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<td>Association of Finnish Architects' Offices</td>
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<td>AUP</td>
<td>Architecture and Urban Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIAD</td>
<td>Beijing Institute of Architectural Design</td>
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<td>BRI</td>
<td>Belt and Road Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>CADG</td>
<td>China Architecture Design and Research Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCEDGC</td>
<td>China Construction Engineering Design Group Corporation</td>
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<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCTV</td>
<td>China Central Television</td>
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<td>CDHT</td>
<td>Chengdu High-tech Industrial Development Zone</td>
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<td>CGW</td>
<td>Commune by the Great Wall</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIPEA</td>
<td>Chinese International Practical Exhibition of Architecture</td>
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<td>ECADI</td>
<td>East China Architectural Design Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGT</td>
<td>Fujian Grand Theater</td>
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<tr>
<td>GBA</td>
<td>Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRG</td>
<td>Glass Fiber Reinforced Gypsum</td>
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<tr>
<td>HVAC</td>
<td>Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDI</td>
<td>Local Design Institute</td>
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<td>MNT</td>
<td>Mawei New Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOHURD</td>
<td>Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGT</td>
<td>Nanchang Grand Theater</td>
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<td>PPP</td>
<td>Public-Private Partnership</td>
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<td>SAFA</td>
<td>The Finnish Association of Architects</td>
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<td>SARA</td>
<td>Sveriges Allmänna Restaurangaktiebolag</td>
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<td>SARS</td>
<td>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome</td>
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<td>SCAC</td>
<td>Strait Art and Culture Center</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>Schematic Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEZ</td>
<td>Special Economic Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>Sino-Finnish Center</td>
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<td>SRLL</td>
<td>Finnish Confederation of Finnish Construction Companies</td>
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<td>TJAD</td>
<td>Tongji Architectural Design Group</td>
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<td>THAD</td>
<td>Architectural Design and Research Institute of Tsinghua University</td>
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<td>TFIC</td>
<td>Tianfu International Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>UABB</td>
<td>Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture</td>
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<td>WGT</td>
<td>Wuxi Grand Theater</td>
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ABSTRACT

The expansion of globalization in the architecture industry has primarily changed the methods architects use and the organizational structures of architectural firms. Nowadays, international architectural offices that have advanced design capabilities are working globally. Finnish contemporary architecture has constructed its own identity while engaging extensively in international architectural designs. This doctoral dissertation focuses on the practices and discourses of Finnish architects in China and how Finnish architects have participated in the rapid wave of urbanization since China’s economic reform. Sino-Finnish projects bridge Finnish architectural designs, which is a paradigm of the Scandinavian design tradition. China, with a culture significantly different from Finland, is a fast-developing economy where numerous transnational architectures have occurred and more are expected to take place in the future. The primary research question is: How may Finnish architecture—an architectural tradition often associated with Finland’s identity and imagination—reconcile with the Chinese context at the level of practice and discourse?

This research consists of several parts. First, the study investigates the backgrounds China brings to international architects and what China expects from them. Given the geopolitical, social development, and cultural differences between China and the West, Finnish architects in China are often situated in a context where discourses oppose and compete, which inevitably influences architects’ practices and discourses. Meanwhile, China continues to have close exchanges with the outside world in cultural and economic fields. Finnish architects have developed new works based on their design philosophies and methods, considering the Chinese urban scale and demands. Also, the study seeks to understand how Finnish architects construct interpretive discourses in a differentiated cultural background and critically analyze the strengths and limitations of these discourses. By analyzing the networks that conduct transnational architectural designs, this study seeks to understand how Finnish architects realize their buildings through collaborative partnerships involving multiple parties, including Finnish architects and local Chinese design institutes. Finally, this research uses a comprehensive case study to illustrate Finnish architects’ ways of reconciling their ideas based on a specific context and how differentiated circumstances have influenced their designs.

This dissertation employs a combined approach of discourse analysis and case studies, drawing from diverse sources including interviews, literature surveys, and original documents. It encompasses interviews with architects from Finland and China, analyzing various documents such as drawings, communication records, and meeting minutes. The study spans architectural competition proposals to completed projects and enhances understanding of
recent developments in Finnish architecture and globalized architectural design by examining design thinking, social contexts, design execution, and cross-cultural interactions.
This dissertation uses the Pinyin system of romanization for Chinese names and words, except for historical figures in their more commonly romanized form. In the first mention of Chinese personal and geographical names, important Chinese terms, and the titles of literary works, I include the original Pinyin. In writing Chinese personal names, I also followed the Chinese custom of placing family names before given names in writing Chinese personal names. In the bibliography, authors’ and publishers’ names as well as article titles in Chinese are presented in English and Chinese to facilitate the retrieval of an original text.
1. INTRODUCTION

Finnish architects have developed a specific tradition in architectural history, adhering to common principles of functionality seen in modernist architecture while developing their characteristics in spatial sensibility.¹ The consensus surrounding Finnish architecture revolves around the close association of its images with Finland’s geographical features, all the while expressing the humanism of a modern welfare society. Over the course of more than a century of development since Finland’s independence, Finnish architecture has garnered widespread acclaim beyond its borders. Sigfried Giedion’s widespread quote, “Finland is with Aalto wherever he goes,” binds the renowned Finnish architect to his homeland.² According to Kenneth Frampton, Finland stands out as one of the most remarkable countries in terms of its success in modern architectural design.³ Wolfgang Jean Stock goes further to suggest that due to Finnish architects’ exceptional material perceptions and their creations of light and shadowy atmospheres, “small” Finland could even be considered a “superpower” in the field of architectural design.⁴ From a Finnish perspective, however, the notion of Finnish character encompasses multiple meanings. According to Matti Peltonen, “Finnishness” reflects a national self-image of Finns, where negative aspects, such as the Finnish “boozing mentality,” are somewhat counterbalanced by Finland’s accomplishments in the field of art, exemplified by the works of Alvar Aalto.⁵ Finnish architectural critic Nils Erik Wickberg argued that apart from Sibelius’s music, Finnish architecture is considered another form of art that has made substantial contributions to the rest of the world.⁶ Kirmo Mikkola views the achievements of Finnish architects as part of Finland’s cultural strategy, strengthening the connections between Finland, situated at the Western periphery, and the Western center.⁷ Finnish architecture is deeply intertwined with the construction of Finnish national identity on a discursive and imaginative level, which has become one of the characteristics of Finnish architecture.

Finnish architects have been actively internationalizing their practices and exporting architectural designs. Within the Finnish architectural community, individuals with exceptional design capabilities have sought opportunities to showcase their talents on an international level. Renowned architects, including Eliel Saarinen, Alvar Aalto, Reima and Raili Pietilä, among others, have achieved success with their works worldwide. Finnish architects, with their international backgrounds and design teams, have long been engaged in foreign exchanges.⁸ The exportation of Finnish architectural designs has

¹ Connah, 2000, p. 22.
² Giedion, 1959.
⁴ Stock, 2015.
⁵ Peltonen, 2000.
⁸ The international exchange of Finnish architects began as early as the National Romantic period (see Section 2.1). For example, Alvar Aalto’s design teams often included people from several countries. In modern times, it is also common for Finnish architects to have an international educational background, such as the principal architects of ALA Architects and JKMM Architects.
CHAPTER 1

become a narrative parallel to buildings that bear strong ties to Finland’s cultural heritage. To expand their opportunities beyond the limited domestic market, the Finnish architectural community has been grappling with the challenge of developing a deeper understanding of globalized design strategies, challenges, and discourses. It is essential to acknowledge that while some outstanding Finnish architects have actively explored and experimented with ways to secure more international opportunities, the majority of architectural firms in Finland operate on a smaller scale. Only a select few have managed to maintain a sustained presence on the global stage. Historically, the international engagement of Finnish architects has been predominantly driven by occasional competition victories rather than by a few prominent firms with multiple global offices.

As a consequence of the extension of globalization, Finland and China, rather than remaining separated by vast Siberian forests, have established multiple links in economic and cultural spheres. The “New Silk Road” formed by the Trans-Asian Railroad network has provided Finland with increased options to strengthen trade ties with China. Finnish architects have actively participated in the construction wave in China, undertaking various architectural practices. China, a large country in Eastern Asia with an ancient civilization, differs significantly from Finland in many aspects. Forced into its path of modernization by imperialist invaders in the mid-19th century, China has since undergone wars and searches for national liberation, emerging from the political fanaticism of Mao’s era. Today, it has evolved into the second-largest economic body in the world, next to the United States.

Following the economic reform in 1978, rapid urbanization and the development of the real estate market have led to a construction boom in numerous Chinese cities. China continues to push ahead with its urbanization and maintains a strong demand for high-quality buildings. Chinese architects must deal with an entirely different scale than many other parts of the world. In 2010, rapid urbanization in China brought about two billion square meters of construction area per year. As Chinese academician Cheng Taining put it, “When other countries discuss architectural design problems in a single project or area, we have cities constantly sprouting up.” This dynamic environment presents unique challenges and opportunities for architects working in China.

By 2016, China’s urbanization rate had surpassed fifty percent, indicating further growth potential compared to developed countries. At the same time, the number of architects in China remains lower than in the developed West. As the construction market in Europe and the US approaches saturation,

9 Kettunen and Alvstam, 2022.
10 According to the World Bank (2021), the U.S. GDP in 2021 was about USD 23 trillion, and China’s GDP in 2021 was approximately USD 18 trillion.
11 Jiang and Zhang, 2010.
13 The data released by China’s National Bureau of Statistics in 2016 indicates that China’s urbanization rate reached 57.35 percent. In comparison, urbanization rates in developed countries typically hover around 70 percent or even higher.
14 Estimating the exact size of the Chinese architectural community is challenging. Statistics often focus on the number of Chinese architects who have obtained the Grand A Licensed Architect qualification, a rigorous examination required for an architectural license. However, the actual number of employed architects in China is much larger, as many architects working in the country may not have passed this exam. Therefore, figures indicating a shortage of architects in China may be exaggerated. For example, during the Monditalia exhibition organized by OMA at the Venice Biennale in 2014, a survey presented data suggesting there was one architect for
emerging-market countries like China have become attractive destinations for new construction projects. Many international architects view the Chinese architectural design market as a land of opportunities based on consideration of the country’s strengths in terms of population size, manufacturing-based economic growth, and urbanization potential. The boom in the Chinese architectural market has attracted architects from Europe, Japan, and the United States, whose iconic works have reshaped the skylines of Chinese cities. However, despite the presence of millions of people and numerous instances of new structures, the cities in China where these Finnish architects’ designs are located are not often highlighted in Finland.

While the early exploration of China by the Finnish architectural community, represented by sizable Finnish engineering firms, originated in the 1980s, most of the exposure of Finnish architects to China has occurred since 2000. Today, Finnish architects have completed projects in Chengdu, Nanjing, Fuzhou, and Wuxi, among other cities. These projects include large public buildings, small-scale villas and pavilions, and even art installations. The process of creating architecture is inextricably linked to a society in which it is embedded, and public buildings are inevitably associated with a given place’s cultural traditions and social agendas.

Meanwhile, Finnish architects construct various discourses, same as they coordinate the relationship between designs and contexts at a level of practice, such as architectural forms and materials. The discursive construction process of Finnish architects, as well as their design philosophy in practice, is another benchmark that distinguishes them from other international architects working in China. When Finnish architects first came to China, they took note of the architectural symbolism addressed in the Chinese context. Finnish architects are confronted with a dual need to maintain their identities and communicate with local contexts. For Finnish architects, customized discourses have become crucial to mediating multiple demands confronting cultural and social differences.

In the field of academic research, Finnish architects’ projects in China represent a significant fraction of Finland’s architectural exports and growth potential. However, this subject has received relatively less attention for academic discussion until now. The international cases of Finnish architectural firms have been mentioned in the Finnish media from time to time. There are also reports presented within the Finnish architectural community, reviews by architects and engineers of their own experiences, and research conducted by economic geographers using Finnish architectural firms as examples to study the international expansion of small firms. Nonetheless, a comprehensive academic exploration of Finnish architects’ endeavors in China has been somewhat limited, making it an area with untapped research potential.

every 40,000 people in China. In comparison, many European countries have a higher density of architects, with Finland having one architect for every 1,662 people and Italy having one architect for every 414 people. However, it is essential to note that this data highlights the scarcity of professional architects in China, where the proportion of architects in the total population is much lower than in developed countries (Rizzardi and Zhang, 2018, p. 17).

15 Ibelings, Bessard and de Ru, 2012.
16 Laakso, 2014.
17 Alaily-Matta et al., 2018.
18 e.g., Aromaa, 2019; 2022.
19 Savolainen, 2010.
In many previous studies of international architectural practices, exported designs have often been treated as homogeneous, replicable phenomena (e.g., the Bilbao effect), neglecting the vast differences in architectural practices in different social contexts. Star architects and well-known architectural firms are credited with contributing significantly to the proliferation of iconic buildings worldwide. However, such studies often overlook the specificities of architectural practices and the influence of cultural contexts in different regions. In the case of Finnish architecture, previous studies have primarily focused on the relationship between Finland's domestic context and Finnish architectural thinking, highlighting its regional features but sometimes overlooking its universal principles. Chinese scholars have conducted overall studies on international architects working in China, including architects from America, Europe, and Japan. However, these studies generally aim to create a basic timeline of foreign architects' development in China and provide an overview of their achievements. Within the existing scholarship, there is little academic attention dedicated to the results of Finnish architects' international practices, let alone a detailed analysis of a specific architectural design export destination like China.

Therefore, this dissertation focuses on the research gap between several areas of extant literature, including 1) the limited research on the international practices of Finnish architects, 2) the lack of a refined categorization in studying international architects practicing in China, and 3) the oversimplified perception of international architectural practice as a homogeneous and symbolic extension worldwide. To fill this gap, the dissertation situates itself in the global space shared by Finland and China, providing an external perspective on Finnish architecture as a recognizable architectural community and China's cityscape developments and social changes. Rather than viewing globalized designs as anonymous and homogeneous activities controlled from afar, the study adopts an up-close perspective, examining the strategies and discourses of a specific category of architects. Through the analysis of various dimensions of Finnish architects' practices, discourse construction, cultural exchanges, and cooperation with Chinese partners, the research highlights that transnational architectural design is not merely a single cosmopolitan expansion but also encounters specific localized constraints.

This dissertation uses Finnish architects' cases as a medium to expand the understanding of Finnish architecture itself. By examining their projects and discourses, this study illuminates the richness and recent advancements in Finnish architecture and offers valuable insights into contemporary Finnish architectural design. By exploring Finnish architects' efforts and dialogues in China, this research enhances our understanding of how they navigate different contexts, reconcile their design traditions with the Chinese context, and generate new ideas.
The concepts of homogenization and heterogenization in globalization mainly originate from Appadurai (1990; 1996). According to Appadurai, the effects of globalization are dialectical, with the world moving towards convergence in certain aspects, while simultaneously accelerating specificity and localization in others. Appadurai’s framework highlights that while global flows of culture, technology, and capital may lead to certain elements of homogenization, the interactions and encounters between different cultures also give rise to new forms of heterogeneity and localized expressions, resulting in a complex and dynamic process of globalization.

Furthermore, this exploration reveals the connections between today’s Finnish architecture, rooted in various social contexts, and its historical achievements. Ultimately, this study helps illustrate a comprehensive view of the design industry and sheds light on how architects relate to various social and economic forms. The reflection of Finnish architecture in China highlights the shared features of contemporary architecture, contributing to the understanding of the simultaneous processes of homogenization and heterogenization unfolding in a globalized world. Through the lens of Finnish architects’ experiences in China, this research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of the global architectural landscape and its impact on local practices and traditions.

1.1 Research Questions

Finnish architects have formed a diverse community with identifiable commonalities and vernacular traditions. It can be argued that Finnish architecture is closely tied to Finland’s national image within the discourse of modernist architecture. However, when exporting architecture, Finnish architects must explore uncharted territories and confront foreign cultures. They need to consider the relationship between their identities and the social contexts in which their designs are situated and be prepared to face unexpected circumstances. This detachment between architects and building contexts provides a new dimension of cultural complexity and the possibility of cultural exchanges.

Paradoxical questions emerge when Finnish architects find themselves in unfamiliar environments, working on projects of social and symbolic significance. While their design concepts may still stem from Finnish architects’ consistent creative visions, the social relations that realize transnational buildings are far beyond a nation-state’s boundaries. When architects meticulously study local characters and embed their designs in a local context (e.g., landscape, climate, or cultural metaphor), the final outcomes can be different from their works at home. Similarly, when Finnish architects attempt to explain their designs, a picturesque architectural discourse may not be sufficient to articulate international projects, especially for buildings in locations significantly different from Finland.

Therefore, this study aims to present the findings of an investigation into the design thinking, design collaboration, and discursive construction processes of Finnish architects practicing in China. The primary focus of this research is to explore how these Finnish architects integrate information, knowledge, design creation, and discourses into their practices. By conducting a comprehensive study involving meticulous observations, analysis of Finnish architects’
discourses, and careful examination of their design outcomes, this research seeks to address the following primary research question:

How can Finnish architecture—an architectural tradition often associated with Finland’s own identity and imagination—reconcile with the Chinese context at the levels of practice and discourse?

The primary research question, which focuses on studying the factors influencing Finnish architectural design in the Chinese context, also simultaneously implies another dimension: Finnish architects in China may continue to employ many of the same design methods and discursive principles as in their domestic practices. These changes and constants in Finnish architectural design are reflected in design outcomes and in coordinating with Finnish architects’ Chinese clients, design partners, consultants, and other participants. Therefore, the secondary research question, which provides a complementary perspective to the primary research question, is as follows:

What unchanging Finnish design principles can we observe by studying Finnish architectural designs produced in the Chinese context?

Building on a comprehensive analysis of Finnish architects’ empirical design processes in China, and informed by an in-depth analysis of Finnish architects’ corpus, I can demonstrate that the cases of Finnish architects in China exhibit the universal principles and openness that Finnish architects have adhered to, which remain consistent across social relations, cultural backgrounds, and other external conditions. Compared to their designs at home, the architectural designs of Finnish architects in China show differentiated characteristics that have the potential to significantly reshape the oversimplified understanding of Finnish architecture as a mere “regional tradition” in the extant research literature. By incorporating examples of architectural designs of different types, scales, locations, and cultural contexts, my study aims to broaden the arguments and evidence about Finnish architectural design.

At the same time, by investigating the two research questions above, the cases of Finnish architects in China challenge the view in much of the extant literature that considering the proliferation of architectural design in global spaces is a homogenization driven by international capital.27 In other words, Finnish architects’ practices in China provide fine-grained evidence of cultural exchange on a global scale. By integrating modernist principles with their own design preferences, Finnish architects develop a distinctive architectural language that reflects the essence of Finnish sensibility. They continue to embody a Finnish specificity in their designs in China, which is expressed through the amalgamation of design methods in practice and a narrative routine in discourse. This current

27 e.g., Ibelings, 1998; Ibelings, Bessard and de Ru, 2012; Sklair, 2006; 2017.
This section analyzes relevant studies to provide essential background knowledge for understanding the meaning, internal logic, and impact of Finnish architects’ practices in China. It identifies concepts and arguments that clarify the research theme, including theoretical concepts, empirical evidence, and public media discussions. Several categories of literature have significant relevance, although they are primarily outside the specific domain of studying the practices of Finnish architects in China. These studies can be broadly categorized into two groups: those conducted by Finnish researchers on the international practices of Finnish architects, and those conducted within Chinese studies focusing on foreign architects practicing in China.

First, under the subject of Finnish architects’ international practices, overviews in media and publications have been conducted to compile historical facts and analysis, including summaries of key architects and their works, a survey led by the Finnish Association of Architects (SAFA), and unfolding accounts from the perspective of Finnish construction and engineering firms. In academic studies, Kettunen, Oinas, and Kalliomäki recently examined the paths, competitiveness, and challenges of Finnish design cultures with local Chinese societies and how these interactions shape and negotiate with each other.

For instance, using local materials in architectural design is a localized approach that many international architects, including Finnish architects, use extensively in their practices. What is special about Finnish architects, however, is that they have developed the choice of materials as a medium for cultural dialogue. The decision to use certain building materials (e.g., bamboo or ceramics) is more like a holistic imagination of Chinese cultural characteristics. Additionally, Finnish architects’ external communication discourses reveal their unique figurative, narrative tradition, which is closely tied to Finnish images of Finland. We can discover how Finnish architects observe people’s daily lives in another place, experiment with new materials, and construct discourses that allow more ordinary people to experience architecture emotionally.

Therefore, unlike the discourses and practices of many Western architects, which imply a “global culture-China” relationship, Finnish architects working in China may represent more of a “Finland-China” one-to-one relationship. I propose the hypothesis that by studying the cases of Finnish architects in China and exploring the two research questions posed above, this dissertation can better reveal the spirit of Finnish architectural design—an inclusive internationalism—and its accessibility and adaptability to different cultural and geographical contexts compared to its widely known regional characters.

1.2 Relevant Literature Survey
faced by Finnish architecture and urban planning (AUP) firms in the global marketplace, including cases in China, by interviewing Finnish architects with various international experiences.\(^{31}\) Finnish female architects Saija Hollmén, Jenni Reuter, and Helena Sandman have practiced extensively in Africa and Southeast Asia and have accumulated a wealth of experience in humanitarian architecture based on local social conditions and climate. In Hollmén’s dissertation, she gave a complete account of her experiences with building assistance in Africa, mainly in designing schools, from the perspective of anthropological research.\(^ {32}\) Her study shows how Finnish architects venture into uncharted territory, collaborate with locals, and translate architectural practices into interactions between cultures.\(^ {33}\) These studies shed light on Finnish architects’ international practices, both as a whole and from individual perspectives, and contribute to our understanding of Finnish architects’ experiences in China. The exploration of various sources offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of Finnish architectural practices beyond China, providing a broader context for understanding their approaches to international design and cultural exchanges.

Second, a category of literature examines the practice of international architects in China from a Chinese perspective.\(^ {34}\) Before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, modernist architecture was introduced to China by Western architects who practiced in China and Chinese architects who returned from studying in the West.\(^ {35}\) After the early entry of architects from Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States, the emergence of European architects in China, who tend to focus on cultural buildings, marked the further development of Chinese society and the country’s quest for higher quality designs.\(^ {36}\) These studies of international architects’ practices in China provide historical context and contemporary characteristics. Still, they do not specifically address architects from a particular country or design genre who practice in China.

A sketchy or neglected part of these studies, which are conducted from broader perspectives, is Finnish architects working in China. The practices of Finnish architects in China as a separate category have received relatively limited attention in the extant literature. In terms of architectural history research, the study of the practice of Finnish architects in China contributes to the ongoing discussions of design philosophy and thought within the Finnish architectural community. Within the literature that examines the processes of cultural exchange on a global scale, this current study provides an insightful exploration of the intricate process and nuances involved in the communication of cultures. Moreover, when viewed through the lens of transnational economic and corporate exchange, the experiences of Finnish architects in China offer compelling examples of international collaboration among design firms, presenting insights derived from the collaborative efforts and inevitable tensions of different design entities.

\(^{31}\) Kettunen, Oinas, and Kalliomäki, 2021.
\(^{32}\) Hollmén, 2020.
\(^{33}\) ibid.
\(^{34}\) Xue, 2002; 2006; 2012.
\(^{35}\) Denison and Guang, 2008.
\(^{36}\) Xue, 2002; 2006.
Nevertheless, due to the scarcity of studies on Finnish architects in China, my aim is to gather the existing literature and organize it into different topics. The subject of Finnish architects in China involves a multifaceted spectrum of knowledge, which I have summarized into four categories. First, there are studies on Finnish architecture itself that sought to analyze the design thinking of Finnish architects, the history of the development of Finnish modernist architecture, and the involvement of Finnish architecture in the construction of Finnish identity. Second, the topic of Finnish architectural exports has been extensively discussed in the existing literature and in the Finnish architectural community, which has resulted in various opinions. Third, the contextual theory of architectural discourse can be used to provide theoretical support for the study of Finnish architects’ discourses in China. Lastly, the fourth category includes research literature on architectural firms and globalized design approaches, encompassing design networks based on international division of labor systems and studies of local Chinese design firms. Rather than provide a systematic overview of all previous work, my aim is to identify a collection of concepts and arguments that can guide my empirical studies and analysis.

1.2.1. Finnish Architectural Identity
First, as the modern movement went hand in hand with Finland’s independence, the spirit of modernism has become deeply rooted in Finnish architecture. In the early 20th century, the newly independent country needed to provide universally applicable living standards and sanitary conditions for society at large. In Finland, functionalism became an interchangeable term with modernism, which could better respond to the developmental requirements of Finnish society. In Finnish architect Aulis Blomstedt’s opinion, the international tradition has prevented Finnish architecture from falling into a “mire of provincialism” and has connected Finland to the global architectural community. Modernism became an emancipating force in many aspects of Finnish society, and its lasting influence has been felt throughout the intellectual class.

Likewise, Finnish architecture is closely related to Finland’s national image and identity building, while Finland’s position on the periphery of the Western world, and its relatively untouched, natural environments allow it to dialectically absorb and improve on international architectural trends and eventually develop its own tradition. Finland’s vast spaces, sparse population, and love of rural life have shaped Finnish architects’ design concepts. Finnish architecture is tightly rooted in Finland’s geographical specialty and climate—a country with lakes, forests, long dark winters, and short but cool summers. The medium that triggered the Finnish architects’ design intuition is their abstract aesthetic experience of Finnish nature. A common explanation considers Finnish architecture to be the visualized form of landscape perception. People

38 Connah, 2005.
41 Wickberg, 1965; Suhonen, 1978; Mikkola, 2009; Mukala, 2012.
42 Čeferin, 2003; Niskanen, 2011.
in Finland feel that forests and lakes “cultivate” architects’ minds and potentially establish a morphologic connection with architectural structures.\textsuperscript{44} In Finland, the connection with nature is seen as characteristically Finnish and as an inherent spiritual core of the Finnish way of life.\textsuperscript{45}

Juhani Pallasmaa further elaborated on the regional specificity of Finnish design, focusing on everyday life, and distancing from the idea of consumerism.\textsuperscript{46} He also emphasized the phenomenological perspective of Finnish architecture, which involves materials, light, shadows, and details to establish a profound connection between the human body and space.\textsuperscript{47} The choice of building materials in Finnish architecture is not merely a functionalist decision but develops as one of the themes convening aesthetic expressions. Building materials are designed to convey the sensibility of natural textures, in which Finnish architecture reveals its appreciation of everyday life. Therefore, Finnish architecture is invariably under an "alternative modernism" with regional features in international architectural discussions. Finnish architect’s works have also served as important examples and references for Frampton’s discussion of his critical regionalism.\textsuperscript{48} However, in dealing with the mobility that characterizes today’s world, a one-dimensional, place-bound discourse was inadequate to elaborate on the complexity of globalized architectural firms’ practices across different places. It is worth noting that while a collective narrative paradigm is prevalent in discussing Finnish architecture, there is also significant individual diversity in the work of Finnish architects.

1.2.2. Finnish Opinions on Architectural Exports

Regarding the topic of architectural exports, the Finnish architectural community has expressed a variety of views, which can be broadly divided into three levels: 1) representing a vigilance against the consumerism brought about by globalization, 2) proposing a reflection from the perspective of preserving cultural diversity, and 3) seeing architectural exports as an opportunity for progress and updating discourses.

In the biennial reviews organized by the Alvar Aalto Academy, the Finnish Association of Architects, and the Museum of Finnish Architecture, a series of projects are selected by a jury to present the best qualities of Finnish architecture in the past two years.\textsuperscript{49} The articles compiled with the projects reflect the latest thoughts from architectural critics in Finland. Though several invited jurors still have relatively high comments on contemporary Finnish architecture, there are also concerned voices about the future, particularly regarding challenges and new actions.

