhen University, China, since 2016. He has received research funding from both international and domestic bodies, including the Getty Foundation, Universitas 21, and Guangdong Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science. He has published research articles in many international refereed journals such as *Habitat International*, *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, *IDEA Journal*, and *Architecture Journal* (Chinese).

Yingbo Xiao (Raibbie) is a Ph.D. candidate with a particular interest in the development of architectural design firms before and after the Chinese Economic Reform. Before enrolling at the City University of Hong Kong, he worked for two years as an intern architect in Shanghai Xian Dai Architectural Design Group and the Shenzhen Municipality Public Works Bureau. He holds a master's degree in architecture from Tsinghua University and a bachelor's degree in architecture from Shenzhen University. For the 2016–2017 academic year, he was a research assistant at the City University of Hong Kong. He lives in Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

Kai Xue is master's degree student of School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Chongqing University.

Lujia Zhang is a Ph.D. candidate at the City University of Hong Kong. She obtained her master's degree in architecture from the South China University of Technology in 2016 and bachelor's degree of architecture from Zhengzhou University in 2013. She is interested in contemporary Chinese architecture practice and criticism. She participated in several design practices and research projects during her study periods in Guangzhou and Hong Kong.