In a review published in 2012, Pallasmaa, in his article “Is Finnish Architecture Losing Its Direction?”, called on Finnish architecture to return to “realism.” He expressed concern that architecture is losing touch with reality and instead responding to virtual fantasies in the globalized world. Pallasmaa

\textsuperscript{44} Norberg-Schulz, 1979.
\textsuperscript{45} Čeferin, 2003; Mukala, 2012.
\textsuperscript{46} Pallasmaa, 2007.
\textsuperscript{47} Pallasmaa, 1996.
\textsuperscript{48} Frampton, 1983.
\textsuperscript{49} Pallasmaa, 2012.
\textsuperscript{50} ibid.
pointed out that some countries, like the Netherlands and Denmark, have lost their modernist traditions, and their architecture has become commercialized imagery. Although Pallasmaa does not advocate for a specific national architecture, he expects that Finnish architecture can strive to express the “ambiguous and problematic nature of contemporary culture and life” rather than merely pursuing “aesthetic elegance.” As a former juror of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, Pallasmaa understands the importance of intellectual aesthetics and a critical attitude in architecture to convey social meaning. His critique is based on considering how Finnish architecture can be rewarded with higher artistic achievements. According to Pallasmaa, architecture should resist consumerist culture, the rootlessness of identities, and flowing images, all of which are becoming prevalent in the globalized world.

Also, the Finnish architectural community had concerns about exporting designs from the point of view of preserving cultural diversity. In 2010, the publication *Arkkitehti* focused on several projects done internationally by Finnish architects. Jouni Kaipia expressed in his article that he believes architectural exports are a historical norm. The history of human culture is based on cultural inputs and outputs, and architecture is undoubtedly part of this grand picture. Nevertheless, he also values architectural differentiation based on regional character and diversity of lifestyles. As people’s daily lives converge around the world, architectural exports are, in a way, undermining such diversity. Kaipia is looking at the world from the perspective of a European traveler, and his attitude implies nostalgia for pre-modern vernacular architecture. From cultural pluralism, Kaipia expresses a caution against contemporary architecture that represents the world’s sameness, and the collective memory that architecture carries in society is unexportable.

“Some design exports are, of course, sincere efforts and worthy of support. (...) At best, these projects are not about exports; sometimes you simply need an outsider’s point of view to demonstrate the worth of local models. Or—can one, from time to time, even in such unselfish activity, distinguish a hint of instructive neo-colonialism and Western self-righteousness: as they don’t understand it themselves.”

Kaipia’s view implies that some architectural works exported from Western countries to developing areas function almost as a form of Westernized “neo-colonial buildings,” wherein wealthier countries exert dominance over poorer ones through their prevalent cultural products. European colonial activities have deconstructed and reconstructed traditions in many parts of the world, and modernist architecture (in a way) has accelerated the process of cultural colonization. Kaipia’s article appeals to an architect’s cultural responsibility and humanity. Architects, on the one hand, have joined the enormous, economically rational global

51 ibid.
52 ibid.
54 ibid.
55 ibid.
expansion of capital. The introduction of a world culture inevitably impacts original local traditions, resulting in a culture that exists in a stratified state.

On the other hand, Finnish architects are also obligated to create a sense of belonging and relevance to daily life due to their professional ethics and belief in adapting to the specific environment, regardless of a project’s location. However, this view, like the long-standing national-international debates in Finnish architectural history, may oversimplify the complex reality of cultural interactions, overlooking the hybrid nature of culture and failing to display the multifaceted process of cultural “invasion” and “resistance.” As Arjun Appadurai argued, the center-periphery way of thinking is no longer applicable to understanding the globalization of human culture and economy; the connection between the local and the global is not necessarily dichotomous but shows the intertwined state of homogenization and heterogenization. According to Arif Dirlik, globalization is accompanied by a sequence of localizations in which international capitals and cultures continuously negotiate with local societies.

In a biennial review published in 2014, Anni Vartola expressed her opinion that Finnish architecture should adjust its discourse to a world dominated by economic principles. In her view, the “original cultural journalism,” namely discourses significantly decided by curators or editors, is fading. As Vartola put it, this journalism is being gnawed away by the frantic profit-seeking of an increasingly concentrated media industry. This is to say that if globalization is an inevitable tendency, Finnish architecture needs to update discursive approaches for a more pragmatic explanation. She also emphasized the need for Finnish architectural critics to be open-minded and prepared for forthcoming changes:

“If Finnish architecture is seriously aiming to conquer the international design world, then we have to accept that ‘drawing money’—making architecture for the design market—is almost all right. By the same token, we must accept the values of new hardcore architecture and turn a blind eye to violations of the old-fashioned Finnish principles of democratic progress and shared good.”

Vartola’s opinion does not endorse aesthetically commercialized architecture that resembles a franchise store nor advocates any authoritarian architecture. Instead, according to Connah, there was an “oscillation” of architectural discussions in Finland between the “national” and the “international” (2005, p. 52). In 1967, Arkitehti invited several influential architects, including Alvar Aalto, Sven Markelius, Aulis Blomstedt, Arne Korso, Bengt Lundsten, Arno Ruusuvuori, and Reima Pietilä, to express their opinions on the topic of “national-international”. The debate was based on the awareness that global trends have increasingly influenced Finnish architecture since its golden age in the 1950s. These modernist gurus expressed little concern about the “invasion” of foreign cultures. In fact, they were happy to see this international influence as part of necessary communication. Aalto (1967), for example, believes that examining architectural design through a lens that pits national and international aspects against each other is “superficial” or “elementary” and will not stand the test of time. In 1993, however, concerns about losing the distinctiveness of Finnish traditions appeared in the architectural journal Arkitehti. Elissa Aalto (1993) mentioned that Finland seems to be losing its original Finnishness and melting into a general pan-European unity due to increased international interactions. Georg Grotenfelt (1993) proposed the “two paths” for Finland: the urban life of the “big world” from the south and the traditional life close to nature. As he concluded: “Only when we (Finnish architects) dare tread this familiar ground and grow to our full height can we self-confidently walk on the other path and, without compromising ourselves, draw on the gifts of the South.” This discussion of nationality and internationality has been going on in the Finnish architectural community for a long time.

Appadurai 1990; 1996.
Vartola, 2014.
ibid.
ibid.
it emphasizes the liberation of the mind and calls for an understanding of the universal business rules behind contemporary artistic activities. In this sense, Finnish architectural discourses should not lead to self-censorship but should embrace a form of realism in practice, where Finnish architects actively participate in the global competitions of the design market.

Holding an international architectural design competition, in essence, is an event that invites international architects to produce influential buildings that become displayed in the media, by which clients aim to showcase their “taste” and “position.” Therefore, globalized architects’ reputation and brand image often form a mutually reinforcing partnership with the media image of their design projects. A purely cultural critique is insufficient to fully assess the consequences of exported architecture. In Vartola’s opinion, conventional ideas that doubt architectural iconicity are no longer feasible for current architectural exports. The Finnish people and their architectural community may need a new perspective on these newly generated architectural works in other countries completed by Finnish architects.

Pallasmaa’s critique is based on artistic criteria, and he expects Finnish architecture to achieve higher artistic excellence. His view hints at an underlying concern that Finnish architecture might be slipping into a kind of “do-gooders’ architecture,” which means the architects may lack a socially critical perspective and blur the purity of the art of architecture. As Pallasmaa stated in one of his earlier articles about the relationship he perceived between architecture and art, “it is my opinion that architecture, like the other arts, is a product of the conflict of pressures in cultural reality and the struggle for autonomy inherent in art.” Similarly, Vartola’s suggestion responds to the inevitable social reality in the postmodernism era. She worries that Finnish architecture is steeped in a repetitive self-affirmation, while public opinions do not fully endorse the willingness to engage in architects’ globalized practices.

At first glance, Vartola and Pallasmaa’s proposals on how Finnish architecture can further develop in an increasingly globalized and consumerist world seem to be opposing. However, these two opinions can be reconciled through market-driven economic activities. For example, it is ironic that many Pritzker Architecture Prize laureates have experienced a more successful business trajectory after receiving the title. They establish their brands, receive numerous commissions, and have opportunities to participate in competitions with high visibility. In a way, this scenario proves that artistic reputation per se has enormous commercial value. For Finnish architects to realize the vision suggested by Pallasmaa, this aspiration ultimately needs to be based on a wide range of practices, which is what Vartola advocates, namely that Finnish architects need to look for as many opportunities as possible.

1.2.3. A Dual Knowledge Thesis: Architectural Discourses

In this dissertation, Finnish architects’ discourses become data that can be analyzed to understand how they think about design in
China and how they deal with cultural conflicts between their own identity and the Chinese context. In general, much research has been conducted on architects’ discourses. The feasibility of architects engaging in discursive constructions stems from the fact that language itself is an open, codifiable system. Although in architecture, a discipline dominated by visual perception, language is often considered inadequate for expressing exact meanings or the richness of sensory experiences, Adrian Forty argued that interpretation can likewise be understood as an entry point into the formal language of architecture, where discourse per se constitutes another reality and becomes an approach equal to other senses when one perceives architecture. Discourse, per se, has become an indispensable element of design and a way of constituting architecture as media representations or interpretable objects. In her well-known book “Privacy and Publicity,” Beatriz Colomina illustrates, through the case of Le Corbusier, that modernist architects have deeply engaged the mass media, consisting of films and publications. Such engagement with the media has strengthened the industrialized architectural profession.

Magali Larson brilliantly articulates the process of constructing architects’ discourses and where such discursive expressions can be integrated into architectural practices. For Larson, architects have to ideologically “double code” their designs for two kinds of audiences: clients and experts within the architectural profession. Expanding on Larson’s viewpoint, Kris Olds, an economic geographer, highlights the existence of “two overlapping networks” in the architectural field, namely the “business network” and the “professional network.” Moreover, Olds draws attention to the unequal power distribution in the two discourse networks, where the “intellectualsia-managed institutions” wield more significant influence in defining the discourse of architecture.

Also, this view of “double knowledge” has been combined with the way of writing within the architectural profession. Tom Spector and Rebecca Damron, in their book that analyzes and guides architects’ writings, explain in detail how architects’ discourses should be constructed in different contexts based on an internal and external dichotomy. An internal discourse system confronts fellow architects, educators, critics, and theorists who aim to improve and redefine the discipline. In contrast, the external discourse system engages outsiders, such as clients, engineers, contractors, officials, and the public, with whom architects must collaborate to realize a building. Therefore, two ways of reasoning coexist in architectural design, what Adrian Snodgrass and Richard Coyne call a “dual knowledge thesis.”

Stuart Hall summarized three approaches to explain how representations of meaning work through language: 1) language can reflect the true meaning of the existing world, 2) language can be used by authors to communicate their particular intentions and share them with others, and 3) the material world itself does not have meaning, and people construct the meanings they want to convey through language (Hall, 1997, pp. 24–26). Hall’s three approaches to understanding how representations of meaning work through language offer valuable insights into the complexity of communication and the construction of meaning.
Architects’ internal discourses reflect a “real” design process that is often “subjective,” “idiosyncratic,” and “dialogical.”\textsuperscript{80} The discourse presented by architects to the outside world is usually “rational,” “narrative,” and “logical.”\textsuperscript{81}

Nevertheless, the division between internal and external discourses is not clear-cut. More often than not, these two discursive systems overlap and are mixed. When studying architects’ discourses, researchers naturally face the task of analyzing to determine the authenticity of their words and discern their true intentions. Architects’ affirmative discourses do not mean that designs are pre-determined or that architects have followed a preordained sequence of logical steps in their design processes, nor do they mean that designs are merely answers to specific problems.\textsuperscript{82} Furthermore, discursive formations have made architecture a representative system. Architects’ discourses are often filled with easy-to-understand visions.\textsuperscript{83} By borrowing specific graphics, structures that may be unfamiliar to many people can be interpreted in an intelligible way. The openness of language allows architects to borrow symbols as a medium of communication, creating an evocative sense of place. In other words, architects use signifiers accumulated in history and culture to convey a correlation with suggestive features and foster a sense of imagination.\textsuperscript{84}

When Finnish architects work in a new cultural context, they must make considerable efforts to communicate and negotiate effectively and to ensure that their designs reflect the appropriate values. The arguments that unfold within this system enhance a building’s credibility and persuasiveness. Spontaneous and imaginative approaches to architectural forms are also widespread in Chinese society, and people often rely on discursive interpretations to understand architecture.\textsuperscript{85} In sum, a perspective of duality can be applied in examining the narratives of Finnish architects, as well as in analyzing the discourses surrounding the creation and evaluation of architectural works in Chinese culture.

1.2.4. Finnish Architectural Identity
Design Production and Transnational Design Collaboration

Finnish architects’ works in China—like other design projects—rely on basic organizational models of design production, and there is a wealth of existing literature on design organizations and networks, covering three strands of relevant knowledge. The first strand is the research on architectural firms, most of which involved investigations conducted by sociologists or architectural
researchers driven in a sociological way. Many American scholars, including Blau, Gutman, Larson, Cuff, and Deamer, have dialectically analyzed the architectural profession and offices.\(^\text{86}\) These studies provide a demystifying view, producing sober observations of the “immaterial” aspects of the architecture industry. Gutman pointed out the architect profession’s entrepreneurial attributes while indicating the vulnerability of architectural firms to a market economy and the trend of the decentralization of architects’ responsibilities.\(^\text{87}\) The development of the architecture industry has transformed architects into network nodes in leadership positions rather than sole creators who design all the parts alone.\(^\text{88}\) The subcontracting of design scopes marks a modernist tradition focused on a total building product and its functionality.\(^\text{89}\) Cuff demonstrates the typical practices of design education and provides a detailed analysis of how an architecture firm works and organizes.\(^\text{90}\)

These studies provide a basis for understanding the organizational culture of architectural firms and exploring the behavioral motivations behind architects. While scientific and technical fields have evolved, architects still follow the operating principles and methods mentioned in these studies in practice, including model workshops, panel presentations, construction site visits, etc.\(^\text{91}\) However, these studies do not extend to other disciplines related to architectural practice, such as structure, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), etc., with which architects form a network essential to building design. While these studies contribute to our understanding of architectural firms’ working and managerial methods, we know little about how different architectural offices collaborate and how architects negotiate with partner firms globally.

The second strand of studies addresses the relationship between architectural firms’ organizational structures and design categories. These studies illustrate that architectural firms that present design thinking, cultural meaning, and media influences in their works are organized differently from those that make mass-produced designs and focus on large and complex projects. As early as the 1940s, American architectural theorist Hitchcock attempted to distinguish between designs and architectural firms.\(^\text{92}\) According to Hitchcock, the production method is the criterion for classifying post-war architecture, which can be categorized into mass-produced buildings and architectural works with design ideas and cultural connotations.\(^\text{93}\)

This classification, based on the size of an architectural firm and the artistry of a design, is carried over to the study of international architectural practice. Like Hitchcock’s argument, McNeill named large architectural companies “faceless” corporations and called idea-oriented offices “boutique firms.”\(^\text{94}\) These smaller but higher-profile architectural practices focus on specific areas, and large architectural


\(^{87}\) Gutman, 2010.

\(^{88}\) Deamer, 2015; 2020.

\(^{89}\) Gutman, 1988, pp.13–22.

\(^{90}\) Cuff, 1991.

\(^{91}\) See, e.g, a study of the hand-model based working methods in the architectural office of OMA (Yaneva, 2005).

\(^{92}\) Hitchcock, 1947.

\(^{93}\) ibid.


\(^{95}\) Allen, 2012.

\(^{96}\) Coxe et al., 1986.
companies' work is more involved in constructing design culture and discourse.\textsuperscript{98} Boutique firms can conduct their architectural practices considerably without a purely profit-oriented approach. Unlike large commercial firms, creative architects constantly seek opportunities to break out and experiment with new concepts in new projects. These smaller, architect-driven firms often produce “strong ideas” and emphasize originality and high-quality designs.\textsuperscript{96} At the same time, prominent, grouped, integrated design agencies cover multiple disciplines in the architectural design process.\textsuperscript{97} From an organizational structure perspective, large companies have a clear hierarchy of roles, and a chain of command conducts their decisions.\textsuperscript{98} Large architectural firms tend to have more formalized features, such as rules, personnel regulations, and more advanced and cutting-edge design tools.\textsuperscript{99} And large offices may be better equipped to handle unexpected situations in complex international projects, such as project delays or clients’ inability to pay design fees on time. Therefore, sizable corporate offices are considered reliable in providing comprehensive services to their clients, especially in demanding public structures.\textsuperscript{100}

These studies provided helpful insights into architectural firms’ general characteristics. Such an analysis of different architectural firms contributes to understanding the architecture industry’s heterogeneous organizational forms and enhances the precision of this academic discussion. Nevertheless, there is insufficient research addressing how these two types of organizations collaborate and influence each other. Many studies on iconic architecture lack an examination of the detailed process of how architects interact with other design participants. They remain at the level of semiotic analysis of an abstract correlation between landmarks and social power structures and tend to leave a partial impression.\textsuperscript{101} An oversimplified classification may lead to the misalignment of public buildings as personal works of a few star architects and ignore the variety of organizational structures involved in the design production process. In contrast, the cases of Finnish architects in China can help to better illustrate the diverse connections between small, architect-led architectural firms and large, integrated institutions.

Furthermore, the emergence of worldwide iconic architecture is a product of the globalization of capital and a symbol of the transnational capitalist class.\textsuperscript{102} Paolo Tombesi highlights a market-oriented global design network trend, which involves relocating professional structures to countries with lower production costs.\textsuperscript{103} According to Tombesi, in recent years, architectural firms in developed countries, such as the United States and Australia, have taken advantage of the inequality in labor costs between countries and assigned design documentation (which requires massive repetitive manual work) to their subsidiaries in Asian countries.\textsuperscript{104} International construction companies can recruit professionals on more favorable terms compared

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{97} Hitchcock, 1947; McNeill, 2009; Allen, 2012.
\bibitem{98} Coxe et al., 1986.
\bibitem{100} Coxe et al, 1986.
\bibitem{101} Larson, 2015.
\bibitem{102} Sklair, 2006; 2017.
\bibitem{103} Tombesi 2001.
\bibitem{104} ibid.
\bibitem{105} ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
to what local companies can offer, enabling them to tap into a global pool of human resources. In Tombesi's argument, the architectural design industry also possesses some characteristics of a labor-intensive sector where labor prices become a critical factor in determining the location of a product's production.

With the refinement of the international architecture industry, design as a service trade is not necessarily a long-term, complete involvement in a transnational project but possibly in a partial and contingent way. However, the globalization process of architectural design is multifactorial, and the labor cost factor alone cannot entirely account for the free flow of the design task of technical routines worldwide. In this respect, the current study analyzes the distribution of design tasks among different teams using the design cooperation network of Finnish architects in China (see Chapter Six).

Third, most Finnish architects' practices in China are based on cooperation with local Chinese design firms. Knowledge is needed about the Local Design Institute (LDI) in China and how collaboration between international architects and LDIs works. More profound critical reflections in this field are still dominated by Chinese scholarship. Xue Qiuli, Ding Guanghui, and Li Feng's monographs in English provide a historical introduction to the origins of and changes to Chinese design institutes and their recent trends. Zhu Jianfei provides a general analysis of design institutes, pointing out the characteristics of Chinese design schools that combine individual architects and the collective and also emphasizing their inescapable position in studying contemporary Chinese architectural practice.

Meanwhile, risks and tensions between collaborating parties are inevitable in Chinese projects. In his doctoral dissertation, Cao Yang analyzed various stakeholders' interests and ethical dilemmas in China's current construction industry via numerous interviews and empirical data. These studies provide a particular perspective from within China, providing a wealth of analysis not yet widely known to researchers in English contexts. Jiang Yong's two books focus on the differences between China and mature developed countries (e.g., Europe, America, and Japan) regarding architecture industry systems, pointing out that China lacks a robust management system that can help architects ensure the quality of details during the deepening phase of a design. The shortcomings of these design institutes are also evident in their partnership with international architects, leading to various issues that are also analyzed in the current study with the help of Finnish architects' design cases in China.

1.3 Methodology

This dissertation examines a multi-participant phenomenon from an international perspective, including historical evolution, cross-cultural exchange, design thinking,
and architectural practice. It inevitably touches on media representations and geopolitical realms, making it difficult to use a single method alone. The research methodology I employ in this dissertation integrates discourse analysis and case studies in an attempt to capture the rich details and complexities of Finnish architects’ practices in China and let them increase architectural researchers’ understanding of the cultural implications of transnational building designs.

First, discourse analysis is the principal method used in this dissertation and the perspective that guides the analysis of the raw data. In a Foucauldian way, discourse is an issue of knowledge and power. Forms of discourse manifest the manners by which knowledge is employed in society (i.e., power) and become a non-institutional method of division and exclusion. Stuart Hall further explained that a discourse refers to a group of statements that provide a language for talking about—a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. This current study uses a discourse analysis method to trace the language and practices of Finnish architectural exports. As the concept of discourse can help investigate the origin of architectural meaning-making and relate it to architects' principles of action, the goal of this current study is to build an image of ideas and knowledge about the development of Finnish architecture in a globalized age and its responses to a Chinese context.

On the one hand, architects are the real players in the globalized practice of architecture. Empirical studies based on architects’ practical experiences provide a factual basis for theory development. This study does not attempt to specifically discuss and analyze conceptual definitions (e.g., “internationalism,” “critical regionalism,” or “postcolonialism”) or cultural traditions (e.g., “Finnishness” or “Chineseness”) or focuses on the discourse itself. On the other hand, in the design production process, architects have expertise and are entrusted with creating architectural designs. Architects have established professionalism through their internal discourses, allowing the architectural profession to present a high degree of autonomy. Analyzing architects’ discourse is an effective way to understand this autonomy in the architectural profession.

Moreover, it is the status quo that Finland and China are asymmetrical in terms of their stages of social development. As a developed country, Finland is currently ahead of China regarding its architecture industry and its practitioners’ professionalism. International architects’ practices in China essentially involve the introduction of more advanced knowledge and experience. This disparity during the social development stages further reinforces architects’ discursive power. Therefore, discourse analysis can provide evidence to dissect their ideas by unfolding discussions, debates, and critiques. This method helps develop a critical perspective instead of an exhaustive empirical summary and leaves a more open platform for subsequent research.

The corpus for discourse analysis mainly refers to Finnish architects' voices,
including their interviews, articles, design descriptions, and lectures. One of my primary resources includes ten in-depth interviews with architects and individuals who have been involved in the projects in China. Interviewees in this study included Chen Zongrui (then project manager of the SCAC, CCEDGC, interviewed in 2022), Fang Hai (then project coordinator of the Shadow Church project in Chengdu, professor, interviewed in 2021), Li Wei (project architect at PES-Architects, interviewed in 2022), Martin Lukasczyk (design director at PES-Architects, interviewed in 2021), Pekka Salminen (partner at PES-Architects, interviewed in 2021), Matti Sanaksenaho and Pirjo Sanaksenaho (partners at Sanaksenaho-Architects, interviewed in 2021), Tuomas Silvennoinen (partner at PES-Architects, interviewed in 2021), Markus Wikar (partner at Geometria, interviewed in 2021), Wu Hao (then architect at Geometria, interviewed in 2021), and Xu Zongwu (then chief architect of the CCEDGC, responsible for the SCAC, interviewed in 2022). One of the interviewees in this study is my supervising professor, Pirjo Sanaksenaho. Her participation was purely as a source of information about the CIPEA Villa No. 20 she designed. Her insights and experiences were treated as original data, distinct from her role as my professor. In particular, her participation did not influence the direction or findings of my independent research or the writing of my dissertation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Architectural Office(s)</th>
<th>Interviewees: Chief Architect(s)</th>
<th>Interviewees: Project Architect(s) or Primary Coordinator(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Chengdu ICON Tower</td>
<td>PES-Architects</td>
<td>Tuomas Silvennoinen</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Church of Shadows in Chengdu</td>
<td>Vesa Honkonen Arkkitehdit Ky</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Fang Hai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 CIPEA Villa No. 20 in Nanjing</td>
<td>Sanaksenaho Architects</td>
<td>Matti Sanaksenaho, Pirjo Sanaksenaho</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Moganshan Villa Group and Resort Hotel</td>
<td>Geometria</td>
<td>Markus Wikar</td>
<td>Wu Hao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Nanchang Grand Theater (NGT)</td>
<td>PES-Architects</td>
<td>Tuomas Silvennoinen</td>
<td>Martin Lukasczyk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Sino-Finnish Center in Nanjing (SFC)</td>
<td>PES-Architects</td>
<td>Pekka Salminen</td>
<td>Li Wei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Wuxi Grand Theater (WGT)</td>
<td>PES-Architects</td>
<td>Pekka Salminen</td>
<td>Martin Lukasczyk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Strait Art and Culture Center (SCAC)</td>
<td>PES-Architects</td>
<td>Pekka Salminen</td>
<td>Li Wei</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. List of interviewees involved in the study and the projects they mentioned about.
Data from interviews can effectively compensate for the one-sided or deterministic narrative approach that researchers may potentially take when using their own experiences. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted face-to-face, where I had the opportunity to ask additional questions. Part of the interviews was conducted in Chinese, and I carefully conducted and reviewed the Chinese-to-English translations to ensure that they were sufficiently faithful to the meaning of the original Chinese texts. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and then confirmed by the interviewees and are kept as appendixes of this thesis. These interviewees fall into two main categories: 1) principal designers who act as primary decision-makers, and 2) “job-captain” architects who act as managers and main coordinators. I used three categories of interview questions: 1) clients and business realities, 2) design scopes and collaborations, and 3) communication issues, with a focus on architects’ experiences working with collaborators and their opinions of design networks. The complete transcripts of my interviews can be found in the Appendix at the end of this dissertation.

Additionally, I conducted an extensive examination of recorded minutes and working documents, such as contracts, planning documents, email correspondences, online chat records, and meeting minutes. Employing a longitudinal approach, I was able to track specific design issues over time and observe the entire process from concept to completion. I also collected a wide range of published materials, including the Finnish architectural journal Arkkitehti, which serves as a prominent platform for architectural debates in Finland, and the archive of Finnish buildings. My data were further enriched by consulting a wide range of resources, including media coverage, academic articles, statistics, bid documents, and on-site architectural surveys.

To enhance the credibility of my data, I integrated existing studies from multiple sources in English, Finnish, and Chinese. As part of the design teams on projects in China led by Finnish architects, I compared the literature survey in different languages with my practical experiences, validating and corroborating the findings from my research. For these cases in China, my studying and working experience in Finland and my Chinese identity enabled me to acquire a “double vision,” which facilitates a holistic understanding that combines critical discourses and empirical facts. This familiarity with the subject matter and research context allowed me to grasp intricacies and subtleties that might be self-evident to me. However, I remained vigilant to potential personal biases and engaged in reflexivity throughout my research, seeking feedback from peers to ensure the objectivity and transparency of my findings.

In sum, this study analyzes and categorizes architects’ words, juxtaposing views that occur in different space-times within the framework of a general sociological perspective. It becomes evident that architects’ discourses are intricately linked to the historical contexts in which they exist, emphasizing the value of intertextuality. Consequently, this comparison reveals how discourses evolve across diverse social and
political landscapes. The discursive contrast helps to understand connections between the discussions on two scales: 1) detailed architectural debates, often referring to specific backgrounds, and 2) macro-sociological theories that underpin all empirical facts of global modernity.

Second, human behaviors and researchers’ learning processes are unpredictable and do not strictly follow existing rules. Architectural design, like many other fields of design and artistic creation, often relies on practice-based analyses. Such studies cannot depend solely on existing research literature; they necessitate comprehensive tracing, documentation, and analysis of real cases in design practice. Yin contends that case studies provide researchers with a valuable tool for comprehending intricate social phenomena while enabling them to maintain a holistic and real-world perspective. Real-life cases allow researchers to observe details that are difficult to provide using generalized theories. Moreover, in her book, Sarvimäki argues that the case study and the design process are not separate entities but an integrated whole, and innovative strategies can also serve as a means to achieve design excellence.

Therefore, case studies are essential for understanding real situations and providing rich information to develop nuanced perspectives. Practical knowledge from cases is as necessary as context-dependent experience. Based on multiple themes, the analysis of actual completed projects can form a cross-check with architects’ discourses, allowing us to discover logical chains of their subjective expressions. For this current study, the data analysis was informed by three flows of activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Following Miles and Huberman’s guidance, conclusions must be sorted out from the data to create a logical chain of evidence; findings should be viewed lightly while maintaining openness and skepticism. As a result, an external observer can trace these steps in two directions: from conclusions to initial questions or questions to conclusions.

The case study database in this dissertation contains various Finnish architects’ practices in China and includes complete works and competition schemes, as well as exhibitions and academic activities. The cases studied in this dissertation include the “Bug Dome” Pavilion in Shenzhen, the “Re-creation” Pavilion in Shenzhen, the Finnish Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo, the Church of Shadows in Chengdu, CIPEA Villa No. 20 in Nanjing, Moganshan Villa Group and Resort Hotel, Chengdu ICON Tower, Wuxi Grand Theater (WGT), the Strait Art and Culture Center (SCAC) in Fuzhou, and the design entries for the Sino-Finnish Center (SFC) in Nanjing.

In selecting research cases, the dissertation focused on public buildings as an essential part of contemporary culture. This category contains large cultural projects (e.g., opera houses) and small-scale buildings, such as resort hotels, pavilions, and churches. In contrast,
although Finnish architects in China’s urban planning field have carried out several drafts and acted as consultants, there are still relatively few cases of actual implementations. Therefore, this dissertation focuses less on housing design, urban planning proposals, or industrialized building products, such as small, ready-made wooden buildings.

1.4 Positionality Statement

Research objectivity aims to reduce potential bias or interference from the investigator to ensure neutrality. Architecture is a practice-oriented discipline, and researchers’ reflections on existing theoretical insights that follow scientific norms are often insufficient to support architectural practices or become part of designers’ knowledge. Therefore, a detailed mastery of the process of architectural practice is an indispensable part of architectural research. I have worked as an architect at PES-Architects (PES) since late 2014, and this dissertation’s concerns come from my direct observations and practical reflections.

This doctoral research was entirely self-funded. I did not receive funding from any firm, organization, or individual. Nevertheless, my research in this dissertation includes a selection of architectural practices in which I have been personally involved. In a way, it contains situations that some readers, peer researchers, or examiners may identify as having research objectivity and ethical risks. Therefore, I must include a separate section to elaborate on this issue.

First, I must emphasize that this dissertation is a research outcome with detailed research questions based on data collection, not on an architectural review. I focus on analyzing the objective empirical process, not making evaluations and judgments about the results. My intention is to showcase an architect’s decision-making logic, interactions with various actors, and responses to feedback. The analysis maintains a distanced, dispassionate, factual narrative that avoids architectural appreciation or aesthetic assessment. The dissertation aims to provide a truthful and objective reflection of reality, promote the construction of architectural theory through qualitative methods, and facilitate meaningful reflections on practice, without serving as a propaganda text for specific architects. Finnish architects participated in my research by sharing their design experiences, expressing their views, and presenting their design results as narrators of their own stories. Based on the inquiry into the substantive content of Finnish architects’ engagement and communication with Chinese society (ontological) and the generation of knowledge through the interpretation of various phenomena and social constructions related to Finnish architects in China (epistemological), I conducted the interviews and data collection while keeping these considerations in mind.

Second, the scope of Finnish architects in China is a particular field with limited

127 PES-Architects is an internationalized architectural firm based in Helsinki, founded by Finnish architect Pekka Salminen in 1968. PES has several design projects in China and also has a branch office in Shanghai.
participants. On the one hand, I have had opportunities to follow and participate in actual projects up close and have firsthand experience of the complexity of international architectural practices. Nevertheless, design decisions, discourses, etc., come from the decision-makers of a design team. As a young architect, I was not involved in these decisions. My role in practice was more of an observer of phenomena, with little ability to manipulate the progression of events. Some of the interviewees were my colleagues, and the topics about which I conducted interviews were not new to me but were part of my daily work, and I rarely had the chance to express and record them in depth. Therefore, these interviews also served as an opportunity to summarize the personal perspectives of architects with practical experiences. As their colleague, my position does not affect the objectivity of the interviewee's statements, although it may affect how they express or present their views. For example, during interviews, some participants discussed experiences we had shared, allowing for more open and candid discussions. They could tell their point of view more straightforwardly instead of introducing some basic concepts.

On the other hand, to maintain the objectivity of scientific research, as I argued in the Methodology section, my data sources are multiple, including interviews with architects and an extensive collection of published articles and interview transcripts. I have carefully scrutinized the data in this dissertation via methods, including discourse analysis. In short, my participation and observations helped me formulate the right questions. However, my practical experience could not answer these questions until I conducted my research. Answering those questions relies on a comprehensive application of research methods.

Third, as my dissertation title suggests, the subject of this research is the Finnish architectural community as a whole rather than a single architect or architectural firm. I compare Finnish cases of architectural practices with other architects’ practices and consider them all a part of the globalized architecture industry. Furthermore, this study is not a biography of specific works; instead, it involves comparing different scales and types of projects to identify common threads of thought. Again, this study is not intended to endorse or promote the Chinese market. It aims to examine the longer historical process and explore the opportunities and risks in Chinese architectural practice that my research reveals. By considering a broader historical context, we can gain a deeper understanding of the trends and challenges that arise in the Chinese architectural industry.

1.5 Structure of this Dissertation

This dissertation consists of eight chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of Finnish architects’ projects in China. Chapter Two reviews the international practice of Finnish architects that began before Finland’s independence and continues to this day. It examines the distinct characteristics of each historical phase, profiles
notable architects and their works, and offers essential historical context for understanding Finnish architects’ endeavors in China. This chapter also discusses the self-identity of Finnish architecture and the status quo that Finnish architects face from a globalized cultural homogeneity. Additionally, it analyzes the significance of exporting Finnish architecture to the emerging Chinese market, along with the debates and challenges that arise as a result.

Chapter Three illustrates the political, social, and economic underpinnings of China’s booming cultural landmarks in which many Western architects have been involved. The geopolitical tensions between the East and West often place Western architects in a complex network of competing discourses, especially when it comes to iconic projects with socio-political implications. Finnish architects are also inevitably confronted with this contested and complex discursive environment. However, this study endeavors to transcend the oversimplified East-West binary perspective. It offers an objective analysis that uncovers the origins of these projects and establishes connections between their sources and subsequent developments. Moreover, it helps to understand several fundamental issues encountered by Finnish architects in their practices in China, such as reconciling their human-centered design philosophy with China’s expectations of scenographic city branding.

Chapter Four paints a general portrait of the practices of Finnish architects in China and discusses the cultural and academic exchanges that accompany architectural practices. It outlines how Finnish architects arrived in China and the historical backgrounds of the different development stages. The second half of this chapter includes case studies of different types of Finnish architects’ projects in China. These cases allow us to identify their commonalities and connections and provide an empirical basis for thematic analysis in the subsequent chapters. The cases used in this chapter include architectural installations, such as the Shenzhen Biennale, Villa No. 20, the Church of Shadows, the Finnish Pavilion in Shanghai Expo, the Wuxi Grand Theater (WTG), and the ICON Tower in Chengdu.

The next two chapters examine the approaches by which Finnish architects process cross-cultural communications. Chapter Five focuses on Finnish architects’ discourses, specifically how they present their designs to Chinese people and bridge cultural differences using language familiar to the Chinese. This study suggests that architects’ discourses are indicative of a hybrid status driven and constrained by multiple parties, synthesizing design creativities, architectural visions, cultural imaginations, and needs for media promotion. Through a study of six Finnish architectural firms’ proposals for the Sino-Finnish Center (SFC) in Nanjing, Finnish architects’ discourses are investigated separately and compared together to ascertain how their articulations may produce transnational connotations. I illustrate the use of constructed discourse by architects as a means of external communication and conduct a dialectical analysis of the discursive contexts and effects.

Chapter Six examines how Finnish architects have developed transnational methods of working with Chinese projects. Similar to
many other Western architects, Finnish architectural offices are idea-driven firms that win projects via creative concepts in competitions. Like all foreign architects in China, Finnish architects need to work with China’s LDIs, which are often mega-corporations with different working cultures and approaches for processing licensed construction design. This chapter mainly analyzes the cooperation between Finnish architects and Chinese LDIs and the difficulties, challenges, and compromises in globalized design practices. Additionally, my research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic has become a significant factor in ongoing Chinese projects. I dedicate a section to analyzing the pandemic’s influences on globalized designs via the cases of Finnish architects in China. In the discussion section, I examine the implications of Sino-foreign design partnerships for the multiple parties involved.

In Chapter Seven, I use the Straits Cultural and Art Center (SCAC) as a case study to illustrate numerous aspects of Finnish architects’ practice in China. This case study incorporates all the main points discussed in the previous chapters. By investigating the abundance of empirical material in the project, this chapter can further our understanding of the complexity of Finnish architects’ practices in China and conclude previous discussions from different perspectives. This chapter details Finnish architects’ material experiments and research for their Chinese projects, respectively illustrated by a series of cases, such as the redesign of bamboo and custom-made ceramic tiles.

Chapter Eight completes this dissertation with conclusions. After reviewing this dissertation’s research questions, the conclusion section presents the results in chapter order. Based on the facts already discussed in the previous chapters, a final discussion of the opportunities and challenges that Finnish architects may encounter in their continued development in China is presented from a macro perspective.
Finnish architecture is rooted in Modernism, an external movement deeply embedded in its heritage. In Finland, however, modernist architecture has undergone a process of localization, as Finnish architects have reinterpreted it and added their own contributions. To understand the practices of Finnish architects in China, it is imperative to first explore the rich tradition of Finnish architecture itself. By delving into the tradition of Finnish architecture, we gain valuable insights into the underlying principles, design philosophies, and cultural context that have shaped Finnish architects’ approach to their designs. Such an understanding lays the foundation for understanding how Finnish architects navigate the complexities of the Chinese architectural landscape and adapt their practices while maintaining their distinctive Finnish identity.

Finnish national identity was constructed gradually during the period when Finland was under the rule of the Kingdom of Sweden and a grand duchy under Russian rule. While the Finnish language was being concretely established as the national language, Finnish people’s self-image of “Finnishness” became increasingly evident. When Russia deprived Finland’s autonomy at the turn of the 20th century, Russification as an external pressure eventually fueled Finland’s aspiration for independence. As a country in the middle of two different political powers, Finland’s particularity can primarily be attributed to its geographical in-betweenness. Nevertheless, Finnish identity was shaped more toward a Western orientation with Finland’s independence and the end of the Finnish civil war (1918). For example, in the architectural field, this can be observed in Finland’s selective and restrictive approach to including buildings associated with Russia or Orthodox churches in its heritage list. In 1926, Finnish architectural critic Carolus Lindberg explained that the cultural character of Finland, namely a Western civilization in the East, and the development of Finnish culture and science, benefited from its ties to the West:

“Geographically speaking, Finland belongs to the eastern European

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continent; the Baltic Sea and its bays separate the country from Western Europe. But the sea connects rather than separates. Finland gained contact with Christian civilization through the Baltic Sea. The same source gave birth to our science and art. (...) We can, therefore, conclude that Finland has always been, and will continue to be, the easternmost domicile of Western civilization.\textsuperscript{132}

To this day, Finland is a widely acclaimed Nordic welfare state. It is recognized as one of the world’s most socially progressive, stable, and peace-loving nations.\textsuperscript{133} In contrast, the self-concept of the Finnish people is often a modest image: Finland is a remote country with small towns composed of small, sparse populations that speak a “strange” language.\textsuperscript{134} Finland’s low-key and pragmatic attitude influences people’s ways of life, which narrows the distance from nature and keeps plain and simple values alive in modern society, such as the “phobia” of dense metropolitan areas and the periodic habit of living in summer cottages. This intertwine of urban and rural, as well as modern and vernacular traditions, is one of the critical characteristics of Finland. In other words, the way of life in Finland may still be very “Finnish,” as Mikkola argues,

“If the transition to an industrialized and urban lifestyle may cause the conversion of humankind, the change will, in any case, require generations to realize. In this respect, the Finnish people are still rural. And they are still alien from a compact form of living. A Finn can flee to the loneliness of his summer cottage whenever he can.”\textsuperscript{135}

Finland has cultivated its distinctiveness in various artistic realms, including but not limited to painting, literature, film, music, and architecture. According to Wickberg, in a place of high latitude like Finland, one can “live without paintings and sculptures,” but dwellings are necessary.\textsuperscript{136} Architecture has always been the primary art form in Finland.\textsuperscript{137} Since Finland’s independence, Finnish architects have created many significant works and devoted themselves to exploring spiritual connotations conveyed by designs. Well-known Finnish architects such as Eliel Saarinen and Alvar Aalto are so closely associated with strengthening the construction of Finland’s identity that their works have become national symbols.\textsuperscript{138} For Aalto, public buildings are like “vital organs in the human body,” depicting the image of Finland both physically and mentally.\textsuperscript{139} These renowned Finnish architects reinforce the clarity of an imagined community; their exceptional design outcomes and diffusion of design thinking in social life also have become part of Finland’s cultural traditions.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{132} Lindberg, 1926.  
\textsuperscript{133} Singleton, 1989, p. 2.  
\textsuperscript{134} Hautajärvi, 2002.  
\textsuperscript{135} Mikkola, 1978/2009.  
\textsuperscript{137} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{138} Wickberg, 1957; Giedion, 1959, p. 567; Pelkonen, 2009.  
\textsuperscript{139} Aalto, 1998/1953.  
\textsuperscript{140} The concept of the state as an imagined community comes from Anderson (1983). Additionally, traditions in a society can be constantly redefined over time; people have gone through a process of continually inventing traditions (Hobsbawm, 1983). These ideas highlight the dynamic nature of societal constructs, where the notions of nationhood and tradition are not fixed but subject to ongoing reinterpretation and reinvention by individuals and communities.
The regional design features of Finnish architecture can be traced to its medieval churches, farmhouses, barns, castles, fortresses, and all foreign styles introduced to Finland. Its design is known for its sensitivity to choice of materials, fineness of tectonic details, sensibility of lighting and shading, and its functionalist nature. The appreciation of everyday life and social equity significantly influences aesthetics in Finland. Finnish architecture can be characterized by pure, honest, direct, and possibly ascetic meanings. Among many Finnish architectural designs, based on their restrained aesthetic and functional conciseness, Finnish architecture offers an alternative approach to the world's architectural community characterized by “noble poverty” in an image-filled society. In a way, Finnish architecture represents a continuum, a community constructed by similar design values and methods.

Nowadays, Finnish society has a consensus that Finnish architectural designs are high level, which is considered a key symbol of the nation's economy, industry, and national identity. The Finnish design image includes architecture, textiles, products, and graphic publications, which have established an internationally well-known reputation for Finland. Finnish people are also aware of and recognize the importance of the arts as elements that add value to everyday life. In the 1950s, the establishment of the Museum of Finnish Architecture aimed to provide a platform and research database to showcase Finnish architectural achievements to the world. Art, architecture, and product design were consistently used to convey a positive image of Finland, encouraging general goodwill and luring prospective investors.

Also, the national pavilions at World Expos are artistic epitomes of nation-states and platforms for their new products and technologies. Finnish Pavilions at World Expos and international design exhibitions are regularly visited by Finnish politicians and have become national cultural brands supported by policymakers. These Finnish Pavilions have been carefully designed to become mediums that may guide a viewer's imagination of Finland. In 2012, Helsinki was selected as the World Design Capital, further highlighting Finland's position as a forerunner in the architectural design industry. Given the architectural design progress within Finland and the cultural exchanges of Finnish architects worldwide, we can sort out the historical facts and evolution of Finnish architects' international designs.

### 2.1 From Importer to Exporter: Finnish Architecture and Globalization

Historically, Finland once acted as a follower of international trends in architectural design. In the early 19th century, German architect Carl Ludwig Engel designed Helsinki’s city...
planning and many other public buildings in Finland. His guidance was a necessary steppingstone for Finnish culture to catch up with the rest of Europe.\textsuperscript{153} Sweden strongly influenced Finland in the scholarly realm. Most of the architects practicing in Finland trained in Stockholm until 1872, which was a time when Scandinavians were somewhat open to outside influences, primarily from Britain, Germany, Austria, and the United States.\textsuperscript{154} Moreover, architects in Finland were possibly even more receptive to international trends than Scandinavians in general.\textsuperscript{156}

During Art Nouveau, Finnish National Romanticism was considered a fusion of international Art Nouveau and traditional Finnish romantic ideas.\textsuperscript{156} At that time, many Finnish architects had apprenticeships with foreign architects. For example, Sigurd Frosterus, an important Finnish architect who marked the transition from National Romanticism to modernism, was an assistant of Henry van de Velde in Weima. Gustaf Strengell also gained experience in Charles Harrison Townsend’s office in London.\textsuperscript{157} As Finland developed from an agrarian society to a modern industrialized nation within a century, it gradually shifted from a receiver of aesthetic styles or trends from larger European countries (e.g., Sweden, Russia, or Germany) to an exporter of architectural designs with a distinctive identity.\textsuperscript{158}

This current study traces Finnish architects’ international practices before they arrived in China. Finnish architectural export can be roughly divided into four stages: 1) the National Romantic era, 2) Finnish internationalism architecture abroad, 3) architectural practices in oil-producing countries, and 4) a diversified phase since the 1990s. This division is mainly based on Mikkola’s view of the historical process of Finnish architecture’s development.\textsuperscript{158} In his opinion, there were three times in history that Finnish architecture rose to an impressive international standard: 1) National Romanticism at the turn of the 20th century, 2) Functionalism around the 1920s, and 3) “Reformed Functionalism” in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{160}

Nevertheless, this study does not encyclopedically list all the exported buildings from Finland. Instead, it highlights significant moments that encapsulate the architectural design features of different historical stages. The selected cases encompass both domestic projects within Finland and practices conducted outside the country. Presented in chronological order, this study describes representative projects and summarizes the overall characteristics of the evolution of Finnish architectural design.

\textbf{2.1.1 The Breakthrough of National Romanticism in the Early 20th Century}
At the beginning of the 20th century, the earliest instances of Finnish architectural export occurred at a time when Finland was still searching for and constructing its national identity via many methods. Eliel Saarinen established his name in the first decade of the 20th century with a series of successes in international competitions. With the political

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{153} Wickberg, 1965, p. 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Ashby, 2007, p. 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} Hausen et al., 1990.
  \item \textsuperscript{156} Wäre, 2010.
  \item \textsuperscript{157} Wäre, 2000.
  \item \textsuperscript{158} Aalto, 1997c.
  \item \textsuperscript{159} Mikkola, 1978/2009.
  \item \textsuperscript{160} ibid.
\end{itemize}
pressure from Russia built in the late 1890s, the Finnish Pavilion at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1900 was believed to be an effective way to express the country’s aspirations for independence. The burning issue for Finnish architects was finding the “new Finnish style” in architectural expression.\(^{161}\) With the design of Gesellius, Lindgren, and Saarinen, the Pavilion could make an architectural and political statement in an international context. National Romanticism collectively represented a longing for an independent identity at that time by creating a symbol that people could recognize. Years later, Aalto gave a high opinion of this breakthrough, as he said in a eulogy to Eliel Saarinen, “For the first time, Finland appeared on the continent with tangible, materialized forms as a source of culture that might influence others, rather than simply being on the receiving end.”\(^{162}\)

The first project undertaken by Gesellius, Lindgren, and Saarinen for a foreign client was Haus Remer in Alt-Ruppin, a small town near Berlin. The villa was designed by Gesellius and Saarinen and commissioned by German poet Paul Remer in 1905.\(^{163}\) Unfortunately, Haus Remer no longer exists because of damage during the Second World War.\(^{164}\) In the second decade of the 20th century, Finnish architects were intimately connected with Estonia. This period marked the high point of Saarinen’s creative output, during which he designed at least two buildings in Estonia: the Estonian Credit Bank in Tallinn (1912) and the St. Paul’s Church in Tartu (1917). In 1912, Saarinen established his international reputation by participating in several urban planning competitions, including one in Tallinn.\(^{165}\) Instead of the romantic ornaments in his earlier works, his proposal for the competition of the Chicago Tribune in 1922 showcased a more neutral style. Although his design was not realized, its urbanist ideas significantly influenced American skyscraper designs.\(^{166}\) This spirit of self-renewal continued throughout his architectural career and can be observed in his later works in the United States.

Saarinen eventually emigrated to the United States. His works reflected a sequence of architectural and social characters in his time. Saarinen and his contemporaries developed an Art Nouveau style from local Finnish folk-art sources and created a distinctive architectural identity. As an art style, Art Nouveau influenced numerous European countries and promoted independence by constructing nationalities.\(^{167}\) This connection between decorative style and the symbolic construction of national identity was not only found in Finland. In Estonia, what Finnish architects exported back then were designs and an awareness of building a national identity.\(^{168}\) In other words, Finnish architects’ international practices accelerated the proliferation of this phenomenon of constructing a national identity via an architectural medium.

However, practicing in the national style of an architect’s home country was

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161 In 1889, one of the most influential architects of the Finnish Neo-Renaissance style, Theodor Höijer, designed the Finnish pavilion for the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris (Hausen et al., 1990, p. 84).

162 Aalto, 1997c.


164 Ibid.

165 Saarinen’s other international competition entries in the same year include his urban planning designs for Budapest and Canberra.

166 Treib, 1985.

167 Hausen et al., 1990; Lane, 2000.

168 Nikula, 1988, p. 75.
often difficult for foreign clients who received these designs. In these international projects of Finnish architects at that time, the ornamentation of their semiotics, closely linked to Finnish history or legendary stories, lost its clarity and turned into a more neutral appearance. By manipulating decorative motifs, the architectural style could be changed from Finnish Art Nouveau to a neoclassical style in an international context. For example, among the buildings designed by Armas Lindgren and Wivi Lönn in Estonia, the Sakala Student Nation House in Tartu looks more like a continental European urban bourgeois villa. The Estonia Theater (completed in 1913) was eventually developed into a more prestigious and classical appearance than its proposal during the competition phase.

Back then, these Finnish buildings abroad could hardly distinguish themselves from others. To some extent, the symbolic meanings in these ornaments on these building facades and in the detailing of interior spaces carried more significance in terms of national identity rather than encompassing an overall conceptual design and typological exploration. With the introduction of Modernism, Finland was on the brink of establishing actual independent architectural design fame. As Sigurd Frosterus commented in 1904, “We do not live on hunting and fishing anymore, as in the old days, and decorative plants and bears—to say nothing of other animals—are hardly representative symbols of the age of steam and electricity.” Although National Romanticism was criticized for lacking a kind of progressiveness, its symbolic meaning responded to a yearning to build a national distinctiveness.

2.1.2 The Era of Internationalism (the 1940s - 1960s)
In around 1930, Alvar Aalto’s name began to be known outside Finland. As Aalto eventually became a worldwide Modernism giant, Finland’s reputation as a country noted for architecture is principally founded on his accomplishments. Aalto developed a repertoire of personal motifs and constantly used these identifiable “styles” in different places. Aalto’s international practice commenced with the design of Villa Tammekann in 1932 for the family of August Tammekann—a professor of geography at the University of Tartu in Estonia. However, the building was not constructed accurately according to Aalto’s original design. After winning two opportunities for designing Finnish Pavilions at World Expos, in the autumn of 1946, Aalto was commissioned by William Wurster, dean of the MIT Department of Architecture, to develop senior student housing, which was later named Baker House. While Walter Gropius was rebuilding an internationalist “coldness” at Harvard, Aalto was one of the key figures who helped construct a warm and organic design strategy at MIT.
In the United States, Aalto’s designs were considered another modernist approach to his organic form, warm materials, and humanistic concerns, which challenged the accepted image of an isolated and austere modern avant-garde. After the Second World War, Aalto’s international journey entered a new phase. Over the subsequent few decades, his global impact has brought him numerous projects abroad. Most of Aalto’s international projects were in Europe, spanning countries such as Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Iceland. After completing many projects, Aalto himself concluded in his late years:

“We (Finnish architects) imported our art—a reredos from Lubeck or a tombstone from Stockholm could be something exceptionally significant in our meager circumstances. That was the period of foreign loans in Finnish culture. We have gone beyond that stage now. I certainly think of myself as an exporter.”

In contrast to Aalto’s extensive portfolio of international design projects, another Finnish internationalism architect, Viljo Revell, made a highly visible work outside of Finland: the Toronto City Hall. In 1950s, there was a re-emergence of sheer rationality in Finnish architecture, and Revell was a representative of the trend: rational, functional, and urbanistic. In 1958, Revell won the Toronto City Hall design competition, assisted by Bengt Lundsten, Heikki Castrén, and Seppo Valjus. The city hall comprises two slim towers that curve on their footprints surrounding the low circular auditorium in the

Figure 1. The Baker House at MIT. Image credit: Li Sen

was completed in 1970. Aalto had two significant buildings in the United States and several interior projects. For example, Aalto designed the Woodberry Poetry Room for the undergraduate Lamont Library at Harvard University (Fenske, 2012).

179 Fenske, 2012.
180 In 1965, during an exhibition of Alvar Aalto’s work at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, the Archbishop of Bologna, Cardinal Lercaro, invited Aalto to design a church and community center for the village of Riola near Bologna. With this project, Aalto finally realized his dream of completing a design in Italy. The working drawings were completed between 1966 and 1967. After a long delay, the construction company was finally selected in 1975. The church was consecrated in June 1978 without Aalto’s pews and bell tower. The Essen Opera House was a project that lasted almost thirty years. A competition was held in 1959, and Aalto’s design won. However, the opera house was not built in Germany until 1988. By then, Aalto had died twelve years earlier. In 1958, Aalto won the competition for the North Jutland Art Museum in Aalborg (Kunsten Museum of Modern Art Aalborg). With the rapid economic growth and reconstruction in Germany after the war, Aalto received several projects from there: Wolfsburg Church and Community Center (1962), Detmerode Church and Community Center (1968), and the high-rise apartment building in Bremen (1962). Another residential building in Switzerland, the Schönbühl Apartment House and Business Center, was completed in 1967. In 1962, the Nordic Council constructed a building in Iceland to house numerous cultural activities and to symbolize the partnership between the Nordic countries. Nordic House was commissioned directly from Aalto and completed in 1968 in Reykjavik, Iceland. The building was a collection of Aalto’s architectural motifs. For example, the Nordic House’s sloping roof with organic forms can also be found in the Seinäjoki Library and Finlandia Hall.


179 Fenske, 2012.
middle. This important public building implemented by Finnish architects eventually became an accomplished milestone in the architectural design market on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.\textsuperscript{184} Unfortunately, Revell passed away before the construction was complete. A collaborative design approach was implemented within Revell’s architectural firm, emphasizing a team-based working method that is now widely adopted by architectural firms. Also, internationalism with minimal personal styles became a viable platform for teamwork. The programmatic design approach and formal language of internationalism are more conducive to collaboration between architects and the re-use of similar designs across different localities than they are to a distinctly individual style.

In Connah’s opinion, Revell and Aalto represent two different genres of internationalism: the “hard” and “soft” approaches. These categories of architectural designs can be observed in Finnish architectural exports from the 1940s to the 1960s.\textsuperscript{185} A “hard” internationalist architecture exhibits more instrumental rationality, while an architect’s personalized style is somewhat unrecognizable. In contrast, a “soft” internationalist includes aesthetic diversity and individual traits based on rational essence. With the rapid development of the post-World War II economy, both Aalto and Revell’s overseas practices highlighted the glory era. Through their works, these renowned Finnish architects, including Eliel Saarinen and his son Eero Saarinen, became Finland’s “cultural ambassadors” in the West, strengthening Finland’s ties with the Western heartland.\textsuperscript{186}

2.1.3. A Wave of Construction in Oil-producing Countries (the 1960s–1980s)

Along with the economic prosperity of oil-producing countries in the Middle East and North Africa, a significant demand for architectural design occurred in these regions in the 1970s. Architectural firms from Europe, America, and Japan actively participated in a construction boom.\textsuperscript{187} During this same period, architects-oriented design firms in Finland, including two well-known married pairs of architects, Reima and Raili Pietilä and

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\textsuperscript{182} Revell worked for a short time in Alvar Aalto’s office early in his career and founded his own practice in 1936 (Mikkonen, 2005).

\textsuperscript{183} Suhonen, 1966.

\textsuperscript{184} ibid.

\textsuperscript{185} As Connah commented, “These two practices (Aalto and Revell) represented the developing struggle between what might be called a Humanist Modernism and the stricter, more abstract, intellectual Rationalism” (2005, p.149).

\textsuperscript{186} Suhonen, 1978.

\textsuperscript{187} Finnish architectural institutes and construction companies were no exception in the Middle East construction wave of the 1970s. They acquired several projects, including housing, public buildings, and urban planning. For example, the Finnish joint venture company Devecon designed the new city of Ras Lanuf in Libya and the campus of Sétif University in Algeria. At the time, many Finnish construction workers traveled to these countries to work, and residential campuses with full living facilities were also built.
Heikki and Kaija Siren, obtained several significant projects from Middle Eastern countries. From a cultural exchange viewpoint, one of the most influential designs by Finnish architects in the region was Pietilä’s project in the vicinity of the Seif Palace in Kuwait. Faced with the vast contrast between the Nordic forest and the Middle Eastern desert, this project demonstrated how Finnish architects worked on a public building in a completely different environment from Finland and used their design methodologies and discourse to interpret and reconcile with the local context.\(^{188}\)

Impressed with the design of Dipoli in Espoo, Finland, Reima and Raili Pietilä were invited by the Planning Board of Kuwait City to participate in the 1969 Old Town Planning Competition.\(^{189}\) The competition did not produce a winner.\(^{190}\) Instead, from 1973 Reima and Raili Pietilä were commissioned to design Seif Palace buildings, including the emir’s governmental offices, the Council of Ministers, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.\(^{191}\) Initially, Reima and Raili Pietilä were required to demonstrate “new Islamic architecture” in Kuwait.\(^{192}\) Nevertheless, Reima and Raili Pietilä explicitly declared that they aimed to search for the “genius loci” (spirit of the place) for each project.\(^{193}\) By studying local history, culture, customs, nature, climate, and architecture, Reima and Raili Pietilä attempted to give a distinct identity to a design according to their general interpretation of a context. Reima Pietilä even learned Arabic because he believed that the language could “orient” him in the place.\(^{194}\)

From the perspective of architectural form and functionality, Reima and Raili Pietilä took into account the local Kuwaiti climate: incorporating arcade shades over the entrances and windows to mitigate direct sunshine. Also, the architects turned this connection into literal and specific descriptions, which could intentionally convey their concerns about the particularity of a place. For example, according to the architects, the fountains they designed with colorful tiles can be reminiscent of coral flowers along the coast, which had disappeared because of this project’s landfill.\(^{195}\) Traditional buildings in Kuwait’s old city used reed as the material to make soffits, which inspired Pietilä to use aluminum strips in the design of the suspended ceilings.\(^{196}\) Nevertheless, according to Reima and Raili Pietilä, these image-based narratives were not literal interpretations but symbolic epitomes of the overall essence of the place, as they concluded:

“The characteristics listed above, however, are not indispensable features of the ‘genius loci’, but rather conditional on it. If they can architecturally harmonize and relate to those more universal, natural denominators of Kuwait Bay—its sky, sand, and sea—then they become meaningful. It is this that I understand by genius loci in the modern sense.”\(^{197}\)

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\(^{188}\) In addition to Reima and Raili Pietilä’s work, another example of Finnish architects’ thinking about the desert environment is B&M’s work in Algeria. In 1992, architects Daniel Bruun and Jussi Murole (principal architects in B&M), as design consultants for Devecon’s planning and infrastructure projects in Libya, were commissioned to design the Al Jufrah Administration Center and Conference Hall. After delays, the project was finally completed in 2002 (Murole and Bruun, 1998).

\(^{189}\) Kuparinen, 2007.

\(^{190}\) ibid.

\(^{191}\) Pietilä and Pietilä, 1983a.

\(^{192}\) ibid.

\(^{193}\) ibid.

\(^{194}\) Kuparinen, 2007.

\(^{195}\) Pietilä and Pietilä, 1983a.

\(^{196}\) ibid.
Reima and Raili Pietilä’s discourses reflect Norberg-Schulz’s arguments of how architects should perceive the “genius loci.” An architect’s work is not a literal translation of preexisting symbols or forms but rather an observation and perception from a holistic impression.\textsuperscript{198} In Reima and Raili Pietilä’s case, their design of the colorful fountain could be likelier an artistic balance for the monotonous feeling of the desert in general. In a way, Reima and Raili Pietilä treated Kuwait as if it were Finland, and the visualization of the desert was displaced by a morphological abstraction of forests and lakes. This project demonstrated that Finnish architecture is not merely a composition of materials, tectonic fineness, or functional minimalism but has an activated attitude that responds to an architectural site and builds its own identity.

According to Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, a professor specializing in Finnish architecture at Yale University, the discourses of Raili and Reima Pietilä foster an open-ended richness of associations through a “loop” between visual images and the quest for words.\textsuperscript{199} Decades later, by analyzing Finnish architects’ cases and corresponding discourses in China (see Chapter Five), we can detect that this particular narrative tradition and Finnish architects’ spirit of dedication to a local culture has been largely preserved and mediated with Chinese contexts.

However, once the building was completed, its long-term architectural conditions were unpredictable. As mentioned above, Pietilä’s works in Kuwait sought to create cultural neutrality and ambiguity since they could be regarded as neither “Finnish” nor “Islamic.” The architects had explicitly declared that their architectural metaphors were inspired by local folk art, historical buildings, and Kuwait’s old town. The architects did not aim

\textsuperscript{197} ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} Norberg-Schulz, 1979.
\textsuperscript{199} Pelkonen, 2018.
In 1980, drawings by twenty-six American architects were exhibited in Helsinki, including Michael Graves, Charles Moore, Cesar Pelli, and Robert Stern, among others. At the same time, an American-European architectural symposium was held in Helsinki (Komonen, 1980). Several well-known Finnish architects of the time participated in the symposium, including Juhani Pallasmaa, Kristian Gullichsen, Pekka Helin, and Timo Penttilä. Vartola’s doctoral dissertation on postmodernism in Finland contains a detailed and thorough discussion and analysis of this topic (2014).

For example, at the American-European Architectural Symposium in 1980, Finnish architect Kristian Gullichsen (1980) mentioned in his article “Neo-Aalto versus Neo-Palladio” that “the open-mindedness and the absence of dogmatism in the attitudes of our friends from America is like fresh air cleaning the somewhat dusty atmosphere of the so-called modern movement which clearly has lost its vitality to become a conservative academism. (...) I would like to think of modernism as a young girl who was slightly difficult as a child but now when she is out of school and her teenage years are behind she is growing to maturity. And I suspect that something very exciting is going on: I believe she is pregnant.”

With the emergence of the post-modernist era in architectural design and the resurgence of historical motifs in American architecture, discussions concerning global architectural changes have occurred in Finland. In the early 1980s, Finnish architects realized traditional functionalism’s limitations in terms of creativity and the challenges posed by an excessively homogenous approach to architectural design. Nevertheless, Finnish architects believed that this new development should be based on the parent body of functionalism, rather than denying it entirely. After a series of debates and practices, Finnish architecture, in general, rejects the collage of classical elements and the “bad taste” of American postmodernism. Instead, it develops tectonic expressionism rooted in the modernist tradition. Representative architects in this period included Kristian Gullichsen, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Juha Leiviskä. Also, with the influence of postmodernism, an architectural symbolism represented by the Oulu School emerged in Finland. A younger generation of Finnish architects, such as Mikko Heikkinen,
Markku Komonen, and Pekka Helin, continued to expand the range of architectural languages. The works of architects such as Jyrki Tasa exemplified the development of personalized forms that often exhibited discreet and theatrical qualities.209

The geopolitical landscape of Europe changed dramatically in the early 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which happened to be Finland’s largest trade partner. In 1990, unemployment affected 14% of the labor force in Finland. During the worst unemployment year, 1994, the share reached no less than 33%.210 The Finnish economy suffered an extremely challenging period, which also significantly impacted Finnish architectural design firms, resulting in a severe winter for the industry. During this period, Finnish architects still found success in architectural exports despite economic challenges. In 1991, Heikkinen and Komonen won an invited competition to design the campus of the European Film College in Ebeltoft, Denmark. The campus design consisted of a group of modernist buildings spread over what the architects described as an undulating site on the scale of a small Danish town. The campus was completed in a relatively short period, opening its doors to students in January 1993. Subsequently, the same architects were entrusted with the design of the laboratory building for the Max Planck Institute in Dresden, Germany, four years later. After recovering from the economic crisis in the early 1990s, Finland’s economy embarked on a high-speed development path oriented toward the technology industry. Finnish architectural exports have presented a diverse palette and have entered a steady development period.211 In addition to the Finnish pavilions and embassies financed by Finland, Finnish architectural offices have been awarded several construction projects funded by the Finnish government and located in various global southern regions.212

In his 1999 review, Jorma Mukala concluded that Finnish architecture could no longer be easily categorized into the conventional binary division of rational and romantic.213 With the advent of the new century, the rhetorically polymorphic style of Finnish architectural design has shifted quietly toward more simplified forms. According to Vartola, Finnish architecture finds its way and steps toward the ideals of sculpture minimalism and architectural coolness.214 Such an evolution can be observed in the next generation of architects, such as Lahdelma and Mahlamäki, and it has become more explicit in currently active architectural firms, such as JKMM, K2S, and ALA. With the new generation, the distinction of individual Finnish architects is fading, and the concept of collaborative design is deepening as architectural land, shows the influence of postmodernism on Finnish architecture while exploring Finnish vernacular building styles (Ylimaula, 1993).

For example, Jyrki Tasa (1990) discussed his understanding of architectural design and analyzed several design techniques of the time based on conventional modernism, including the architect’s “unscrupulous conversion” of reality and the creation of a “harmonious thriller” in spaces.


Savolainen, 2010.

The Finnish embassies mentioned above showcase the diverse architectural contributions of Finnish architects in various locations around the world. For instance, the Finnish Embassy in Washington D.C., designed by Mikko Heikkinen and Markku Komonen, was completed in 1994, while the expansion of the Finnish Embassy in Moscow, designed by Tuomo Siitonen, was realized in 1995. Similarly, the Finnish Embassy in Canberra, designed by Hirvonen-Huttunen Architects, was completed in 2002, as was the Finnish Embassy in Stockholm, designed by Gullichsen Kairamo Architects. Apart from embassy projects, Heikkinen and Komonen also ventured into international endeavors in the 1990s, engaging in a wide array of architectural undertakings, including projects in Africa.

According to Jorma Mukala, international trends such as minimalism, lightness, deconstructivism, postmodern mannerism, high-tech, and neo-modernism all had the potential to influence Finnish architecture (Mukala, 1999).

firms are formed. The names of these architectural firms often consist of the initials of several principal architects, emphasizing the creative team aspect of design rather than individual authorship.

In recent years, Finnish architects have broken new ground in the international architectural field, gaining a broader perspective and completing several notable works. Although Europe is considered a highly competitive market, it remains the primary arena for Finnish architects to secure international opportunities. Since Heikki and Kaija Siren won the Linz Concert Hall competition in the 1960s, Finnish architects have continuously achieved success in high-profile European competitions. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Finnish architects have returned to Estonia. In 2006, Pekka Vapaavuori completed the KUMU Art Museum in Tallinn, marking a significant achievement. In 2005, ALA, a pioneering architectural firm, won the competition of the Kristiansand Performing Arts Center, in Norway. This unexpected victory also made ALA an emerging international voice in Finnish architecture.

In the same year, Lahdelma and Mahlamäki won the design competition of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, prevailing over renowned international architectural offices such as Daniel Libeskind, Kengo Kuma, and Peter Eisenman. This diverse range of cases reflects the ongoing efforts of Finnish architects to expand the scope of their projects and engage in international practices.

In addition to Europe, East Asia has become a region with a concentration of Finnish building designs being exported. Early interactions occurred between Finnish architects and Japan, a country with a history of cultural exchange with Finland. Although there is less Finnish architecture built in Japan, a golf club was designed by Heikki Siren and Kaija Siren in the mid-1970s. The wooden pavilion built in Onuma somehow signified a mutual appreciation of cultures between Finland and Japan. The client was a “great Finophile” and wanted buildings made of natural Finnish logs (Bruun and Popovits, 1977; Siren and Siren, 1982).
With China’s growing economic strength and rapid urbanization, the Chinese architectural design market has shown considerable growth potential. The scale and diversity of Finnish designs in China have enabled them to become a new category in the repertoire of international practices for Finnish architects.

### 2.2 New Changes Brought by Globalization

The globalized economy, transnational exchanges of information, and professional networks have caused multiple impacts on the production of architectural design.\(^\text{222}\) To this day, architectural practices have become simultaneously globalized and locally-bound.\(^\text{223}\) First, the traditional relationship between sovereignty and personal identity has been impacted by homogenized and globally interchangeable cultures, particularly driven by consumerism.\(^\text{224}\) Identity and tradition are less tied to locality and are based more on images and information flowing in virtual and digital spaces.\(^\text{225}\) Major cities have become significant nodes in the global economic network, playing an essential role in the functioning of the worldwide trading system, and therefore have a wide range of influence. Global cities have played a crucial role in a decentralized network of instantaneous exchanges of information, knowledge, technology, and culture.\(^\text{226}\)

According to anthropologist Marc Augé, contemporary human society is in a “super modern” age characterized by an overabundance of meanings.\(^\text{227}\) The proliferation of imaged and imaginary references, which can immediately travel worldwide, has resulted in the sociological notion of “non-places,” such as airports, supermarkets, and hotels.\(^\text{228}\) The homogenization of global public spaces has diminished the feeling of belonging and thus can cultivate a rootless social reality, and ubiquitous similarity in today’s world has extensively expanded the boundaries people can perceive.\(^\text{229}\) According to Hans Ibelings, traditional notions such as place, context, and identity have been insufficient in dealing with new “supermodernism” architecture, and conventional regionalist discourse is becoming increasingly anachronistic.\(^\text{230}\)

Also, the transnational capitalist class has become a driving force behind the proliferation of urban landmarks worldwide.\(^\text{231}\) The sameness of many cities has brought an imbalanced phenomenon of architectural projects gathering in the hands of a group of star architects and large design companies.\(^\text{232}\) Designed by influential architects, internationalized city landmarks often produce

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\(^\text{221}\) Another Finnish architect with practical experience in Asia is Pekka Helin. Apart from his highly visible works in Helsinki, Pekka Helin has also been involved in various international projects, creating several residential designs. In 1990, Helin and Tuomo Siitonen designed the Sibelius City Block for the Swedish city of Borås, based on their winning entry. Years later, Helin secured the opportunity to continue creating residential spaces on the other side of the world. In China, he designed the Icon Apartments in Chengdu (i.e., the residence next to the ICON Tower designed by PES). In 2011, Helin won the international competition of Pan-Gyo Housing in South Korea (Mukaia, 2010).

\(^\text{222}\) King, 2004.

\(^\text{223}\) Cuff, 1999, p. 84.

\(^\text{224}\) e.g., King, 2004, pp. 26–29.

\(^\text{225}\) Many cultural studies scholars have made similar arguments and discourses. In the globalized age, identity has become a diverse, continuously constructed, self-selecting process. The concept has been widely debated. Mathews (2007), for example, created the concept of a “cultural supermarket” that involves the self-selection of identities at different psychological levels (Alsayyad 2007, p. 203).

\(^\text{226}\) Castells, 2009.

\(^\text{227}\) Augé, 1995.

\(^\text{228}\) ibid.

\(^\text{229}\) Ibelings, 1998, p. 64.

impressive media effects. As former British Design Museum Director Deyan Sudjic commented in 2006, “There can never have been a moment when quite so much high-visibility architecture has been designed by so few people.” With the influence of the media and the growth of electronic cyberspace, the range of information people receive is instantaneous and immense. With the accessibility of Internet mediums, architectural firms have utilized social platforms to achieve the immediacy of releasing information and images. The continuous promotion of design works via online social media has become an essential strategy in the branding of architectural firms.

As a result, the “globalized architect” concept has been created. With the economic expansion in emerging markets and globalized capital, many architectural firms have evolved into transnational companies, establishing branch offices worldwide and operating projects globally. For some large global architectural firms, it is difficult to argue which country to which they belong, as their workspaces are often spread across the world’s major cities. Architects who process projects globally follow a new working method that requires them to travel intensively. In his massive book, “S, M, L, XL,” Rem Koolhaas showed that he traveled 360,000 kilometers and spent 305 nights at hotels in one year, while 14 percent of the office expenses for his company, OMA, went to travel. In an interview, Koolhaas enthusiastically shared his recent hectic trips, saying, “Do you know that in the past week I’ve been swimming in Lagos, in Milan, in Switzerland, in Rotterdam, in London, in L.A., and Las Vegas?”

Such architects who manage projects everywhere experience the world through various brief impressions, sharing a flowing space not limited to any location. Likewise, these globalized architects tend to offer “universal” solutions to universal problems. Much of their design production unfolds in a self-referential manner rather than one that is place-referential. An overflow of imagery stimulates the proliferation of new architectural scenes. For example, Jørn Utzon’s Sydney Opera has become a paradigm of landmarks, while more cities are praying for the same effect as the Sydney Opera to come on them. In many cases, iconic architectural designs are selected by a procedure of competition, which produces interchangeable proposals within several months’ time. The interpretation of architecture in the mass media focuses not on the architecture itself, but rather on the city’s iconic representation. Compared with a solution provider’s role, an architect as an image creator for supplying meaning and improving architectural visibility is becoming increasingly important.

Exporting architecture implies an unavoidable encounter with an international context that challenges self-centered perspectives in design discourses. When we take a closer look at the entire design process from the perspectives of various stakeholders, we may find many details that distinguish transnational designs from a previously generalized, homogenized vision. Advancing architectural design requires international architects to engage with local contexts, blending the local and global in a manner that respects the unique identity of each place while also connecting to the globalized world.
social networks and cultural contexts for an extended period. Ultimately, their designs result from a reconciliation of external concepts, expertise, and skills with local traditions and influences.

From the perspective of Finnish architects, designing transnational architecture involves navigating the complexities of interacting with “mysterious others.” Architectural exports require Finnish architects to create in significantly different circumstances compared to their home country. The demands of international design practices no longer revolve around a defensive attitude of safeguarding tradition or a relatively positive way of assimilating with others. Instead, architects must negotiate with foreign cultures and actively mediate unpredictable challenges. When buildings are required to demonstrate symbolic meanings, Finnish architects inevitably need to reconcile their cultural identity with the context in which a commissioned design is located. Based on her experiences practicing international designs, Finnish architect Saija Hollmén argues that unfamiliar environments can challenge the perceptions that architects are used to; they must be sensitive to local contexts and even reconfigure their working methods:

“Architects working within their own cultures have already internalized the values and beliefs that undergird their society, and they work from those unspoken parameters without reflection. However, working within a different and foreign context requires critical perception skills. This points to the importance of the architect/designer as a participant-observer in the context of a given project.”

Therefore, on the one hand, the global circulation of images increasingly affects design thinking in regional conditions and among architects who inherit specific collective memories. Architects worldwide adopt common design principles and follow similar workflows. On the other hand, cultural exchange, including architectural design, does not follow a one-way, center-periphery diffusion path but is a continuous localization process through constant communication with local communities. This localized force constrains international architects’ discourses (see Chapter Five), participates in the architecture industry’s collaboration and division (see Chapter Six), and becomes part of globalized design practice. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and new geopolitical conflicts have not only posed challenges to globalization at a macro level but have also significantly impacted the working methods of international architects, which is addressed in Section 6.6.

### 2.3 Necessity for Exporting Architecture and Its Challenges

Exporting architectural design to the global stage holds several implications for the Finnish architectural community. Although Finland has debated how international designs

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237 Olds, 2001, p. 150.
should be perceived, the act of exporting architecture, especially to more dominant Western countries, is viewed as a means to facilitate the exchange of cultures and serve as a medium for Finland's promotion of its positive national image and values. The rich history of Finnish architecture, characterized by a spectrum of influential architects, further contributes to the expectations surrounding the future development of Finnish architectural design on the world stage. In contrast to the relatively limited implementation opportunities of Expo pavilions or exhibitions, architectural designs exported from Finland possess the potential for longer-lasting and far-reaching impacts compared to temporary spaces.

Also, the architectural design industry remains susceptible to economic fluctuations, and architectural design, as an integral part of the construction industry chain, cannot ensure industry-wide monopolistic control.\textsuperscript{240} Architectural expertise is honed through participation in construction projects, as they provide opportunities for architects to acquire knowledge and experience. For complex structures such as airports, theaters, and high-rise towers, practical projects are the primary means of passing down architects' expertise to younger generations. The traditional learning-by-doing approach still serves as the model for cultivating architects capable of handling diverse tasks. Within the design market, architects' know-how and their ability to manage and coordinate projects ensure architectural firms' exclusive competitiveness. Through extensive practice with a particular type of architecture, an architect's expertise creates a reservoir of knowledge that makes it difficult for other architects to compete.

The construction industry's trajectory is closely intertwined with society's macro development stages, and new constructions inevitably transition from a phase of incremental competition to a phase of stock competition. Compared to China's rapid urbanization, there have been fewer opportunities in the West to build large-scale public buildings, such as opera houses and concert halls. When there is a shortage of domestic projects, it is almost a given that architects travel to other places in the world to search for projects. Architectural firms may need to leverage the global economy's countercyclical tendency by exporting design services to maintain competitiveness in the market. Consequently, global participation can help stabilize employment in the domestic architecture industry and safeguard it against the volatility of a single market.\textsuperscript{241} Western architects, with their expertise and advantages stemming from more established societies, may actively seek opportunities in overseas markets. To some extent, transnational projects are crucial for a country with limited domestic demand yet renowned for its architectural design capabilities.

Significant public architecture is a systematic endeavor that integrates several specialist areas. In the globalized market, what is exported goes beyond design and includes building technologies and construction systems, including various subcontracting services such as acoustic engineering, lighting consultants, and product designs.\textsuperscript{242} Due to ease of communication,
work habits, quality of service, and the positive outcomes of previous collaborations, there may be a trickle-down effect when architectural offices are awarded international projects, which may lead to more opportunities for consultants, engineers, or subsystem designers who have collaborated in the past. Therefore, the export of design also boosts industries and professions related to architectural design.

However, the expectation for Finnish architects’ wide-ranging participation in global competition faces challenges. As Vesikansa pointed out, Finnish architectural offices are restricted by their small size and lack of marketing expertise. Even when aware of the advantages of and necessity for internationalization, small offices often do not have sufficient resources, such as staff, connections, and expertise. The primary market for Finnish architectural design firms remains domestic, and exporting design serves as a complement rather than a pillar of their business. Occasionally, winning international competitions remains the primary channel for many Finnish architects to secure projects abroad. Compared to countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, Finland has a smaller number of architectural exports and lacks large architectural firms with an established worldwide presence.

According to Kalle Euro, the executive director of the Association of Finnish Architects’ Offices (ATL), the association’s member companies can be regarded as the main force in Finnish architectural design production activities. However, most Finnish architecture firms are architect-oriented and remain relatively small-scale. Finland has a much lower number of practicing architects than Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. Almost all Finnish architectural firms are under one hundred people in size. Most Finnish architects’ international design projects have also been concentrated in a limited number of firms. There are still relatively few Finnish architecture firms with branches in other cities worldwide. Compared with other Nordic countries, especially Denmark, the number of Finnish architecture exports remains relatively modest. Euro expects Finnish architects to gain more opportunities outside of Finland, and an internationalization strategy could become a long-term business model for Finnish architectural firms.

2.4 Summary

Despite the significant challenges associated with developing international practices, there...
is a limited number of Finnish architects who prioritize or aspire to enter the international architectural market. Some of these generations of Finnish architects have achieved remarkable results in their efforts abroad. By examining the international developments of Finnish architects over a century, we can observe that Finnish architecture has undergone a transformation, transitioning from learning abroad to eventually establishing its own identity and style. These transnational designs showcase the solutions proposed by Finnish architects for various geographical and climatic conditions, as well as their adaptability in the face of differentiated cultural environments. Architectural exports contribute to the expansion of Finland’s cultural influence and open new possibilities for developing its contemporary architecture. Also, architectural exports enable people in other parts of the world to become acquainted with Finland and gain insight into the Finnish way of life. These transnational architectural designs often combine an architect’s philosophy and the resistant power of a project’s location. The practices of Finnish architects demonstrate that the connection between an architect’s perspective and a local culture should not be positioned in a way that one might dilute or replace the other.

Finnish architectural exports have, therefore, become an intriguing category of design work in cultural exchanges and represent a promising direction for development in architectural design. This work also contributes to the development of the building industry and the maintenance of competitiveness. The practices of Finnish architects in China are also, in a sense, a continuation and breakthrough of the tradition of architectural exportation. The strategies employed by Finnish architects in other parts of the world and the difficulties they have encountered also provide valuable insights into their endeavors in China. The next chapter’s analysis of the political, social, and economic factors behind urban construction in China sheds light on the underlying motives and implications of Finnish architectural efforts in this context.
This chapter aims to provide a multi-scalar overview of the political, social, and economic underpinnings behind Chinese projects made by Western architects, especially when it comes to the high-profile buildings that have been built and are likely to be made in the future. By exploring these influences, a more accurate understanding of the challenges that shape Finnish architects’ practices can be obtained. Architecture is deeply intertwined with socio-political contexts, and comprehending the dynamics helps us grasp the nuanced interactions and negotiations that influence architectural decisions. This study shows that China’s demand for internationalized architectural designs stems from a combination of its domestic cultural consumption, the manifestation of state power, and capital accumulation. Although the factors analyzed in this chapter extend beyond Finnish architects’ experiences and provide implications for many other Western architects, China’s particular circumstances are crucial for understanding the complicated buildings that Finnish architects have designed.

As Finnish architects began to reach out to the Chinese market, the Finnish architectural journal Arkkitehti again set its sight on China in 2007, publishing several articles and reviews. In one such article, the then-chief editor, Harri Hautajärvi, compared his first trip to China in 1987 across Siberia by train and his later trip to China in 2006. The epochal changes in Chinese cities and the sharp contrast with what had come before surprised him as much as confused him. Although China has undertaken major economic reforms and embraced a market-oriented economy, it has continued its previous political system. The ruling position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has not changed. Hautajärvi could not hide his deep disappointment and expressed mistrust of China’s political institutions. In his view, what has diverted Chinese people from focusing on political reform is a mindset that encourages self-enrichment and a tsunami of consumerism.

In the same issue of Arkkitehti as Hautajärvi’s article, architectural critic Tarja Nurmi’s article also cast a skeptical eye on China.
She questioned how Western architects could maintain a sense of "political correctness" when working there.\textsuperscript{255}

This current study does not aim to initiate a political debate, not to mention that China and its positioning in the Western world are continuously developing and changing. However, Hautajärvi and Nurmi's comments reflect a broader discursive background.\textsuperscript{256} For Western architects, China opens doors to the world, but it also brings political complications, especially when filtered through the lens of journalism. As portrayed in mainstream Western news media, Chinese politics has always been associated with the same issues of ideological differences, political dissent, and ethnic suppression. This questioning of China's political institution also leads, by extension, to the field of Western architects' practices in China, making it an agenda for public debates in the West.

These arguments arise mainly from the inseparable connection between cities and power networks.\textsuperscript{257} Throughout history, in both authoritarian and democratic social systems, political leaders have used architecture to assert their authority, win public support, and gain governing legitimacy.\textsuperscript{258} China's urban beautification plans have attracted many global architects and are regarded as a state-led and top-down strategy.\textsuperscript{259} For example, in the Western opinion, the CCTV (China Central Television) building, designed by OMA, is probably the most controversial work. While CCTV is considered the official mouthpiece of the CCP, two principal architects from OMA, Rem Koolhaas from the Netherlands and Ole Scheeren from Germany, have given such an institution a visually striking image. Therefore, CCTV's tower is seen as a way for Chinese leaders to demonstrate their political influence, regulate their city's identities, and improve their position on the global geopolitical stage.

However, in all these political critiques, the diversity of China's internal discussions has been neglected. China has become the birthplace of many grand designs by importing architecture, and its openness to global architects has not changed. More and more public functions in Chinese society are accommodated in foreign-designed, often cutting-edge structures. However, in 2014, Xi Jinping, the president of China, said in a symposium on literature and artwork in Beijing, “no more weird architecture.”\textsuperscript{260} Ironically, the speculation surrounding what Xi refers to as “weird architecture” usually circles back to the CCTV Tower designed by Koolhaas and Scheeren.\textsuperscript{261} Xi’s comment suggests that China’s official tolerance of such international architecture tends to change upon leadership succession. Also, if China’s landmarks are, as some researchers have argued, a visual way to strengthen political individuals' power, it would be reductive to assume such direct correspondences. Xi’s words imply many variables beyond a simple
correlation between power structures and iconic buildings. China’s strong cultural traditions and years of experience under the socialist system have led contemporary Chinese society to exhibit an ambivalence toward imported cultures. According to historian Arif Dirlik, a particular aspect of China is that Chinese society has been through a grand experiment in human history, namely the historical experience from a socialist renunciation of markets and capitalism to incorporation into a capitalist market economy. To understand this ambivalence, we can consider it in two ways.

First, a form of apolitical consumerism, manifested through various post-modernist buildings, has become widespread in China. For a long time after China resumed communication with the world, from building styles to daily necessities, things associated with the West or Japan were always considered more trendy or superior. In the Chinese architectural design market, internationality serves as a brand representing status and quality. Chinese clients hold admiration for architectural firms that adopt internationalized strategic and organizational approaches, often employing the phrase “foreign design masters” in their media promotions. Along with individual iconic buildings, a flood of imported architectural symbols made by foreign and local designers has occurred in Chinese cities, representing poor imitations and superficial collages. For example, Sweco, the Swedish engineering consultancy giant, has replicated a “Scandinavian-style” town in the Baoshan district, a Shanghai suburb. The government building in Nanjing’s Yuhuatai district is considered a rough imitation of the United States Capitol. These examples are merely a glimpse of the countless kitschy buildings that can be found throughout China.

The mimicry, while not a laudable act, speaks to the fact that China does not view various foreign structures and styles from a political perspective. This reflects that globalization is still a construct of the West, which holds the dominant power of promoting its cultural forms. Transnational buildings and flowing architectural images have become familiar sights in the daily lives of Chinese people. Many are more concerned with a building’s functionality and visual effect and would not inquire about where its architect is from. According to Ren Xuefei, these architectural imports since the 1990s do not indicate a loss of state control; rather, they manifest how the global and the national are embedded in each other in shaping a built environment.

Second, the impact of globalization and imported buildings also has resulted in discontent, resistance, and contemplation among China’s intellectual circles. Local architects often complain that international architects tend to secure the most prestigious projects, turning China into an experimental field for architects’ ostentatious ideas. Some Chinese architects with local reputations were once one of the most vocal opponents of “exaggerated” architecture in the face of international architects who came to capture the architectural design market.
example, located beside Beijing’s central axis and near the Forbidden City, the egg-shaped National Grand Theater, designed by French architect Paul Andreu, is seen as a “creative destruction” of the historic city skyline.\textsuperscript{269} Even though some competitions invite both foreign and Chinese architects, it is often difficult for Chinese firms to gain the complete trust of their clients.\textsuperscript{270}

There exists a widespread desire in contemporary Chinese society not only to achieve economic growth but also to complete a cultural renaissance. This longing has spawned collagist works based on unsuccessful historical reinvention. Still, Chinese architects such as Wang Shu, Zhang Ke, and Liu Jiakun have gained recognition, even in the Western architectural context.\textsuperscript{271} Some Chinese architects have received overseas education and have practiced backgrounds, such as Ma Yansong and his office MAD, which have emerged to compete for highly visible projects and export their designs back to the West.

China is more like a node in a vast global network of design consumption and production. However, currently, the two ends of architectural design consumption and production do not present a balanced scenario.\textsuperscript{272} China’s local architects have been learning from the West and are playing an increasingly important role in the production of original design.\textsuperscript{273} The world cultures represented by imported buildings, and the extent to which buildings represent political power have a more complicated and pluralistic relationship with Chinese society. An ideological binary is conceptually ineffective when the scope of globalized architectural practice is considered in greater detail.

In confrontations and competitions between different discourses and positions, Western architects practicing in China, including Finnish architects, are often caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, many architects feel the need to engage China and access its vast population and design market. The appeal of the Chinese market has even made some architects put aside their previous criticisms and change their perspectives. For example, Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind once claimed in a 2008 speech in Belfast that he would not work for “totalitarian regimes” and advised architects to think “long and hard” before working in China.\textsuperscript{274} However, making overly arbitrary statements may put the architect himself in an awkward position, open to accusations of hypocrisy. In 2018, Libeskind collaborated with one of China’s largest property developers, Vanke, and completed his first project in mainland China, the Museum of Zhang Zhidong in Wuhan.\textsuperscript{275}

On the other hand, globalized architects who have designed significant public buildings in China have been careful to keep a distance as far as possible from any political misunderstanding, which serves as an invisible red line for them. Architects continuously

\textsuperscript{269} ibid.
\textsuperscript{270} Xu, 2022.
\textsuperscript{271} Wang Shu was awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2012. Zhang Ke received the Alvar Aalto Medal in 2017. Liu Jiakun is a renowned Chinese architect based in Sichuan, China, known for his original and widely acclaimed works, which have been prominently featured in the media (Zhu, J., 2005).
\textsuperscript{272} Ren 2011, pp. 38–40.
\textsuperscript{273} Hardie, 2019.
\textsuperscript{274} Pogrebin, 2008
\textsuperscript{275} Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) was a crucial chancellor who advocated for the establishment of modern industries in the late Qing Dynasty. The museum, situated at the historic site of China’s first steel company, seeks to recreate the memories of the founding of China’s national industry.
emphasize that their grandiose forms are derived from the concepts of urban publicness, accessibility, or traditional Chinese cultural imagery. Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, for example, elaborated on an essential urban strategy for the Beijing Olympic Stadium, where the vast steel structure created an “intermediate zone” bridging the external city and the internal stadium. Western architects have believed their works can radically “transform” Chinese society by introducing increased public space through their designs.277

Also, international architects have developed discourses that are responsive to the Chinese context’s complexity and sensitivity. It is a common phenomenon among international architects working in China to claim that their designs are inspired by Chinese elements, and they seek discursive accommodation by abstracting localized characteristics to interpret their designs.278 This dilemma of being between two competing powers has motivated architects to carefully consider their positions and wording and to adopt more simplified symbolic and pictorial interpretations. Architects need to advance their highly visible designs in reality while they have to deconstruct or reinvent these China-based designs in their artistic narratives.279 (The discourses used by Finnish architects in China are analyzed in Chapter Five.) According to Anne-Marie Broudehoux, international architects in China have learned to create an evocative subtext to present their projects positively, disguising the close connection between iconic architecture and state power by using visual metaphors that are culturally appealing to Chinese audiences.280

One reason for this awkward situation is that, as discussed in Section 1.2.3, there are two discourse systems in the architectural profession, one used within the industry and the other facing the public and non-specialists. More importantly, the divergent perceptions and positions of these two networks have led to an oversimplified ethical debate, as evident in the aforementioned criticism of iconic buildings designed by Western architects in China, behind which is the question of whom architecture should serve. Should it prioritize capital and power, an architect’s own prestige, or the well-being of ordinary people in society? The architectural profession’s ethics and conventions revere designs that serve the common good and oppose architects’ hubristic self-serving experiments. However, the monetized nature design activities in today’s world situates them within a network of external forces and economic structures.281 This emphasis on architectural imagery is occurring in China.
and worldwide, and it is difficult to attribute this trend exclusively to architects’ design works.

As the principal at Zaha Hadid Architects, an extensive worldwide practice, Patrik Schumacher argues that architecture is not a substitute for political debate, and an architect’s professionalism should place it in a politically neutral position.\(^{282}\) According to Schumacher, the realization of buildings in various types and scales reflects essential economic operation and urban development logic in different societies; it is inappropriate to view them uniformly through a Western-centric lens.\(^{283}\) Architects often try to illustrate that the fundamental concept of architecture originates from a powerful design gesture and critical thinking rooted in bottom-up urban strategies, rather than merely filling the given framework of a client’s wishes and functions. An architect’s discourse becomes a constructed product that responds to multiple needs and contradictions. Therefore, many globalized architects find themselves navigating a paradoxical public opinion environment. Conducting an isolated ethical analysis to pass moral judgments on the multidimensional social phenomena of globalized architectural practices often leads to one-sided and unreliable conclusions.

When Hautajärvi expressed his criticisms and confusion in 2007, Finnish architects had yet to build anything influential in China. In contrast, to this day, the Finnish architecture firm PES, for example, has been involved in China’s urban construction wave. Two performance centers designed and completed by PES, the WGT (2012) and the SCAC (2018), are already operating. Nevertheless, the grand buildings that PES has designed are only a drop in the ocean of massive cityscape construction in China. China’s large landmark projects have been considered the most attractive arena for globalized architects. In almost every major city in China nowadays, there are several iconic buildings designed by Western architects. The Chinese market is equally attractive to a younger generation of Finnish architects. In a 2012 article published in the Chinese journal “World Architecture,” Antti Nousjoki (a partner in ALA) argued that the typical motivation to enter the Chinese architecture market was “an ego-driven search for unique and ambitious, well-funded public buildings.”\(^{284}\) Finnish architectural offices ALA and JKMM have been invited to several competitions for significant public buildings in China.

However, suspicions and worries about China remain. Researchers studying Finnish national strategies see Finland’s relationship with China as “pragmatic” and “based on commercial interests.” While recognizing the growing economic relations between China and Finland, these researchers have also expressed concerns about potential overdependence on China.\(^{285}\) The Chinese architectural design context, which is intertwined with Finnish architects’ practices, has not been systematically discussed and explained. To better understand Finnish designs in China’s construction boom, it is necessary to analyze the driving forces objectively. Although China may represent an

\(^{282}\) Schumacher, 2015.

\(^{283}\) Schumacher, 2015.

\(^{284}\) Nousjoki, 2012.

\(^{285}\) Kallio et al., 2022.
ideology different from the West, it remains socially and economically interconnected. At the national policy level, China continuously practices a kind of relentless realism. Approaching architectural works with a Western-centric perspective and subjecting them to moral critiques based on ideological differences does not contribute to a deeper understanding of China's architectural landscape.

### 3.1 China's Political System and Its Influence on Architecture

Historically, China has maintained a centralized power structure—a vast country managed under a sophisticated bureaucratic system. According to Francis Fukuyama, compared with China's increasingly influential national image on the international stage in recent decades, it is more important to recognize the deep-rooted nature of its political system, with a centralized government system dating back to the unification of the Qin dynasty (B.C. 221).\(^{286}\) China's humiliations in its modern history have fueled a collective aspiration for modernization. For example, Xi Jinping's slogan, "The Chinese Dream," was, to a large extent, a response to this vision.\(^{287}\) The Chinese government is, on the one hand, the main body of administrative management and, on the other hand, the driver of economic development.\(^{288}\) Economic development achievements have become the primary indicator for examining Chinese officials' behaviors, especially in the early era of China's economic reform.\(^{289}\) Developmentalism and the pursuit of ecological sustainability that comes with rapid growth remain at the core of China's national policy and the dominant ideological mindset in Chinese society.\(^{290}\) Chinese leaders see its legitimacy as stemming from its mission to grow the economy, guarantee employment, raise the standard of living, and ultimately achieve a national revival and complete modernization.\(^{291}\) Lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty, for example, is a critical aspect of the legitimacy of governance.\(^{292}\)

At the same time, an appealing urban landscape can help foster a sense of social solidarity, civic pride, and loyalty to a place.\(^{293}\) A visually attractive architectural design helps the Internet media's need to quickly grab people's attention.\(^{294}\) Improving a city's attractiveness and competitiveness is a goal of urban entrepreneurship. As David Harvey pointed out, this public–private partnership focusing on increasing the service economy exemplifies "urban entrepreneurialism," which attempts to make a city an innovative, exciting, and safe place to live or consume.\(^{295}\) Also, China expects to build its cities to become nodes of the world economic network and pool of talent.\(^{296}\) Along with the need to accelerate a shift to a knowledge-based economy...
and innovative industries, Chinese cities have embraced online social media platforms as tools to showcase their image, attract young professionals, and promote entrepreneurial opportunities.  

China’s decision-makers have realized the importance of creating captivating urban environments comparable with leading global cities, with a message of openness and social progress. Many Chinese cities expect to attract more tourists and international elites by updating their public images, stimulating domestic consumer markets, and creating a competitive investment climate. The aspiration to build “international-level metropolises” and iconic landmarks is evident in the slogans and bid documents of provincial and municipal governments. China’s local governments have become primary art patrons of many cultural facilities, such as concert halls, theaters, art galleries, and exhibition centers. Many municipalities attempt to replicate the “Bilbao effect,” which endeavors to improve its cultural content and tourism revenue by establishing iconic buildings. Therefore, carrying out city beautification and creating a futuristic vision has become imperative for China’s modernization and re-emergence as a great nation.

Furthermore, intercity competition has pushed each municipality to establish its fame and status, leading to an increase in international design demands in China. Iconic buildings, known as “face” projects, are used to showcase local developments and compete with other cities. Many places in China are not content with a simple repetition of the developed world’s cityscape but want to achieve a first-of-its-kind effect. The skylines in China’s first-tier cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, have become models for urban development in the country. While leading cities in China have erected architectural icons or processed grand urban plans, smaller cities in subordinate positions follow the examples set by their superiors. Many large public buildings have occurred in China’s second-tier, third-tier, or even smaller towns since the preeminent cities made a “flagship” effect. The desire for place-making and the “peer pressure” of competing with other cities have facilitated a construction boom. From another perspective, this also reflects China’s approach of gradualism, where it conducts experiments in specific regions and accumulates empirical findings before implementing them on a national scale to advance its economic reforms.

Changes in a city’s skyline and the introduction of new public venues provide an intuitive interpretation of personal achievements. Government officials use large-scale projects to stimulate local urban expansion and pursue career advancement. Upgrading China’s urban landscape has become a means for governmental appointment and selection.
mechanisms within a bureaucratic system. In China, each governor has a specific term of office, and these government officials tend to implement visible improvements in the local urban environment to demonstrate their administrative capabilities. The frequent reshuffling of governors may cause anxiety and urgency in designing and constructing highly visible projects.

Meanwhile, China’s local governments can be considered market actors, and China’s centralized system enables quick decisions and construction of large public buildings. Such new cultural projects are often directly managed by a government’s subordinate agency or state-owned new district construction companies. These Chinese government agencies or SOEs may have more resources and stability in decision-making to support large public designs within a predetermined time frame than privatized companies. Completing a building has become an obligatory administrative task for those responsible for managing a project. For example, the enormous new Beijing Daxing International Airport went from initiating its design to commissioning in six years.

In a way, authorities’ decisions allow these projects to progress and ensure their eventual completion, thus avoiding inefficiencies when moving forward with large-scale public structures. By establishing SOEs, China’s state-owned funds are directly involved in the initial stages of urban infrastructure investment and attempt to create a benchmarking effect that can attract social capital to follow. This top-down decision-making in the Chinese political system has enabled smoother site selection, excavation, preparation, design, and construction of large public projects compared to many democratic societies.

Nevertheless, some arbitrary and ill-advised decisions have led to repetitive constructions, the waste of public assets, and inflated real estate bubbles. Like many other cities in the world, China has to face the challenge of how to reuse venues after a series of significant events, such as the Beijing Olympics (2008), the Nanjing Youth Olympics (2014), and the Beijing Winter Olympics (2022). As China is still urbanizing and people are moving to big cities, public facilities and transportation infrastructures are often constructed before inhabited communities. In some cases, especially in major cities, residents hold optimism that these projects, built in anticipation of population growth and immigration, will eventually be utilized. In contrast, in smaller places where residents are moving out of the area, there is a more significant risk that public projects will be left vacant, and projects under construction may also be at risk of being shut down.
3.2 Social Change and Cultural Consumption

The more than four decades since China’s economic reform in 1978 have been the longest sustained period of steady development in the country’s modern history. For a long time, China’s economic growth relied heavily on fixed-asset investment and foreign trade. However, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang stated in 2017 that, with rising national incomes and an aging population, development based on extensive domestic infrastructure investments that China has relied on in the past is unsustainable, and a restructuring of its economic growth path is imperative. With geopolitical conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic (at least temporarily) fragmented the world’s globalization system, China is increasingly focused on building an internally circular domestic market-focused economic drive. At the same time, as China’s economy exponentially grew, a sizable middle class was born. Expanding the domestic market and stimulating consumption growth have become significant priorities for China. Especially in major cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, the new generation of young Chinese is educated, affluent, effortlessly international, firmly pragmatic, and resistant to radical political changes.

Young Chinese parents who grew up in the reform era (such as the Post-80s) are more concerned about quality of life, the education of their children, and the livability of urban settings. They expect to find appropriate, leisurely places in a city to spend time with their children on weekends and holidays. China’s consumers are also keen on performative “self-presentation” and are used to sharing geo-tagged dining spaces and photos of their food on social media. Even Westerners who have not had the opportunity to witness China’s dramatic changes firsthand can observe the emergence of China’s sizable middle class from a close-by perspective. For example, many Chinese tourists in European towns and Chinese students in Western universities help give another intuitive experience of this emerging social group. The new consumer population in China’s cities has created a massive consumerist demand and seeks a sense of cultural belonging. When the service economy dominates cities, new demands created by the cultural and creative industries and the need for aesthetic preferences play essential roles in urban areas and lifestyles.

Therefore, the new urban spaces and public facilities in China’s cities are a response to the cultural consumption needs of a large, rising urban middle class. The emancipation...
of personal life has generated high expectations for diverse cultural, recreational, and leisurely spaces. In Europe's history, cultivating citizens through artistic and cultural activities, led by the state, was considered a way of contributing to modernization.\textsuperscript{326} Social class changes contribute to the occurrence of new "cultural norms" and persuade society to accept new cultural forms.\textsuperscript{327} Similarly, China, via construction projects, has seen a "cultural turn" in its urban revitalization and transformation of its post-industrial cities.\textsuperscript{328} As Chinese society progresses, China places more and more emphasis on its cultural industry, seeking understanding and respect via the development of cultural products, enhancing its so-called "soft power."\textsuperscript{329} The development of China's urban cultural facilities has occurred in two main dimensions: 1) top-down construction of key venues and enhancement of urban public environments, and 2) upgrading, renovating, and reusing existing urban structures.

First, a set of national policies in China will significantly influence the architectural market and create new hot spots. For example, the Xiong'an New Area aims to create a new satellite city near Beijing to accommodate the "non-core" functions of the capital. Another example of a flagship regional plan is in southern China: the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) plan, which seeks to integrate several cities in the region into one super metropolitan area.\textsuperscript{330} This GBA plan, which includes regional planning and frontier industrial policies, can facilitate Shenzhen's further growth. Relying on its advantages in manufacturing and high-tech industries, Shenzhen has launched a new round of city landmark projects, attracting the participation of many famous international architects.

Considerable attention has been paid to improving public spaces in China's state-led urban construction and cultural mega-projects (e.g., theaters, concert halls, libraries, and museums).\textsuperscript{331} Official cultural strategies are mainly linked to a city's beautification and cultural promotion initiatives, using arts, entertainment, and historical heritage to establish distinct localized identities and attract tourists. Many cities aim to discover differentiated cultural labels as part of policies that promote cultural and creative industries. For example, Shenzhen, which has long served as China's special economic zone (SEZ) and an urban construction and management model, promotes the construction of multiple "urban living rooms."\textsuperscript{332} The goal is to form multiple central areas of the city's public life, including large green zones composed of parks and cultural facilities that offer open-air and indoor events.\textsuperscript{333} Social publicity has been presented as an explicit evaluation criterion in tender documents for large cultural buildings. For example, in 2020, Shenzhen hosted an international competition for its new International Performance Center, located in Shenzhen's heart. The design brief prepared by the local municipality mentioned that creating an urbanist public space should be one of the design principles:
"The building should fully reflect the spirit of hospitality and service to the whole society. Based on a public perspective, the space should provide sufficient activities, improve accessibility, openness, and user-friendliness of the performance center. It should also establish a sense of place and a vibrant atmosphere for public culture, integrating seamlessly with neighboring buildings and city parks. The design should provide shade and convenient services to the community, facilitate visitor circulation, and create a friendly image."

Local governments often regard the engagement of international architects to build new cultural structures as an essential step in developing "cultural infrastructures." This reflects an official policy of seeking a quantitative enhancement of the number of arts and cultural facilities. Such grand cultural edifices must possess local uniqueness and offer amenities such as dining and shopping, as well as facilitate spontaneous activities to attract individuals. China's large state-owned theater management company, Poly Theater, has continued to invite Western orchestras, operas, and tours to its numerous theaters across the country. These large performance venues have acted as catalysts for new cultural forms, allowing musicals, operas, and classical symphonies, which were previously unfamiliar to the average Chinese person, to gradually spread in China. Also, China's social development has called for the continuation and recreation of cultural traditions. This trend is evidenced by the increasing popularity of locally-produced Chinese plays, stand-up comedy events, and traditional local operas in various cities.

Second, original urban spaces that once hosted vibrant social activities, such as Beijing's hutongs, have been significantly reduced with the massive renovation of old urban areas and its resulting gentrification. In contrast, new community activities and cultural facilities remain in short supply in many Chinese cities. Addressing how to merge state and market efforts to rejuvenate old, unclean, disorganized, and impoverished areas of China's cities while preserving historic buildings has emerged as a challenge for local governments. These strategies include restoring existing industrial areas into artistic districts and urban ecological spaces. These projects may occur at the scale of block renewal, such as the renovation of Beijing's 798 Art District, which transformed original factory buildings into an exhibition space for modern art. Big Air Shougang, constructed for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics' big air events, utilized the industrial site of a former steel mill. The Xintiandi project in Shanghai transformed an original old district into a luxurious commercial and entertainment area, which became a prime example of urban regeneration in China, while breathing life into an actual urban space. At the same time, "red tourism," characterized by notable events and locales...
3.3 The Land Logic of China’s Urban Development

Worldwide, using buildings to produce land rent is a prevalent method of securing the political and economic viability of urban regeneration processes. Similarly, land, and the financialization of land, have played a crucial role in China’s urbanization. As a country that adopts what economists call a socialist market economy (i.e., a dominant state-owned enterprise sector exists in parallel with market capitalism and private ownership), China’s land is still nominally owned by the state. Concurrently, China operates a dual land tenure system in which urban and rural land are managed separately. The 1994 tax-sharing reform enacted by China’s State Council stipulated that local governments could grant land use rights for a fee, making the land-leasing system a catalyst for China’s urban development.

As a result of administrative decentralization, local governments have greater autonomy in formulating urban development strategies. Rural properties belonging to village collectives can be converted to urban development areas. The standard leasing formula was seventy years for residential property and fifty years for office-, education-, health-, and industrial-related lands. Commercial, tourism, and recreational facilities were capped at forty years. Land leasing transformed the land-use right into a commodity and promptly made the real estate sector a primary driver of China’s economic growth.

With the massive development of cities, the scale of land grants has rapidly expanded. Control over land has allowed local governments to dominate negotiations with real estate developers in land concessions. Chinese society has traditionally placed great value on homeownership and views housing as an essential gateway to marriage and childbirth as well as an investment tool. Housing was a form of social benefit distributed by work units (danwei or state-run institutions) to urban residents until the welfare housing policy was officially abolished in 1998. After market-oriented reforms, the state policy of allocating housing no longer exists, and China’s real estate industry has flourished and gradually assumed a pivotal role in the Chinese economy. Over the past few decades, the real estate boom has accelerated urban expansion, with residential areas popping up on the outskirts of cities. Buying a residence in a Chinese city is, in a way, purchasing a stake in the city’s development and sharing in development dividends. Revenues from land transfers by local governments can be considered a “one-time investment” in urban construction and public services by selling the future appreciation of the land (i.e., after

338 e.g., Hunter, 2013.
340 e.g., Yew, 2012.
341 Sun and Zhou, 2014.
345 Zhao, 2009; 2013; 2014.
346 ibid.
348 Deng, Shen and Wang, 2011.
349 Zhao, 2013; 2014.
seventy years). In some Chinese cities, the revenue from transferring land rights can even exceed local tax revenue, contributing to China's accumulation of primitive capital. China's local governments' reliance on land-leasing revenues has ultimately given rise to the so-called "land finance" phenomenon.

On the positive side of the ledger, land finance enables China's cities to capture substantial revenue from land appreciation, cover fiscal expenditures, expand off-budget revenues, and start the next round of investment. Competition among Chinese cities has prompted officials to improve local infrastructures and urban images to attract enterprises and people to move in, thus further expanding their tax base and housing demands. In China, the financial support provided by land finance could potentially mitigate the risk associated with long-term infrastructure projects, thereby facilitating urbanization on a scale unparalleled in human history. The financialization of land has allowed China to achieve its goals of rapidly expanding infrastructure, attracting investment, transforming cities, and developing economies.

Important cultural buildings, such as performance centers, exhibition halls, and stadiums, serve as essential tools for land appreciation and become integral components in the land finance cycle. Development plans in Chinese cities create subcenters outside extant city centers, setting up completely new city areas. Led by new urban planning (e.g., new landmarks and transportation infrastructures), there is often an agglomeration effect on allocating a city's public resources, including education and health care. Well-known primary and secondary schools often establish branches in these new areas, alongside new hospitals and sports parks. Public infrastructures and landmarks appear before other buildings since they represent an official commitment to a new regional development plan. The significance of these iconic buildings is not limited to themselves; more importantly, they often represent the cornerstones of an entirely new district and the catalyst for land value appreciation.

However, these pre-constructed urban structures are expected to increase property values in nearby areas that are still under development or are in the process of waiting for land-use rights to be leased. The expropriation, development, and redistribution of land have become templates for government-led gentrification. The consequent surge in housing prices has exacerbated the creation of new social hierarchies within cities. High housing prices make it difficult for many young Chinese to stay in big cities, and the expensive cost of living may counteract the social mobility that a beautiful urban landscape tries to create. Individuals in China contribute a relatively small percentage of total taxes, and as of 2022, China has not yet introduced a property tax. This difference in how the government raises funds for city infrastructures is one of the reasons Chinese people often lack the enthusiasm to participate in community decision-making.

350 ibid.
351 Zhao, 2009; 2013; 2014.
354 Zhao, 2009.
355 Zhao, 2013; 2014.
357 China's personal income tax collection in 2019 was 1,038.9 billion yuan, accounting for 6 percent of tax revenue (China's State Taxation Administration, 2019).
Moreover, China’s local governments can recoup the money from land value appreciation, while long-time financial rationale appears to be less questioned. Chinese cities borrowing funds to invest in public cultural buildings may increase financial pressure and overinvestment risk. It is not uncommon in China to see a vast cultural building situated in an undeveloped area surrounded by farmland and emptiness.\textsuperscript{360} Although more and more projects adopt a public–private partnership (PPP) funding model for introducing social capital, operating sizable public buildings requires high costs. The rate of return for cultural buildings is meager. These projects often end up relying on subsidies and eventually lead to burdening local governments with debt.\textsuperscript{361}

3.4 Summary

While globalized architectural practices have become a common phenomenon, the decision-making mechanisms that drive these urban constructions in China and their role in the Chinese socioeconomic system are inherently localized. Without an understanding of Chinese society and the perceptions of local people, an isolated observation of static buildings and urban landscapes in Chinese cities can lead to biased interpretations. Due to a combination of factors, a wealth of opportunities for architectural practice have emerged in China over the last few decades. A simplistic, dichotomous view of the practices of global architects working in China is not conducive to developing nuanced analyses and accumulating knowledge.

In sum, there are three primary forces in Chinese society that drive its ambitious urban development plans. First, renewed urban landscapes and the proliferation of landmarks align with the political image of China’s national rejuvenation and the need for cities to compete. China’s development strategy reflects the state’s leading role in various forms of public infrastructures. Competition between cities has also led to them serving as blueprints for each other’s planning and development, giving architects more opportunities for similar types of architectural design. Policies that have worked often serve as a compass for designing and managing other cities in China and serve as a reference for development paths elsewhere.

Second, the creation of new urban public spaces and cultural facilities caters to the consumption needs of China’s burgeoning urban middle class. The renewal of China’s urban landscapes and the strengthening of cultural buildings result from a top-down system driven by internal social changes, reflecting the reality of the expansion of China’s middle class and a rising standard of living. In an effort to accelerate the development of its cultural industries, China has been constructing new cultural infrastructures and upgrading existing urban structures, paving the way for the creation of artistic and creative products.

Third, the economic rationale underpinning the cities’ competition to launch large-scale projects deserves more attention.

\textsuperscript{358} In 2021, with the approval of the Chinese legislature, the Chinese government will launch a trial for real estate tax in some regions in the next few years (Xinhua News Agency, 2021).

\textsuperscript{359} Zhao, 2013.

\textsuperscript{360} Shepard, 2015.

\textsuperscript{361} Pan, et al., 2016.
China's approach to urbanization is a result of capital accumulation and development based on land circulation in Chinese society. The real estate sector occupies an important place in China's national economy. Land finance has, for a long time, allowed revenues from land transfers to provide capital for China's urban expansion. New critical infrastructures and landmark buildings have played an essential role in increasing land prices. However, these practices risk triggering speculative bubbles and exacerbating socioeconomic disparities. They can also impact urban residents, catalyzing gentrification and making city living unaffordable for less affluent citizens. Striking a balance between urban development and implementing sustainable, equitable policies that benefit a broader spectrum of society is of utmost importance.
Global architectural designs, including those from Western architects, have substantially influenced the formation of China's contemporary profile. Among these, Finnish architects, noted for their design expertise, have been involved in China's construction boom. Finnish architects' engagement in China commenced in the 1980s with the Prime Hotel project in Beijing. However, the main entry of Finnish architectural involvement and most of their practices did not start until 2000.

The first half of this chapter navigates the journey of Finnish architects from being unfamiliar with China to progressive understanding, expanding their localized networks, and eventually practicing in the country. It begins by briefly analyzing how Finnish architects have accessed the Chinese design market since China's economic reform. This analysis segues into a deeper dive into China's varying historical contexts and the impact of these contexts on international architects. This part primarily focuses on describing how Finnish architects started their projects in China and analyzing their social contexts and networks. In addition to architectural practices, this chapter examines academic discussions and publications accompanying Finnish architects' design activities. It also compares Finnish and Chinese perspectives to illustrate how the Chinese architectural community has learned about Finnish design philosophy via practical projects and cultural exchanges.

The second half of this chapter provides an empirical analysis based on different scales of designs. It primarily focuses on three categories of Finnish architects' projects in China: 1) miniature artistic installations with socio-critical implications (from architects Marco Casagrande and Anssi Lassila), 2) medium-sized projects that carry nearly original Finnish images to China (from architects Matti Sanaksenaho, Pirjo Sanaksenaho, Vesa Honkonen, and Teemu Kurkela), and 3) megaprojects with multiple socio-cultural connotations that facilitate the construction of iconic urban landscapes (from architects Pekka Salminen and Tuomas Silvennoinen). These case studies provide a macro perspective and paint the background for analyses in subsequent chapters.
Historically, missionaries from the Jesuits undertook cultural exchanges between China and the West. Western architectural designs were introduced to China, while Chinese classical art, including architecture, gardens, and furniture, spread to the West via European missionaries. China gradually became semi-colonial, as China’s gate was forced open after the Opium War in 1840. China's feudal society slowly disintegrated under the impact of external imperialism, while its national policies were co-determined by foreign powers. The works of foreign architects in China were inseparable from the general context of China's modern history (1840 to the present), and the architectural designs of each historical period exhibited different characteristics.

Western architects have been working in China since the late 19th century, and their designs have made rapid inroads, particularly in treaty ports and foreign concessions. Shanghai, China's most prosperous city then, became a gathering place for architects worldwide. A typical scenery in Shanghai may be a row of colonial buildings along with the Bund near the Huangpu River, which to this day have been registered as historical buildings in Shanghai.

Modernism also came to China with the practices of many foreign and Chinese architects who had studied in Europe and America. The return of talent continued until the early years of the People’s Republic of China. In 1951, Wu Liangyong, a Chinese student of Eliel Saarinen at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, returned to China and began teaching in the architecture department at Tsinghua University.

With the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, China became a member of the socialist bloc countries led by the Soviet Union. During the 1950s, Soviet architects played an important role in China's civil and industrial assistance projects. The Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976 plunged China into unprecedented political turmoil, and geopolitical and ideological rivalries stopped China’s communication with the outside world. In Western public opinion then, China was a country that was socially and ideologically opposed to Western liberal society and nowhere near modern. Nevertheless, in the political turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, sporadic reports about China surfaced in architectural media in the West, including in Finnish journals. Although far from concerning any architectural cases, the early Jesuit missionaries to China were a diverse group of individuals who made significant contributions to cultural exchange. Among them, Jean Denis Attiret (1702-1768) stands out as a French Jesuit painter and missionary who left a remarkable impact on the field of architecture. In his letter titled “A Particular Account of the Emperor of China’s Gardens Near Pekin,” Attiret provided detailed descriptions of the Forbidden City and Chinese gardens in Beijing.

The treaty ports were the port cities in China and Japan that were opened to foreign trade primarily by the unequal treaties imposed by the Western powers, and the cities in Korea that were similarly opened by the Japanese empire (Xue and Li, 2008; Sklair, 2017, p. 213). The establishment of these treaty ports, driven by the Western powers, primarily led to damage of China’s sovereignty, despite their role in facilitating cultural exchange and shaping China’s engagement with the outside world.

China’s diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union went through significant changes in the historical period after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. Initially, the Soviet Union provided substantial aid to China. However, Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated sharply in the 1960s and gradually began to thaw in the 1980s. In contrast, a significant development occurred when U.S. President Richard Nixon visited China in 1972, leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China in 1979.

Xue and Li, 2008.
these reports are more of an expansion of the international perspective of Finnish architects.

In 1978, *Arkkitehti* published an article, “Chinese Planning Directives,” by Leena Lukkarinen, Markku Annila, and Heikki Tegelman. This article briefly unfolds Chinese society at that time, including the people’s communes from the Mao era and the campaign of resettling educated urban youth in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution.\(^{366}\) It also mentions the traditional Chinese urban context, the coherence of family values, and even China’s architectural education system.\(^{367}\) This six-page article introduced China and provided a glimpse of a mysterious socialist country in the distant East. Instead of following the widespread stereotypes about China that prevailed in the West during the Cold War era, this article takes a close look at the daily lives of the Chinese people. The authors summed up their opinions by quoting from Swedish writer Lars Gustafsson’s travelogue that recorded his trip to China in the autumn of 1976,

> “Swedish Lars Gustafsson, in his newly published book *Kinesisk Höst* (Chinese Autumn), tells of his trip to China and states that he had no preconceived notions nor unrealistic ‘Maoists’ aspirations. On his journey, he noted two prejudices probably common to us all. First of all, the attitude towards politics came up. The information about China in the West is usually either characterized by anti-communism or distorted by the ideological struggle between socialist countries. The impression given by Chinese publications is that the political debate is stereotypical and that it is conducted according to the same rules everywhere and all the time. However, this was not the case. Of course, all the discussions (in China) began by telling what it was like before the revolution, speaking about the liberation in 1949, the Great Proletariat in the Cultural Revolution, and of course, the defeat of the Gang of Four. And that’s it. The guest is not burdened by talking about the fractions, Wisdom of Crowds, disintegration attempts, or the power struggles that European Maoists are constantly lecturing on. Chinese cadres do not talk about politics; they talk about agricultural mechanization, water control projects, artificial fertilization, industrial goals, education, etc. Another common preconception is that, after all, there is something hidden behind the scenes, a hidden clockwork. Here too, a visitor like Gustafsson finds himself mistaken.”\(^{368}\)

This passage shows that the authors attempted to understand China’s situation from a Chinese way of life and to offer a different perspective from the long-held Western preconceived views of China. Considering that, when this article was published, the facts described in the report would soon be changed. Mao Zedong passed away in 1976. After that, the Gang of Four was quickly purged. In 1977, the chief architect of Chinese

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\(^{367}\) ibid.

\(^{368}\) The original text here is in Finnish (Lukkarinen, Annila and Tegelman, 1978). What the authors have paraphrased is roughly on pages 113 to 114 of *Kinesisk Höst* (Gustafsson, 1978).
CHAPTER 4

Economic reform, Deng Xiaoping, was restored to his position and became the leader of China at the end of 1978. Deng subsequently instigated deep-seated internal reform in China and revolutionized its foreign policies.

With the launch of the “reform and opening” policy, China started to sideline ideological disparities and refocused on economic development as its primary state policy. China gradually emerged from the turbulent decade of the Cultural Revolution and entered a new era of fast growth. Regular township-level administrative divisions displaced the people’s communes, and the Hukou restrictions were eased. Individuals could leave their homes in the countryside and search for work opportunities in cities. Higher education returned to regular enrollment, and private companies reappeared in China. With the opening of China’s doors, a wave of urbanization in China soon began.

Intriguingly, a Finnish architectural journal published an article about China in 1978, a year later regarded as a turning point in Chinese history. Although the authors’ introduction to Chinese society stops on a descriptive level and does not analyze a sequence of hints of the forthcoming socio-economic reform, they showed their mindful acceptance of different political systems. Also, the article confirmed the potential and persistence of Chinese people by citing the well-known Chinese fable, “The Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountains,” as the ending. This optimistic view, which pinned its hopes in Chinese people, was undoubtedly predictive. China’s rapid development later validated the author’s expectations. A few years after this article was published, Finnish architects embarked on a journey to explore China.

4.2 Early Practice of Finnish Architects in China

Since the economic reform and the reopening of China, international architects have returned to the Chinese architectural design market. The Chinese architectural styles of the time began to demonstrate a tendency to be a collage of multiple and intertwined genres. The 1980s was considered the first phase of China’s architectural design import. Architects from Japan, Hong Kong, and the United States became the first foreign architects to enter mainland China. These international architects globalized development strategies with transnational projects before they were designed in China. Back then, China was in a shortage of high-level hotels in Beijing and many other major cities. Hotels that conformed to international standards were the primary category of buildings in which foreign architects were involved.

However, China’s shallow foreign exchange reserves at that time made it unable to afford these projects. Also, China lacked experience in operating modern hotels. Many hotel design projects at that time required

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371 Xue, 2006; 2010; 2012.
372 ibid.
foreign investment in the hotel shares and reimbursement of design fees through the hotel’s operating income. Sino–foreign joint ventures in new hotels became a common phenomenon. In 1979, the first Sino–foreign joint venture hotel, Jian Guo Hotel in Beijing, was approved by China’s State Council. The hotel was built in 1982 and promptly promoted as a model of Sino–foreign cooperation. Design companies from America, Japan, and Hong Kong designed a series of high-ending hotels. Many of the architects were from Chinese diaspora communities outside of China. During this period, Ieoh Ming Pei, a well-known American architect of Chinese descent, was also working on his first project in mainland China, the Fragrant Hills Hotel (Xiangshan Hotel).

In this wave of hotel construction, Finnish construction companies were also present. Considering China to be a vast design market, several Finnish construction companies went to China in search of opportunities. In 1984, Finnish contractors spent a three-week “expedition” in China; however, they did not consider that there were viable projects for Finnish engineering companies in China at that time. It was not until 1987 that Puolimatka, one of the largest construction companies at that time in Finland, entered China and designed the Prime Hotel together with a local partner, the Beijing Institute of Architectural Design (BIAD). The Prime Hotel was arguably the first building in China designed by a Finnish firm.

Prime Hotel was located in the downtown center of Beijing, about 800 meters from the Forbidden City. The National Art Museum of China is diagonally opposite the street. The Prime Hotel’s location originally housed an old hotel, which was built in the 1950s, also under the name Prime Hotel. The original building on the site needed to be demolished before a new hotel could be built. When the decision to create a new five-star hotel arose, there was a debate about the demolition of the old hotel.

The building that needed to be demolished was one of the “Ten Great Buildings” built to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the People’s Republic of China. And it was regarded as an important historical building designed by Chinese architect Zhang Kaiji. Considering its historical status, there was an opinion of protecting the existing building and positioning the new hotel on the southeast side of the old one, where the old one-floor housing would be demolished. However, this suggestion was not adopted because of a shortage of money for land acquisition. Also, the old Prime Hotel was more like a hostel and could hardly be made to meet international standards via renovation. On the night of May 29, 1988, the old building was demolished, and the

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373 Laakso and Tamminen, 2014; p. 241.
374 ibid.
375 In the mid-1980s, the Puolimatka Group employed over 6000 individuals. However, in 1985, the company was sold to Hankkija. Shortly after the acquisition, it became evident that Puolimatka was facing severe financial challenges. As a result, the bank assumed control of the Puolimatka Group, which was later purchased by NCC, the Swedish construction company (Hoffman, 2018).
376 The hotel is known by two names, Prime Hotel and Huaqiao Mansion in Chinese, which translates to “overseas Chinese mansion.” In the book by Laakso Mikko and Tamminen Seppo, it is referred to as Sara Hotel. This is because SARA (In Swedish: Sveriges Allmänna Restaurangaktiebolag) was the Swedish hotel management company that operated Prime Hotel during that period.
377 In fact, so far, the Prime Hotel has become the only one of the ten buildings that has been demolished.
378 Zhang Kaiji is the father of well-known architect Yung Ho Chang (In Pinyin: Zhang Yonghe). Yung Ho Chang is a Chinese-American architect and professor at MIT. He has also served as a jury member for the Pritzker Architecture Prize.
380 ibid.
381 ibid.
construction of the new hotel began in December of the same year. To secure the Prime Hotel project, Puolimatka had to accept the condition of becoming a shareholder, holding 11.5 percent of the shares. In contrast to later Finnish architects’ Chinese practices as mere design contractors, Puolimatka was also involved in building construction at that time. As the general contractor, Puolimatka partnered with the Construction Engineering Office of the Ministry of Railways. The facade and slab of the Prime Hotel were constructed by assembling prefabricated elements. The modular assembly construction method was utterly new to China at that time. Large plywood panels were imported from Finland to make the prefabrication mold.

The Prime Hotel was expected to be the cornerstone for opening the Chinese market. However, it was not economically successful and was affected by the recession in Finland after the end of the Cold War. In 1992, Puolimatka sold its shares. Because of the bankruptcy of its parent company, Puolimatka was taken by the bank, and its construction projects were held as pledges. Eventually, Puolimatka was sold to Swedish construction company NCC, and it eventually withdrew from the “risky” Chinese market.

Prime Hotel was mainly a construction export project and an investment in China. Puolimatka secured this project because of its design and construction expertise and capacity to become a shareholder. During global expansion, construction firms are often ahead of architects because they can bear the economic risks that architectural design firms cannot afford. In an architectural design sense, Prime Hotel was an eclectic combination of a functionalist layout with decorative Chinese cornice. This eclecticism was a mark of its historical background and a response to the very heart of Beijing.

At the beginning of China’s reform and opening in the 1980s and 1990s, a modern-oriented national form emerged again, typically in the design of the Beijing West Railway Station. The decorative theme of the Prime Hotel echoes this wave (and era) in architectural design. However, as China’s understanding of the world outside its borders increased, this attempt at nationalism was submerged in more international, post-modernist architecture. Although the hotel’s design did not obtain the possibility to demonstrate architectural thinking exclusive to Finland, it was groundbreaking for the Chinese design market and showed an option for the future. Prime Hotel is still in full service after several renovations as a five-star hotel in a prime location in the center of Beijing.

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382 ibid.
385 The manufacturer of the plywood panels was Schauman Wood (Wang and Hu, 1991). In 1988, the company was merged into the Kymmene Group and became part of UPM, one of Finland’s largest forest industry companies.
389 Gutman 1988, p. 47.
In the 1990s, architectural firms in the United States and Japan began establishing branch offices in China. European architects also entered the Chinese design market to design cultural buildings, such as the Shanghai Grand Theater, designed by French architect Jean-Marie Charpentier. Numerous skyscrapers began to appear in Chinese cities. They became a representative building type on which American architectural design firms concentrated, for example, the Shenzhen Diwang Mansion and the Shanghai Jinmao Tower. To this day, although many major cities in China have introduced measures to restrict supertall buildings, the wave of skyscrapers shows no signs of stopping.

After the new millennium, China’s urban construction entered a phase of rapid development. China started large-scale urban renewal plans. The regional highways, high-speed rail networks, and metro lines in China’s major cities have been extensively upgraded. The urban context in China requires architects with experience in designing high-rise, high-density buildings, and urban complexes that accommodate multiple functions. In 2001, the book (edited by Rem Koolhaas), *The Great Leap Forward*, made a slightly exaggerated yet impactful statement: “There is one-tenth of the number of architects in China as in the U.S., designing five times the volume of projects and earning one-tenth of the design fee.” This statement primarily reflects international architects’ recognition of the potential of the Chinese architectural design market in the early 2000s.

During the twenty-first century’s first decade, China’s public building projects came to the world’s attention on architectural and cultural levels. In 2001, Beijing was awarded the hosting of the 2008 Olympics. One year later, Shanghai was selected to host the 2010 World Expo. With the promotion of celebrated events, China launched architectural competitions for many public buildings. Several iconic, government-led projects were assigned to European architects, such as the Guangzhou Opera House (designed by Zaha Hadid), the new Beijing airport terminal (designed by Norman Foster), the Beijing Olympic Stadium (designed by Herzog and de Meuron), and the CCTV Tower (designed by Rem Koolhaas and Ole Scheeren). For China, these international architects’ designs display a message of economic development and cultural openness to the world. Also, a solid reputation and an internationalized image help architectural design firms secure projects in China. For architectural firms, winning these significant competitions and projects in China’s first-tier cities can significantly assist with branding and business development. According to Zhu Jianfei, a close collaborative alliance has been formed...
between the state with its significant capital and the international systems of architectural design production.\textsuperscript{394}

In 2018, China had nearly a hundred cities with a population of more than one million. As of now, some first-tier cities have reached their growth limits, and the architectural design market has become more saturated and competitive.\textsuperscript{395} For example, Beijing and Shanghai can no longer accommodate their rapidly increasing populations and have introduced measures to limit population growth.\textsuperscript{396} At the same time, along with large-scale urban renewal comes the intensification of social conflicts, such as the phenomenon of “nail houses” in urban areas being demolished and relocated.\textsuperscript{397} One of the most prominent issues has been the lack of humanitarian care and the deterioration of living environments due to haphazard construction and demolition.

The overbuilding driven by massive investment in infrastructure and “ghost cities” created by real estate bubbles raises concerns for many architects working in China. China attempts to promote a more balanced development strategy and plans to form multiple “regional central cities” across the country.\textsuperscript{398} Extensive regional ecological transformation and urban regeneration have also been achieved in Chinese cities, formerly dominated by high-polluting industries. For example, in Hebei province, where China’s steel industry is concentrated (including cities such as Tangshan and Handan), many ecological renovation and steel industry transformation projects are planned in response to increasingly severe environmental pressures.\textsuperscript{399}

In this sense, the Chinese architectural design market has generated more demands for originality, novelty, and cultural connotations in new buildings. Advocacy for humanity-centric thinking, regional adaptation, and the inclusion of traditional intellectual spirit has become increasingly standing out. On the one hand, China’s local design force has been growing through exchanges with the outside world. Chinese architects have begun to reflect on a series of problems resulting from the rapid urban construction of previous years. The original Chinese design force slowly grew after the twenty-first century, featuring architects such as Wang Shu, Liu Jiakun, Zhang Lei, and Liu Yichun. They oppose the archaic Beaux-Arts system that accompanies their educational process and purely market-oriented commercial architecture.\textsuperscript{400} The emergence of more independent, design-conscious architects in China has allowed for dialogues on progressive design thinking among architects from different regions.
On the other hand, there remains a considerable shortage of architects in the Chinese architectural design market who have cultural influence and the ability to address urban challenges through innovative designs of public buildings. Although Chinese architects and local design institutions were aware of the complexity of urbanistic design requirements, they often lacked practical experience and proven solutions in the first decade of the 21st century. The focus of China’s importation of foreign architectural designs shifted from commercialized buildings to public cultural facilities, such as convention centers, museums, and grand theaters. This construction of complicated venues required higher expectations for design quality and architects’ expertise, and they were often won by European architects with social prestige. The growth of European architects has resulted from China’s growing demand for cultural consumption, the pursuit of higher design quality and aesthetic needs, and a deepening understanding of functionality and sustainability.

4.4 Finnish Architects’ Practices in China After the New Millennium

At the beginning of the new millennium, Finnish architects entered the Chinese architectural design market with many other European architects. In 2002, Matti and Pirjo Sanaksenaho were invited to the Chinese International Practical Exhibition of Architecture (CIPCEA) in Nanjing, where they secured the chance to design a villa with many other international architects. Also, Finnish architects have presented their capacity to accomplish complex public buildings. PES-Architects has been working in China since 2003 and, to date, remains one of the few Finnish firms to have continuously participated in China’s architectural competitions and to have realized several significant projects. Other Finnish architects, including Vesa Honkonen, Teemu Kurkela, Marco Casagrande, Sami Rintala, and Anssi Lassila, have also gained opportunities to practice in China via various paths. Examples of these practices from diverse backgrounds provide a wealth of information and present a variety of perspectives for observing architects’ thinking.

Since the late 1990s, Chinese scholars have traveled to Finland to study and eventually facilitated the introduction of Finnish architecture to China. The most well-known contact between Finland and China in the architecture and design field is Fang Hai, who has acted as a bridge between China and Finland and published several books on contemporary Finnish architecture and product design. Fang Zhu, J., 2005. Xue, 2006; 2010; 2012. After years of development, many globalized European architectural design firms have gradually established themselves in China and have formed an orderly development path. They have established branch offices in China’s major cities, mostly concentrated in Beijing and Shanghai, using local talent resources and allowing easier access to architectural competitions and communication with their clients (Zhao, Z., et al., 2012). The Chinese design market’s most successful European architectural design firms include OMA, MVRDV, and GMP Architects, which have achieved a consistent path of winning projects in significant architectural competitions in China. Danish architectural design firms, which are considered the most active in architectural export in the Scandinavian region, have also progressed. Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects, the firm known for its library designs in Denmark and worldwide, has gained a foothold in Shanghai. Henning Larsen Architects and BIG, led by star architect Bjarke Ingels, have also accomplished several high-profile projects in China, including the Hangzhou Yuhang Opera and the Shenzhen Energy Mansion. The new opera house in Shanghai, which the Norwegian architectural office Snehetta won the contract to build in 2017, has become the next expected icon.
has also introduced Finnish architects and designers to Chinese clients, including Pekka Salminen and Vesa Honkonen. Especially in the early stages, when Finnish architects were trying to establish a foothold in China, Fang was a guide who helped Finnish architects become familiar with a completely new territory. Another influential Chinese academic with Finnish experience in China's design education is Zhou Haoming, now a professor at China's prestigious Tsinghua University.

These individuals' common characteristics are that they completed their higher education within China, had practical and teaching experiences, and traveled to Finland as academics. After returning to China, they teach at Chinese universities and continuously use their contacts to introduce Finnish designs and designers to China. Over the years, they have turned out to be the most outspoken advocates in China's academic field for Finland. At the same time, Finnish architects and designers have also been offered the opportunity to be appointed as visiting professors at China's design academies.

In his article, “On the Qualities of a Professional Architect: Reflections on Chinese and Finnish Architectural Practices,” Fang sharply criticized the Chinese architectural profession’s environment and summarized the strengths of Finnish architects. In Fang’s view, China’s shortcomings in its architectural design system guide a “governor’s will” to prioritize quantity over quality, nominal project leaders who often do nothing in practice, and a disregard for ecological and humane design.

The Shanghai Expo took place in 2010, a year of intensive cultural exchanges between Finland and China. Face-to-face dialogues also occurred between Finnish and Chinese architectural communities. Architectural media in China and Finland organized several dialogue events between the two countries and produced publications. In 2010, one of the most influential Chinese architectural magazines, Urban Environment Design (UED), created a special issue on contemporary Finnish architecture. The Sino-Finnish Architects Forum was held in Tianjin. Many young generations of Finnish architects, including Teemu Kurkela, Tuomas Toivonen, Jussi Palva, Mikko Summanen, and Tuukka Vuori, attended this seminar. Chinese architects who participated in the event included Zhang Ke and Zhu Xiaofeng. These young architects are not part of the traditional design institute system and established their creative studios in China after receiving their overseas education. The event’s purpose, as it claimed, was to learn from other countries’ experiences and improve Chinese architects’ design and communication skills. In the same year, young Finnish artists Anni Puolakka

Fang Hai completed his studies at Nanjing Institute of Technology (later Southeast University) and pursued his doctoral studies in Finland and Sweden. His research focused on the concept of “Chineseness” in modern Nordic furniture design. In 2004, Fang Hai obtained his doctoral degree from the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH), which later became part of the Department of Art, Design, and Architecture at Aalto University. He later served as the dean of the School of Art and Design at the Guangdong University of Technology. Additionally, Fang Hai partnered with Finnish architect Vesa Honkonen to establish an architectural firm in Beijing.

Zhou Haoming has not only co-authored a book on furniture designer Yrjö Kukkapuro with Fang Hai but has also published several articles on Finnish design in Chinese academic journals (e.g., Zhou, H., 2005). Zhou has been actively involved in promoting cultural exchanges between China and Finland in the field of design, contributing to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Finnish design in China.

Vesa Honkonen was a visiting professor at Shandong University of Art and Design in China.

Peng et al., 2010.

ibid.
and Jenna Sutela traveled to China and interviewed Chinese architects, including Meng Yan, Zhang Ke, and Wang Shu. They contrasted Finnish and Chinese architects’ architectural design thinking and attempted to discover the shared values both pursue.

“Building inspiring and enjoyable cities with many layers and cultural variations as well as creating comfortable homes, workplaces, and public spaces—and routes between them—are, in the end, objectives of architects in both countries. But while Finns know how to support privacy, the Chinese master community. And while Chinese architects know how to tackle chaos and speed, their Finnish colleagues are experts in taking advantage of tranquility and empty space. These skills can be applied in both countries, even if the starting points and issues are completely different.”

The Chinese architectural community has also expressed curiosity and a wish to learn from Finnish architecture, which is not a typical internationalist style, and places greater emphasis on regional differences. Professor Kong Yuhang, School of Architecture, Tianjin University, commented highly on Finnish architecture: “In general, the impression of Finnish architecture is not exaggerating or vulgar. It is rather elegant, constituting the masterpieces of modern architecture.”

Driven by architectural media and academics, Finnish architecture has gained sufficient peer recognition from China and has become an inspiring example from which to learn. Finland’s most celebrated modernist architect, Alvar Aalto, has become a role model for many Chinese architects and, to some extent, a symbol of Finnish architecture in China. Although Finnish architects are not known for writing, Pallasmaa’s books, for example, have been translated into Chinese. Also, books introducing Aalto’s work have been translated into Chinese and published in China. Chinese architectural journals have published special issues on Finnish architecture and have asked Finnish architects and academics for articles.

Nowadays, communication between China and Finland has expanded beyond interactions with key individuals familiar with design. Widespread media accessibility (e.g., cell phone-based mobile Internet) has realized an instantaneous exchange of information. A successful project can immediately become well known worldwide. Driven by influential media, international architects with high visibility who have completed projects in places outside China are often invited to China for similar projects. One of the most available examples to illustrate the media influence between Finland and China is the Helsinki Central Library (Oodi) and its designer, ALA.

When the Helsinki Central Library (Oodi), an avant-garde library design, first appeared on the Chinese Internet, it immediately became popular. Articles about the library were widely shared and promoted on the Chinese Internet. “The birth of the world’s
most subversive library: cooking, lease, Karaoke, anything is possible!”⁴¹⁵ That is the headline of a widespread report that received many clicks on the Chinese social network WeChat. This report did not focus on building design per se; instead, it discussed the feasibility of various activities in the library.⁴¹⁶ The article, and the fact that it is popular, reflects a strong image of livable cities in Nordic countries and suggests not just how favorable Chinese people admire such architecture but also the Finnish way of life. The Chinese architectural community quickly noticed ALA’s experience in library design. After winning second prize in the Sino–Finnish Center competition in Nanjing (see Chapter Five), ALA received an invitation in 2019 to compete for the construction of the new Jiangning library in Nanjing, China.⁴¹⁷

A similar case happened to another well-known Finnish architectural firm, JKMM. The Amos Rex Museum, which the firm designed at the center of Helsinki, also became an Internet sensation in China. For the Chinese audience, the building’s undulating hills and circular skylights created in the plaza are reminiscent of the moon’s surface and present a public living space.⁴¹⁸ With its design cases in Finland, JKMM has succeeded in obtaining opportunities to participate in museum design competitions in China.

In late 2019, Teemu Kurkela, co-founder of the firm, was invited by Position, one of China’s influential architectural media and design promotion agencies, to deliver a lecture in Shenzhen titled “An Architectural Recipe for Happiness.” Kurkela’s lecture addresses that architecture ultimately needs to form a concern for the well-being of common people’s lives and a spirit of sharing.⁴¹⁹ Also, the aspiration of “happiness” in Chinese society has created new demands for spaces and urban environments, which, to a large extent, respond to the idealized mental state of China’s emerging urban middle class.

Several months later, JKMM participated in a competition for the Shenzhen branch of China’s National Museum (also called the Guoshen Museum, based on its Chinese abbreviation), which attracted numerous well-known international architects. This museum has a total floor area of about 120,000 square meters, with the ambition of setting a new benchmark for museum design in China.⁴²⁰

Finnish architects’ works in Finland and elsewhere in Europe serve as essential references for developing the Chinese architectural design market. Like many other developed countries with media influence and a more active position in cultural exports, Finland remains a “highland” of design and occupies an advanced position in the global architectural design production chain. Newly constructed buildings from design-leading countries can significantly influence architectural preference in many other places.

⁴¹⁶ ibid. ⁴¹⁷ Although ALA Architects did not succeed with their design, this case provided insight into the rules of Chinese architectural competitions. Two other architectural firms, Kris Yao and Snøhetta, were selected for the second stage. Interestingly, the proposals of these two firms represented two different aesthetic orientations: Kris Yao’s design showcased a “New Chinese” style with some traditional abstracted elements, while Snøhetta’s proposal displayed a more typically international taste. In a sense, the jury of architects evaluates the technical feasibility and usability of the entries in China. However, the final decision ultimately rests with local government officials.

⁴¹⁸ Archina, 2018. ⁴¹⁹ Kurkela, 2020. ⁴²⁰ The design documents explicitly refer to the museum as a “world-class, century-old classic comprehensive museum and city business card.”
Companies that have succeeded in the Finnish domestic design market have an inherent advantage in architectural exports to developing regions. However, design competitions in China’s large cities can be regarded as highly competitive for international architectural design firms. Competitions are generally considered the “launching pad” for architects’ careers, and their entry into new markets may also begin with winning in a competition.

For clients, architectural competitions solicit concepts and provide alternative options for future development. Also, architectural competitions are communicative procedures that generate concerns and raise questions, and competition sponsors can make trade-offs between aesthetics, public regulations, and social acceptabilities. A well-prepared competition with a detailed design brief reflects the fairness of one society and the maturity of the architecture industry.

In contrast to the open competitions that are relatively common in Finland, competitions in China for important projects are likelier to take place in the form of invitations. While an invitation-only system with adequate compensation can provide some financial security for architectural offices, it also creates higher barriers to entry. Shenzhen and China’s other significant cities often serve as laboratories for experimenting with organizing architectural design bidding and administrative approaches, such as preparing well-informed bilingual bidding documents, internationalized jury members, and Internet advertising.

Moreover, prequalification specifically tailored to a project’s attributes is becoming common in China. Prequalification is a selection process used to identify architectural firms for a competition, based primarily on principal architects’ reputations and design firms’ previous experiences with completed projects. These important competitions often attract internationally renowned architects, and many of these architectural firms have established stable collaborative networks with local governments and LDIs. Also, awards or honorary titles received by architects have become entry tickets to important competitions. Some competitions even set a shortlist of tender participants as Pritzker Architecture Prize winners or China’s officially certified “Architectural Masters.”

In addition to considering architects’ design capabilities, the Chinese architectural design market also searches for service security and reliable capacity for overall control of the entire design process. According to project designs, clients generally prefer architects with previous experience in similar architectural designs, which may reduce the risk of unexpected results.

ALA and JKMM have been offered more Chinese competitions, primarily

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421 Zhao, Z. et al., 2012.
425 Kreiner, 2010.
426 Although in recent years, large architectural competitions in China, such as large theaters or convention centers, may offer millions of RMB in compensation to architectural firms that do not win the final bid. In most cases, the design fee in an architectural competition cannot cover the expenses. The cost of preparing a proposal is significant in terms of staff time, travel expenses, or physical models. The multimedia in the final presentation materials, usually a short video of several minutes mixed with animated diagrams and cinematic animations, is also costly. As Larson (1994) pointed out, the possibility of profitability for architectural design firms is primarily based on winning the project.
428 The so-called “Architectural Master” is an honorary title granted by China’s Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD).
429 Cuff 1991, p. 103.
because of their success in the media and their experiences in designing libraries and museums. Similarly, in 2018, a team of Finnish architectural offices participated in the design competition for the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games venues, combining an image of Finland’s strengths in ice and snow sports.\textsuperscript{430} Moreover, as Cuff points out, an office is somehow “tailored” to the type of its clients and the service it provides in the architectural profession.\textsuperscript{431} For example, the competition for the Shenzhen Qianhai International Financial Exchange Center (SIFEC), in which PES participated at the end of 2018, illustrates that competition organizers can be specific about candidate firms’ previous performances. According to the design scope, the aim of the SIFEC is to be the venue for future G20 summits. Prequalification, therefore, requires experience in the design of large auditoriums.

Shenzhen also has a metropolitan population of over twenty million and has constructed extensive underground structures. There is an underground transportation hub on the opposite side of the SIFEC site, with a network of high-speed rail links between Hong Kong and Shenzhen airports and several local metro interchange stations. In this case, prequalification also requires architectural offices to have experience with underground projects. PES was selected because of its expertise in theaters and underground stations (e.g., the Kehärata Ring Rail Line linking Helsinki city-center and Vantaa Airport in Finland).\textsuperscript{432} In the assessment, there were eighty-one applicants, who could be from individual companies or collaborative partners, and seven of them were chosen to join the competition.\textsuperscript{433} Like many competitions in China, the list of candidates is often a collection of star architects and influential Chinese LDIs. The entry barriers and fierce competition in the Chinese architectural design market have challenged the development of Finnish architects. Nevertheless, after almost twenty years of development, Finnish architects have achieved several successes in China.

In the following section, I utilize case studies to analyze how Finnish architects secure their opportunities. Also, I attempt to apply consistent perspectives to the analysis.

\textsuperscript{430} PES-Architects, 2018.
\textsuperscript{431} Cuff, 1991, p.55.
\textsuperscript{432} PES-Architects, 2018.
\textsuperscript{433} After great efforts, PES still missed out on the project. The architectural firm OMA became the final winner.
which include 1) the background of architect(s), 2) the context of a project, 3) the empirical facts of a project, 4) the main design ideas of a building, 5) the design thinking about a project’s locality and response to surrounding environments, and 6) the feedback and evaluation of Finnish designs in China.

4.5 Finnish Architects’ Artistic Installations in China

Several artistic and architectural exhibitions have emerged in recent years in China to promote the exchange of modern art and as a sign of China’s efforts to build globalized cities. The first Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture (UABB) was held in Shenzhen in 2005. Since 2007, this event has been co-organized by the neighboring cities of Shenzhen and Hong Kong. The Biennale positions itself as a platform that focuses on global urban issues, especially the Pearl River Delta region’s rapid urbanization. Nowadays, it has become a significant architectural event in China.

In 2009 and 2013, Finnish architects Marco Casagrande and Anssi Lassila were invited to participate in exhibitions and present their works to Chinese audiences. In this study, these two cases were chosen not only because they both appeared in the same biennial but also because, through their designs, they both attempted to express their views on social issues in China. There are similarities in their thinking, design approach, and choice of materials, which to some extent reflect Finnish architects’ shared characteristics.

Marco Casagrande has a unique cross-disciplinary background in the Finnish architectural community and is recognized in several fields. He is an architect, artist, writer, and also served as a volunteer mercenary during the Bosnian Civil War in 1993. At the 2009 UABB, Casagrande, together with Taiwanese architects Hsieh Ying-Chun and Roan Ching-Yueh, collaborated on an installation project called “Bug Dome,” which used traditional bamboo weaving craftsmanship to create a fluid sheltered space in a ruined construction site in Shenzhen. The work attempted to bring attention to the lives of migrant workers in China and to advocate for their rights in the city. As China’s urbanization progresses, many people from rural areas, many of whom are migrant workers, have searched for job opportunities in cities. Most migrant workers are employed in the manufacturing, construction, and service sectors, where manual labor is the mainstay. The construction industry has taken advantage of these short-term laborers from distant rural areas—a labor sourcing practice well suited to building projects’ one-time, site-specific nature.

In 2018, there were nearly 290 million migrant workers, most of whom entered the major cities of East China. However, due to the residential registration system (Hukou), which separates urban and rural residents in China, many migrant workers in such social deprivation cannot access the same social benefits as urban residents, including affordable housing, health
care, and education. Migrant workers have contributed significantly to China's rapid development, but they have become the ones often neglected by society.

Architects Marco Casagrande, Hsieh Ying-Chun, and Roan Ching-Yueh chose “WEAK!” as an integral component of their design narratives not only because of the simple and primitive materials used in their work but also as an expression of their concern for the underprivileged in the city. **Bug Dome** was made from bamboo strips and aimed to present a space where migrant workers in Shenzhen could engage in activities such as karaoke, reading, and resting. In the architects’ opinion, this simple space serves as a manifesto, bringing nature into the city and redefining the grassroots meaning of belonging to society.

A few years later, another Finnish architect Anssi Lassila reflected a different theme in his project for UABB. The Museum of Finnish Architecture invited Lassila to participate in two international biennales, the UABB in 2013 and the Venice Biennale in 2014. Lassila’s work, titled “Re-creation,” was divided into two parts. Collaborating with different craftsmen and employing different materials, Lassila created two “primitive huts.” Based on the same architectural prototype, Lassila demonstrated his thoughts about architectural regionality and presented a dialogue between the two localities. Both huts were based on an upwardly reduced form. The design of the “Finnish hut” was made of solid wooden blocks, while the “Chinese hut” was made of bamboo strapping. Through his two different design versions, Lassila attempted to illustrate how different cultural contexts can influence structure and construction methods.

Lassila’s work is characterized by a profound passion for wood, and timber has consistently been a central element in his projects. Before the Shenzhen Biennale, Lassila made the “Finnish hut” in Finland with carpenter Kari Virtanen and shipped it to Shenzhen. After that, Lassila further developed his design

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435 Casagrande, 2009.
436 ibid.
437 ibid.
438 Lassila, 2014.
439 ibid.
440 ibid.

**Figures 11 – 12.** A photo of the “Bug Dome” after its completion on site in Shenzhen (left), and a hand-drawn sketch by architect Casagrande (right). Image credit: Casagrande Laboratory
sketches with two builders from Hong Kong, Gigi Leung and Richard So, who were responsible for building the bamboo-made “Chinese hut” of the hut in Shenzhen.\textsuperscript{441} According to Lassila, he wanted to express that even a “pure” architectural idea, influenced and nurtured by different geographical contexts, materials, and craftsmanship, can achieve innovative effects.\textsuperscript{442}

By establishing a dialogue between the two huts in terms of their forms, materials, and tectonics, the architect attempted to express the theme of cultural exchange and cooperation between the East and West within a globalized context.\textsuperscript{443} This work embodies Lassila’s belief that artistic creation is based on continuous interaction and reinterpretation. The architect mentioned that the installation also addresses the issue of “copycat architecture” in China and implied that architects can mutually benefit from continuous cultural exchange.\textsuperscript{444} In a sense, Lassila wanted to remind his Chinese colleagues that it is preferable to localize designs from somewhere else by utilizing traditional, local materials and techniques instead of direct replication.\textsuperscript{445}

Since all of these aforementioned artworks only exist for a relatively short period, they are more like artistic manifestos than functional buildings and can hardly be considered complete architectural design activities. However, the experimentalism expressed in these avant-garde artworks transcends the boundaries of marketability. Moreover, the aesthetic quest was not these architects’ primary motivation for creating these art installations. Compared to actual buildings used for complicated social relations or to respond to specific needs, these installations reflect Finnish architects’ opinions on and attitudes toward some social issues in China. Although these Finnish architects are not researchers focusing on Chinese topics, it is for this reason that the ideas embedded in their works,
in a way, deliver an intuitive impression of China from a Finnish perspective. These artistic installations give visitors a visual symbol and spatial experience, and what underpins them is a kind of “functional complementary” proposed by architects after observing and contemplating the local context.

Casagrande’s approach centered around providing low-tech shelter and highlighted the necessity of creating a sense of belonging for ordinary workers in response to a lack of public space in China’s urbanization scenario. On the other hand, concerning architectural design “copycats” in China during its rapid development period, Lassila suggested getting inspiration from other cultures by producing a mirror image of Finnish wooden structures. For Casagrande and Lassila, although their ideas were hidden behind an artistic mask, their constructs should become or be interpreted as artifacts with specific functions. These two cases reflect that functionalism is still at the very heart of their thinking, after stripping architects’ social aspirations.

Furthermore, for these two Finnish architects, materials are laden with cultural symbolism, and the substitution of materials implies a transition between cultures. The architects successfully utilized the characteristics of bamboo, such as ease of processing and transportation. Local builders are familiar with bamboo’s properties, know how to process it, and provide convenient and feasible construction solutions. In that sense, bamboo became the counterpart of Finnish wood in China as a localized building material and as a cultural token. The locality of Casagrande and Lassila’s works is predominantly expressed via the transformation of materials and the adoption of localized craftsmanship.

This section examines Finnish architects’ medium-sized building designs in China, including Villa No. 20 (by architects Matti Sanaksenaho and Pirjo Sanaksenaho), the Church of Shadows (by architect Vesa Honkonen), and the Finnish Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo (by architect Teemu Kurkela). Due to the relatively well-defined design context and functionality, these buildings do not necessarily establish complicated conversations with local cultures and become architectural “souvenirs” that travel to other places. These projects’ reasonable scale and relatively free design conditions have enabled architects to focus on details and embody more independent architectural thinking and craftsmanship. Meanwhile, the backgrounds of these projects, such as World Expos and architectural exhibition events, have encouraged architects to maintain their personalized characters. In many ways, the architects have used simple and effective geometric languages and applied various representative Finnish materials in their works. This architectural design category has played a significant role in disseminating the image of Finnish architecture, allowing people in China to experience authentic designs from the distant country of Finland.

4.6 Finnish Architects’ Small and Medium-Sized Buildings in China

This section examines Finnish architects’ medium-sized building designs in China, including Villa No. 20 (by architects Matti Sanaksenaho and Pirjo Sanaksenaho), the Church of Shadows (by architect Vesa Honkonen), and the Finnish Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo (by architect Teemu Kurkela). Due to the relatively well-defined design context and functionality, these buildings do not necessarily establish complicated conversations with local cultures and become architectural “souvenirs” that travel to other places. These projects’ reasonable scale and relatively free design conditions have enabled architects to focus on details and embody more independent architectural thinking and craftsmanship. Meanwhile, the backgrounds of these projects, such as World Expos and architectural exhibition events, have encouraged architects to maintain their personalized characters. In many ways, the architects have used simple and effective geometric languages and applied various representative Finnish materials in their works. This architectural design category has played a significant role in disseminating the image of Finnish architecture, allowing people in China to experience authentic designs from the distant country of Finland.

447 ibid.
4.6.1 CIPEA Villa No. 20

In 2002, Zhang Xin (a Chinese female real estate developer) was awarded a special prize as “a patron of architectural works” at the Venice Biennale because of the project “Commune by the Great Wall (CGW),” which she prompted. The CGW project invited twelve internationally well-known Asian architects, including Kengo Kuma and Shigeru Ban, to design and create a group of well-functional villas in a valley at the foot of the Badaling Great Wall near Beijing. Upon completion, these villas were put into use as high-end resorts. The CGW brought the concept of an “architectural cluster” to China, an architectural park that combines the works of several esteemed architects. The CGW project gained significant attention within China’s architectural community and received extensive media coverage. The developer aimed to leverage the architects’ reputations, design philosophies, and real estate projects to enhance media impact and market value.

Inspired by CGW, similar architectural clusters occurred in several other Chinese cities in the first decade of the twenty-first century. These clusters served as a means to collectively invite international architects to practice in China. In 2003, the Chinese International Practical Exhibition of Architecture (CIPEA) in Nanjing became another notable architectural cluster project in China. Finnish architects Matti Sanaksenaho and Pirjo Sanaksenaho received the commission and participated in the event. For Matti Sanaksenaho, this was not the first time he had been involved in a project located outside Finland. In 1992, he was known to the Finnish architectural community from his student days as one of the principal architects of the Finnish pavilion at the Seville World Expo.

In 2002, Chinese artist Xu Jiang, architectural critic Li Xiaoshan, and Japanese architect Arata Isozaki met during the Shanghai Biennale and generated the idea of planning an international exhibition by composing a group of buildings with distinct design qualities. In the 1980s, Isozaki had early experience curating architectural clusters in Japan. From the late 1980s until 1992, he was the coordinator of the “Nexus World” project in Fukuoka. Years later, Isozaki encountered another opportunity to practice a similar concept again in China, this time at the CIPEA, which was supported by the Ministry of Culture of China, a local real estate developer, an art patron, and the Pukou District government. The endorsement from official institutions strengthened the credibility of the CIPEA and facilitated its implementation.

In 2003, Isozaki and Chinese architect Liu Jiakun were appointed as curators of the CIPEA at Foshou Lake in Nanjing. The site is a hilly scenic area close to Lao Shan.
Forest Park and the Pearl Spring Tourism Zone on the outskirts of Nanjing downtown. The Canadian architectural firm Ekistics was commissioned to undertake the master plan and coordination of the architectural design for the entire area. According to the master plan, there were twenty individual villas and three public buildings planned, including an art museum, convention center, and recreation center.454

During the initial CIPEA preparatory committee meeting in March 2003, the exhibition committee ensured the theme “rebuild balance,” which was based on the consideration that architecture should respond to local culture and nature and combine a variety of artistic approaches.455 The international architects were nominated by Isozaki, who made his criteria for potential candidates: 1) to find a group of young architects who have strong and fresh ideas to design the villas, and 2) to select another two established, world-class architects from America and Europe to collaborate with him in creating the three public buildings. Finally, twenty-four architects from fifteen countries (eleven Chinese architects and thirteen international architects) were invited to participate in the exhibition.456

In 2003, Matti Sanaksenaho and Pirjo Sanaksenaho were surprised to receive a fax from Isozaki inviting them to participate in this architectural event in China.457 Before that, however, Isozaki had seen only some of their works in architectural publications. Without hesitation, Matti and Pirjo decided to participate.458 A spectrum of internationally well-known architects was invited to design the villas, including Mathias Klotz (Chile), Hrvoje Njiric (Croatia), David Adjaye (Britain), Luis Moreno Mansilla (Spain), Sean Godsell (Australia), Odile Decq (France), and Gábor Bachmann (Hungary). Several Chinese architects also joined the exhibition, including Zhang Lei, Liu Jiakun, Zhou Kai, and Wang Shu.

At that time, these young architects might not have been as well known to the public as the star architects, but their works were featured with their personalized design approaches. These villas, designed by young architects, ranged in size from 200 to 800 square meters. Likewise, Arata Isozaki, Steven Holl, and Ettore Sottsass were invited to

Figures 15 - 18. These photos show architects participating in the CIPEA touring the site. Figure 15 shows the original Villa No. 20 site. The person in white in Figure 16 is Arata Isozaki, curator of the CIPEA. From left to right, the people in Figure 17 are Ai Weiwei, Sean Godsell, Zhang Lei, and Matti Sanaksenaho. The man in the green shirt in Figure 18 is Steven Holl. Image credit: Sanaksenaho Architects
create public buildings. After the delays caused by the SARS outbreak in August 2003, the invited architects visited the site, and the residential plots were randomly assigned to architects by a lottery system. Matti Sanaksenaho and Pirjo Sanaksenaho were fortunate to secure a location at the area’s entrance, giving them the opportunity to design Villa No.20. At the end of January 2004, all the schematic designs were completed, and construction began in 2005. The project went through several years of dormancy due to its developer’s financial problems, but it progressed slowly and was finally completed in 2012.

A scenic, natural environment surrounds the site, and the building designed by the Finnish architects sits on a slope that extends to the water’s edge. When the architects visited the site, they drew inspiration from the surroundings, leading to the development of an architectural concept that integrates spatial sensation, functional considerations, and the natural context.

As Norberg-Schulz mentioned, architects visualize their understanding of nature, while architecture itself becomes a complement to nature. The approach is universal and does not differ depending on whether a project is located; audiences in both places can detect a sense of familiarity with the architecture. According to architects Matti and Pirjo Sanaksenaho, the design image of Villa No.20 is themed by a boat floating on calm water, mirroring its location by the waterfront and amid a forestry landscape. As the architects mentioned, the building functions as a poetic supplement to the specific terrain: “We had to incorporate a roof-top terrace to allow people to admire the great display of nature. We walked around a dam-like structure that was planted in the middle of the lake to take in the environment as if from a boat.”

The footprint of the villa takes on a nearly oval shape, which somehow echoes the design of the Finnish pavilion at the Seville World Expo and the architects’ previous chapel design in Turku. The building presents a regular yet internally changing geometry that responds to the sloping site. The main entrance is located on the rear side of the villa, where people can access the roof terrace or step down to the lake. Due to consideration of the local climate and living habits, the architects adjusted the villa’s functional layout. For example, after communicating with the client, they canceled the original idea of placing the swimming pool on the roof terrace.

Figure 19. View of Villa No.20 from the water. Image credit: Tuomas Uusheimo
In Villa No. 20, Finnish architectural characters are again represented by their connection to nature and the representation of materials. The architects chose materials from different places, with materials originating from both China and Finland. Matti Sanaksenaho recalled that when they walked into a vast local construction materials market in Nanjing, it was like “a child walking into a candy store.” The primary interior furnishing material, timber, is sourced from local Chinese cherry trees, which exhibit a reddish hue and evoke a typical Scandinavian ambiance. The building facades are covered by pre-patinated copper sheeting from Luvata in Finland. To some extent, green copper reminds people of the traditional Nordic features for building proofs and contrasts with reddish wood in the interior space. Through the collage and combination of materials, the architectural design of Villa No. 20 expresses multiple identities and establishes connections between different locales.

The CIPEA functions as an architectural park and art community that integrates place-promotion events, real estate development, and cultural exchange activities. From the developer’s perspective, the international architects’ reputations have significantly enhanced CIPEA’s commercial value and media visibility. In turn, the CIPEA has also allowed younger-generation architects to demonstrate their creativity and intelligence based on conceptual thinking and research. Architects operate under relatively unfettered conditions, allowing them to bring their ideal architectural prototypes to life in the real world. Additionally, the CIPEA serves as a reference for these architects’ potential future endeavors in China.

4.6.2 The Church of Shadows
In 2005, Finnish architect Vesa Honkonen received a commission to design a Lutheran Church in Chengdu, Sichuan province. Since the 1990s, as a large city in southwest China, Chengdu has been taking measures to grow its economy and establish itself as an internationalized city. The Chengdu High-tech Industrial Development Zone (CDHT) is part of an ambitious plan to attract transnational corporations and investments. The Tianfu International Community (TFIC), established in 2010, is situated in the heart of the CDHT and aims to create a multifunctional, international talent community accommodating up to 5,000 individuals seeking employment in Chengdu. Spanning an area of approximately 100,000 square meters, the TFIC includes features such as Chinese-English bilingual kindergartens, sports facilities, and a church, all aimed at enhancing its international image. The TFIC’s planning guideline argues that the importation of an “original” European modernist church contributes to establishing the community’s gesture of international openness.

Architect Honkonen has been engaged in international practices since the early stages of his career. In the 1990s, he was part of American architect Steven Holl’s design team when Holl was designing...
Kiasma, the Contemporary Art Museum in Helsinki. In addition to his international experience within the practice realm, he has served as a professor at design schools in Sweden and China. Honkonen met Chinese architect Fang Hai while Fang was still studying for his doctoral degree at the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH). These two individuals collaborated extensively in subsequent years. In the design of the Church of Shadows, Fang was the primary coordinator between Finland and China. The local partner for this project was the China Southwest Architectural Design and Research Institute (CSWADI), which completed construction drawings (including structural, HVAC, and other ancillary disciplines).

The church is presented as a black box situated at the corner of a plaza. Charring wood is a standard facade treatment for wooden buildings in Finland, but it is rare in China, where black buildings are also unusual. Due to its proximity to a city road, the building adopts an introverted gesture by employing a relatively close facade in noisy surroundings. According to the architect, the starting point for this design was to create an interior space with a subtly illuminated, shadowy atmosphere, and the architect expected to have a darkened place for peaceful contemplation. As Honkonen mentioned, “The essential idea was to find dark, almost-black materials for the interior finishes and to think about how light would strike them and be reflected from them; the aim being to create a space that would be almost in darkness, so that light could truly come into its own.”

With this concept in mind, Honkonen selected a rough, dark-gray slate for the interior walls to minimize reflection. In this dark and dim interior, the altarpiece by Finnish artist Nina Roos, with its contrasting colors, becomes the visual center of the space. Also, Honkonen placed a light and shadow installation, a “forest window,” which forms a second visual focal point in addition to the altar. The architect installed a large area of frosted glass on one side of the church’s main hall. In the exterior space outside the window, the architect created a kind of symbolic

Figures 20 – 22. Honkonen’s hand-drawn sketch of the church’s bell tower (left), the exterior of the Church of Shadows with its bell tower (middle), and the interior effect of the shadow church and the altarpiece by artist Nina Roos (right). Image credit: Vesa Honkonen Architects (left) and ARCH-EXIST Photography (middle and right)
forest by positioning twenty weather-resistant steel columns of different diameters.

On the one hand, these columns produce different degrees of shadows on the frosted glass, creating an ever-changing light and shadow effect for the interior space. On the other hand, these columns become public sculptures set in the outdoor square. In a way, the forest window is a human-made installation that attempts to recall an image of the natural senses. The design concept links the Church of Shadows in Chengdu with some of Finland’s classic modern church designs. For example, in the Otaniemi Chapel in Espoo in Finland, one is confronted with a natural forest. In contrast, architect Honkonen created a virtual image of Finnish woods in China. As Norberg-Schulz pointed out in his phenomenological analysis, an architect may present a symbolic nature revealed via a different medium as a remembrance of the forest that does not exist in the surroundings.  

Moreover, this symbolized connection between the human senses and nature is present in different cultures. For example, traditional Chinese gardens’ artificial rockeries (jia shan), via stacking stones, are meticulously designed to create a “scale model” of an imaginary and idealized natural landscape. This comparison is not an attempt to label Honkonen’s design as an oriental or Chinese feature but rather to illustrate that the shared abstract interpretation and imagination constitute a way of conversation, making the design sensible to individuals from diverse backgrounds and places.

Honkonen has a multidisciplinary background in design, and in a sense, this interdisciplinary interest in “complete design” also can be regarded as a general character of Finnish architects. Finnish architects often demonstrate a willingness to extend their design scope to encompass architectural spaces and include details such as lighting fixtures and furniture. In addition to being an architect, Honkonen designs lighting and furniture. This multidisciplinary knowledge and talent were brought together in his church design in Chengdu.
Honkonen maintained a holistic approach throughout the project, paying attention to every aspect, from the exterior of the building to numerous details such as door handles, pews, the altar, rainwater drains, and the yard’s fountain. In the design of fixed furniture, there is a substitution of Finnish wood with Chinese bamboo materials. Compared with the solid wood pews and altars in European churches, the ones in the Church of Shadows are custom-made of industrialized bamboo panels, while their style is influenced by Finnish sculptor Kain Tapper (1930-2004).

In addition to primary functional forms, materialistic expressions, and lighting atmospheres, the architect deliberately created various architectural symbols, such as the main entrance’s form and the bell tower’s curved metal shell. Christianity in China has a long and winding development history, and in today’s Chinese society, Christianity has a large number of believers. For Christians, these symbols can be interpreted with religious meaning. Architecturally, they are contrasted with homogenized material selection and box shapes. Meanwhile, the symbols gave the building its character to the local population, which they call “the church with a peanut on top.”

In sum, this modernist Lutheran church, which has some design qualities, represents a new phenomenon that has emerged in China in recent years. These pure, serene, and elegant modern religious architectural designs contrast with a noisy urban backdrop, satisfying the aesthetic needs of young people in Chinese cities. After a few years of delay, the Church of Shadows was completed and consecrated in October 2013. In addition to regular Sunday worship, this church is also used as a wedding venue and has become a new Internet-famous spot in Chengdu.

4.6.3 The Finnish Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo
The 2010 Shanghai World Expo was another opportunity for China to showcase its image in an international event after the Beijing Olympics. During the preparatory period, Shanghai promoted a massive urban renewal program to deepen its position as China’s premier international metropolis. The Expo venues were strategically located on both sides of the Huangpu River, repurposing former industrial areas such as the former Jiangnan Shipyard.

The Expo held significant cultural and business implications. On the cultural side, China had high expectations of seeing original designs from many leading countries in the design field. It was also a valuable learning and experiential opportunity for the Chinese architectural community. At that time, I had the opportunity to visit the Finnish pavilion at the Shanghai Expo and many other temporary buildings before they were dismantled.

On the business side, the Finnish government and the business community demonstrated a keen interest in showcasing Finland in China. For Finland, the Shanghai Expo was an influential platform for Finnish companies to expand their networks in China, thus generating new business opportunities,
especially in response to China’s growing demand for high-tech industries, new materials, and eco-sustainable solutions. More than forty Finnish companies and organizations were involved in the Finnish pavilion exhibition at the Shanghai Expo. The Finnish president at that time, Tarja Halonen, attended Finnish Pavilion Day as part of her visit to China. In the initial planning stages of the pavilion, consideration was given to conducting a high standard of diplomatic events, and the design brief requested that architects consider VIP functions and corresponding circulations.\textsuperscript{485}

In 2008, a competition was held to select the Finnish pavilion for the Shanghai Expo. Finnish architectural firm JKMM’s proposal, “Kirnu,” was chosen as the winner of the 104 entries, and Teemu Kurkela was the project’s chief architect.\textsuperscript{486} The Finnish pavilion in Shanghai was shaped like a giant white bowl suspended in calm water. As visitors went through the entrance, there was a courtyard with gentle curves. The wall surfaces surrounding the atrium were made of a stretchable white membrane material, and daylight was partially transmitted through the membrane and became a soft light source for the interior space. However, in Shanghai’s hot summer, the soft material released an unpleasant odor in the courtyard.

According to the jury, the design had a bright and elegant shape, which evoked a pleasant sensation of its slightly asymmetric geometry.\textsuperscript{487} The name “Kirnu” refers to a “giant’s kettle,” a natural phenomenon left on bedrock because of flows from melting glaciers during the Ice Age. However, instead of taking a direct translation of the geographical terminology, Kirnu’s Chinese name has been translated as Binghu or “Ice Kettle.” Its origin is the poem “The ice (or crystal and pure, “bing”) heart in a jade kettle (or vase, “hu”)” by Wang Changling, a poet of the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907), which is intended to express the integrity and decency of a person’s character.\textsuperscript{488} Binghu creates visual imagery that fits an architectural shape. Like previous Finnish pavilions, the pavilion became a symbolic metaphor for Finland.

As Kurkela mentioned in his introduction text in a Chinese architecture journal: “The Finnish pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo 2010 portrays our country in miniature, presenting both Finland and its society to the world. The pavilion’s sculptural architecture aims to create visions of freedom, creativity, and innovation for the future. The pavilion will rise from the water as an island-like miniature city. (...) The architecture of the pavilion draws inspiration from Finnish nature. Elements of nature are reinterpreted in the pavilion, including the shape of small rocks found on coastal islands, the surface of a fish, the framed view of the sky, and the smell of tar on wood. Like nature, the pavilion offers a quiet refuge from busy city life for anyone who wishes to enter.”\textsuperscript{489}
In his words, Kurkela implied two visions that must be reflected in his design. First, the architect believes that the building should represent Finland's future vision and social and technological progress. In the design, we can observe that material choice becomes one medium for expressing thoughts about futurist visions and a semantic imagination of nature. The architects used more than 25,000 white panels made of ProFi on the facade, an environmentally sustainable material produced from surplus paper and plastic left over from the production of self-adhesive label materials. In his description, Kurkela ascribed cultural significance to facade design. By serving as a metaphor for fish, the architect attempted to convince people that the material is part of the imagination about Finland.

This fish-scale-like facade has appeared in several of JKMM’s works, such as the Finnish Pavilion at Shanghai Expo, the Viikki Church and the Seinäjoki Library. These works use different materials to create similar patterns. As the building’s external context changes, the material selection for the building facade can shift from a rustic wood panel to a more technically modern synthetic material. This material with innovative connotations not only gives the building a distinctive texture, continuing a Finnish design tradition of materialism but also implies Finland’s leading position in renewable technologies and sustainability awareness. Once again, material selection becomes a mark of identity, and it serves as a design method and tactical decision that entails the purpose of the pavilion.

Second, the architect believes that the design conveys an imagined nature. The architecture is seen as an epitome of the Finnish landscape and represents the totality of many natural elements, such as islands, forests, rocks, or lakes. Created by a Finnish architect, it shows a Chinese audience a spiritual and poetic homeland. Faced with the megacity of Shanghai and a crowded Expo site, the architect envisioned his design as a shelter for a hermit’s life and an idyllic retreat in the countryside. As he mentioned, the pavilion accommodates the “refugees” from...
Furthermore, beyond a macro symbolic narrative, there are still some intriguing commonalities to be discovered at the level of urban life. Architects can further explore the possibilities of a more profound cultural exchange in future projects by revealing ideas beneath the empirical surface of everyday events.

The concept of an enclosed courtyard has appeared several times in Finnish pavilions, such as the pavilion designed by SARC Architects at the Hannover Expo in 2000, where an actual Finnish birch forest was set in the atrium. JKMM again won the Finnish pavilion design at Expo 2020 in Dubai, and his proposal shows a similar kind of yard surrounded by changing forms to the core of the building. It seems that these Finnish architects attempted to continuously reconstruct an idealized archetype in their minds, and they attempted to recreate a separate natural scene or meditation space in the Finnish pavilions in Hannover, Shanghai, and Dubai.

An architect’s design interpretation is often a symbolic elaboration of a given form so that discourse becomes a reasonable imagination with specific functional and sometimes replaceable characters. However, the courtyard concept of the Finnish pavilion in Shanghai successfully showed Chinese visitors a tranquil quality via its architectural simplicity and stillness. Its design demonstrated a power transcending language through its forms, spaces, and materials and was praised in numerous reports in the Chinese architectural press.

In an interview conducted by Arkitehtti, Teemu Kurkela was asked, “What is the defining principle behind the design of the pavilion? Did you strive for Finnishness?” From the perspective of the architectural media, Finnish pavilions have been given the self-evident task of reinterpreting Finnish identity in different contexts and ages. However, Kurkela still emphasized that the starting point is a personalized and idealized model of a way of habitation, the image of what the architect calls the “island.”

“The key concept was to create an island, a structure surrounded by water. In Finland, islands and nature generally are within everyone’s reach. The pavilion can be seen as a man-made...
island built by the Finns and Chinese together. The central courtyard, open to the sky, was the starting point, and the formal language of the design was developed later. We aimed to express the essential, nothing else. In the tradition of Finnish architecture and design, there is an appreciation for simple, abstract solutions.”

In response to the question, Kurkela does not expect his work to be understood as a fixed paradigm. Also, it is problematic for him to comprehend or interpret architecture merely on a visual level, which would compare his new design with pre-established images. The architect wants to highlight that his design philosophy is open and based on a shareable community of human behaviors and practices rather than an ethnic symbol. In a way, Kurkela’s answer implies a discursive gap between the architectural profession and the media’s concerns and interests. His response is not only to avoid a nationalist label but also to defend the autonomy of architects’ discourses.

In sum, Finnish pavilions at World Expos have traditionally brought together the designs of many outstanding Finnish architects. 

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497 Kurkela, 2010a.
499 Both Finnish and Chinese media reports can confirm this statement. By the end of October 2010, the number of visitors to the Finnish pavilion “Kirnu” had already exceeded the total population of Finland. The Finnish pavilion considered this a remarkable record, as it received twice as many visitors as Finland had at any previous Expo. The 5.3 millionth visitor was rewarded with a lucky prize of an overnight stay for two at the Portman Ritz-Carlton Hotel in the Shanghai World Financial Center (Havia, 2010; Yang and Pu, 2010).
architects and have made them a particular category in Finnish architectural history. With the Shanghai Expo, a China-based building design was, for the first time, added to the repertoire of Finnish pavilions at World Expos. The pavilion was a successful national image-promotion structure. During the Expo, the Finnish pavilion received more visitors than the total population of Finland.\textsuperscript{499} The pavilion became a business card and a platform for showing Finnish cultural, artistic, and technological features. Architecturally, the Finnish pavilion’s design at the Shanghai Expo fully defined itself as an outsider, a dream island floating above the Chinese city. Nevertheless, the spirit that the pavilion brought to China is communication about the experience of living, which gives it a warm intimacy and serves as a foundation for intercultural exchange.

4.7 Finnish Architects’ Large Public Buildings in China

As one of PES’s founders and chief architects, Pekka Salminen is known for his theater and transport infrastructure expertise in Finland. Salminen’s preoccupation with China also makes China another characteristic of his long career and makes him an inescapable figure in this dissertation. To date, Salminen and his firm PES have designed projects of various scales in China, but their cultural projects are clearly among the most notable. It remains one of the very few Finnish firms that has realized large cultural buildings in China and continues to work actively there, competing with other large international architectural firms. By 2018, PES had drawn up approximately eighty projects in China, ranging from competitions, concept designs, drafts, to completed buildings.\textsuperscript{500}

Salminen’s international connections can be traced to his early years working in Timo Penttilä’s office in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{501} Penttilä was one of the most well-known Finnish architects of his time. His design of the Helsinki City Theater remains classic in Finnish modernist architecture. As the project architect of the Helsinki City Theater, Salminen has, from that point on, had a lifelong bond with the design of performance spaces. Penttilä, known for his outspokenness and bold statements, exhibited a keen interest in pluralistic cultures and possessed a broad vision.\textsuperscript{502} As one of Penttilä’s protégés, Salminen was greatly influenced by his approach to architecture. In a 1998 article, Salminen reflected on the impact of working alongside Penttilä, stating, “The opportunity to assist him (Timo Penttilä) in numerous architectural competitions, as well as the international atmosphere of his office, were important stimuli for my own practice as a private architect.”\textsuperscript{503}

Following the establishment of his own office, Salminen’s interest in international \textsuperscript{500} PES-Architects, 2018.
\textsuperscript{501} Salminen had previously worked for Aarne Ervi for a year. The architectural office PES has several partners.
\textsuperscript{502} Penttilä’s book (2013) about architectural theory provides valuable insights into his knowledge. Additionally, his early articles published in Arkkitehti serve as critical materials for studying his ideas. According to Penttilä’s perspective, architects, as experts, bear the responsibility of leading the aesthetics of a society, and political systems should not hinder individual creativity due to unnecessary mechanisms (Penttilä, 1983). Building upon Penttilä’s manuscript, Roger Connah (2015) also authored a book. Furthermore, Penttilä’s emphasis on the role of architects in shaping society and fostering creativity has left a lasting impact on architectural discourse and practice, influencing both present and future generations of architects.
\textsuperscript{503} Salminen, 1998.
Prior to his venture into China, he had successfully collaborated with architects from different countries and achieved architectural exports. The design of the Marienkirche Concert Hall in Neubrandenburg, Germany was another chance to work internationally. Drawing from his practical experiences in Germany and Croatia, Salminen ultimately set his sights on China as the next “hot spot” in his architectural endeavors.

Salminen’s first contact with China occurred during his trip in 2003 when he was searching for suitable granite for the Helsinki Airport expansion. His further engagement with China was facilitated by his connection with furniture designer Yrjö Kukkapuro, whom Salminen had long known. In the Lahti City Theater, which was completed in 1983, Salminen used Kukkapuro’s auditorium seat and lounge sofa designs. In 2004, Kukkapuro introduced Chinese architect Fang Hai to Salminen. Fang worked as a guide with knowledge about local situations to help communicate with clients and partner firms during Salminen’s early ventures in China.

On his first visit to China, Salminen secured the opportunity to produce a conceptual design for a hotel in Wuhan. Drawing on his experience as the architect for the Vantaa Airport T2 Terminal, he also participated in several airport competitions in China, including Wuhan Tianhe Airport and Hefei Airport. However, none of these projects was successful. Since then, PES has participated in several competitions in China but has yet to secure the opportunity to bring their designs to life. At one point, the firm even contemplated withdrawing from the Chinese market.

In 2008, PES achieved a significant milestone by winning the Wuxi Grand Theater (WGT) project, marking it as the first iconic public building designed by Finnish architects in China. The city of Wuxi, located

For example, in 1978, Salminen met the Polish architect Romuald Loegler, who became his lifelong friend, and they collaborated in various architectural competitions.

The concert hall’s design was carried out shortly after the reunification of Germany in the former East German region.
approximately 100 kilometers from Shanghai, embarked on an ambitious urban development plan for Taihu New Town in 2002. With a vision to accommodate one million residents, the construction of Taihu New Town began in 2007. As one of the most visible projects in this area, the local government began a competition for the WGT in the middle of 2008. This “grand theater” paradigm first appeared in Shenzhen in the late 1980s and became the template around China.\textsuperscript{510} With the Shanghai Grand Theater and the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, this architectural type has become an icon in developing Chinese cities and expanding new urban spaces.\textsuperscript{511}

Similarly, the WGT was envisioned as a “cultural landmark” with the aim of enhancing the city’s image, promoting its competitiveness, and complementing the existing cultural industry. The theater is situated on a reclaimed plot of land near Lihu Lake, providing a picturesque setting for the project.\textsuperscript{512} Several internationally renowned architectural offices were invited to the competition, including GMP from Germany, 3XN from Denmark, Architecture Studio from France, and PES from Finland.\textsuperscript{513} Finally, after two rounds of review and presentation, PES won the project and was awarded the complete design commission, including architecture, interior, and landscape.\textsuperscript{514}

A notable feature of the opera house is its expressive “steel wings.” For Finnish architects, it is rare to see such a structurally expressive design in Finland, let alone such a large-scale architectural mass. Salminen’s structural expressionism can be traced to his early works. For example, in the Kallioharju House design (1976) and the Lahti City Theater (1983), Salminen demonstrated a rational approach of structural systems that control architecture in a modular way. In these designs during Salminen’s early life, the buildings’ beam columns become the elements that contribute to spatial feelings.

Furthermore, Salminen’s atelier design (1987), serving as an extension to his office at Marjaniemi, reflects a new direction in his architectural expression. While maintaining a sense of rational order, the design deviates

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figures33-36.png}
\caption{The ground floor plan of the Lahti City Theater (Fig. 33) and the view of the lobby of the Lahti City Theater (Fig. 34). The floor plan of the Kallioharju House (Fig. 35) and the outside view (Fig. 36). We can notice that the Kallioharju House and the Lahti City Theater both adopt a similar square modal design approach to their architectural plans. Image credit: PES-Architects}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{510} Xue, 2019, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{511} ibid.
\textsuperscript{512} Lihu Lake is a part of the Taihu Lake that extends into Wuxi.
\textsuperscript{513} The name of the WGT during the competition phase was the Wuxi Art Center.
\textsuperscript{514} Salminen, 2021.
from a strict modular grid, and the curved roofs that extend beyond the walls introduce a sense of freedom. The atelier’s glass curtain-wall is leaning, and the windows attached to the curved roof create many irregular sizes. The incorporation of numerous elements of free expression positions the atelier design as a tangible prototype for understanding the architectural concept of the WGT.

As time progressed, the intensity of this expression became more robust and unfettered. This exploration of the structure system continues in the WGT and is presented on a stunning scale. The concept of the steel wings raises the question of its design inspiration. In the WGT’s early physical model studies, the architect used burdock leaves as a reference to simulate the extended roofs. However, the roots of this leaf-like form can be traced back to Salminen’s competition scheme for the Turku Sports Grandstand in 1981, where he won second prize. The image of a hand holding a leaf appeared on the cover of PES’s thirtieth-anniversary exhibition book (1998), titled Teemoja (meaning “theme” in Finnish), which is positioned below this image. After a long time, the structural ideal derived from the theme of plant leaves was finally realized in the WGT. The detailed design of the zinc panels on the upper surface of the steel wings also contributes to the organic appearance of the theater. It is worth noting that the site of the WGT is surrounded by numerous high-rise residential buildings, necessitating the careful design of the building’s top surface to ensure that technical equipment remains concealed from view.515

Salminen, 2018.

PES strategically employed symbolic and metaphorical approaches to introduce the design of the WGT to their Chinese clients. This practice of using graphic metaphors to explain the creative process can be traced back to PES’s early projects in China.516 For example, PES used the image of “a white landing crane” in its Lakeside Hotel project in Wuhan as one of its earliest Chinese competition proposals.517 In Wuxi, PES’s early narrative metaphorically compared the
building to “a dragonfly resting on the water’s edge,” which later shifted to the image of a butterfly. The butterfly symbolism holds significance in China as it relates to the traditional folktale of the Butterfly Lovers, which has inspired numerous opera productions throughout Chinese history.\textsuperscript{518} This aligns well with the WGT’s purpose as a performance space. However, Salminen confessed that he did not initially take such a symbolic metaphor as a starting point.\textsuperscript{519} The WGT’s distant echo of the Chinese architectural tradition can be seen in its grand roof, reminiscent of the characteristic roofs found in traditional Chinese architecture.

“During the competition phase, we began to perceive the building as a dragonfly landed by the lake. The client later wanted to call it a butterfly in reference to the well-known Chinese opera \textit{Butterfly Lovers}. However, we were not specifically striving for a natural metaphor. Due to the shape of its roof wings, the building has a Chinese feel to it, but it is simultaneously international and Finnish as well.”\textsuperscript{520}

In addition to structural design and discourse construction, material expressionism was formed as a cultural theme in the WGT. In collaboration with local design partners, PES took on the task of designing the primary interior public spaces and delved into the construction design of the theater. PES dedicated efforts to customize and experiment with two specific materials in the WGT: the glass-brick wall in the WGT’s lobby, developed in collaboration with Finnish glass artists Tapio Yli-Viikarilla and Kirsti Taiviola, and industrialized strand-woven bamboo as the primary finish material in the opera’s auditorium.

According to PES, the glass block design was inspired by Finland’s abundant lakes and echoes the WGT’s proximity to water.\textsuperscript{521} Additionally, bamboo emerged as a...
significant material choice for Finnish architects in China, akin to the role of wood in their eyes. The WGT opened the beginning of Salminen’s series of material experiments in China. As he continued using bamboo in his subsequent works, bamboo has become a “name card” for PES.

For people in Wuxi, the function that the WGT offers that is relevant to their daily lives may be the public space of the lobby. Salminen stressed that he wanted to create a space that could be open to all citizens all day long, thus avoiding the venue being vacant. According to the architect, although auditoriums are available during show times in the evenings, the public lobby should help support local urban public spaces. The city of Wuxi is located in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River and has sweltering and humid summers. People there like to go out in the evenings and have a flourishing nightlife. Since 2012, the WGT has been organizing “Open the Door to Arts” events during the summer, offering discounted tickets, extended evening hours, and plays for children. As the local newspaper reported in 2015, bringing children to the WGT during summer evenings has become the primary choice for many local parents.

The comfort of air conditioning in the lobby also appeals to visitors who are not attending a show. In general, by shaping a type of public space in which all can share, the WGT has gradually integrated into local people’s daily lives.

Through the WGT, PES acquired further experience in handling large and complicated projects in China. The entire project was moving forward at a breakneck pace. After four years of intensive design and construction, the WGT was put into operation in 2012. Completing the WGT established PES’s reputation in China and brought the firm more market opportunities. In a way, PES was tailored to the identity of a “grand theater architect,” participating in several theater competitions in China over the next few years. However, architectural projects of such magnitude require ongoing maintenance, adaptability to changing user needs, and sustainable operational practices. It is essential to question whether the WGT was designed and built with these considerations in mind.

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522 ibid.
523 The architect’s research on bamboo materials has been further developed in the SCAC. See Chapter Seven for details.
524 Salminen, 2015.
525 ibid.
526 Gong, 2015.
527 ibid.
528 CSWADI stands for China Southwest Architecture De-

**Figures 43 – 49.** These figures show Finnish glass artists experimenting with firing and blowing glass bricks. Figure 45 shows multiple options for the texture of the glass brick prototypes during the design process and the corresponding molds. Figure 46 shows the concealed steel structures holding the glass-bricks. These glass bricks were produced in China by a local manufacturer. Figures 47 and 48 show the effects of the completed glass brick walls and staircases in the WGT lobby. Figure 49 shows the design details of the steel staircase affixed to the glass-brick wall. Image credit: PES-Architects (Figs. 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, and 49), and Martin Lukasczyk (Fig. 46)
While the design for the WGT was progressing in 2009, another opportunity arose for PES in Chengdu. The city planned to construct a high-rise building in its industrial development zone, and PES was invited to compete with Pekka Helin and its local partner, CSWADI. This project consists of a tower (including commercial and office space, and a hotel), a residential building, and a concert hall in Tianfu Software Park. Tuomas Silvennoinen, another principal architect of PES, primarily handled the project. After winning the competition, the program changed dramatically. A higher and more landmark skyscraper replaced three smaller towers in the original design brief. The building was also positioned as the “China-Europe Center,” aiming to become a comprehensive-service platform for trade, investment, and technical cooperation between Western China and Europe. The new skyscraper project was part of Chengdu’s strategy to create a new image for its technology park, attracting international investments and companies, particularly from Europe. The design and Research Institute. In the later phase of the project, a concert hall designed by CSWADI was added to the site. PES was responsible for the overall design and the office tower, and Helin designed the riverside apartment building according to the master plan. CSWADI assisted both Finnish offices with technical designs and provided comments during the design phase.
aim was to facilitate administrative procedures and provide a platform for fostering closer ties between Chengdu and European entities.\textsuperscript{530}

Finnish architects have been relatively uncommonly involved in high-rise buildings due to the limited number of tall buildings in Finland.\textsuperscript{531} The concept of constructing high-rises has been a subject of controversy in Finland. However, China’s vast population and urban structure have made high-density buildings a distinctive feature of the country. Notably, the ICON Tower stands as the sole high-rise tower designed by a Finnish architect in China. In addition to the drab combination of point block and podium, the ICON Tower offers another solution to the high-rise repertoire. Silvennoinen attempted to use a curved form to mediate the brutal contrast between the building and the site. One of the remarkable aspects of the ICON Tower lies in the opportunities it provides for Finnish architects to expand their expertise and experiment with new architectural typologies in the Chinese market. By venturing into such projects, Finnish architects can explore new design concepts and broaden their horizons in the international arena.

On PES’s 50th anniversary in 2018, the firm organized a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Finnish Architecture in Helsinki. The exhibition space was divided into two sections, with one half showcasing scenes from their Helsinki office and the other half presenting scenes from their Shanghai office.\textsuperscript{532} This deliberate layout aimed to highlight their work in different geographical contexts and foster a dialogue between diverse cultures and work approaches. In their exhibition book for Helsinki Design Week, Salminen expressed the following sentiments:

“Working in China has required a willingness to take risks, the ability to endure uncertainty, and, above all, great patience. (...) We regard our work in China as an intercultural exchange in a situation in which the undergrowth of small, high-quality design firms is growing in the shade of massive planning organizations. This development will further increase competition in the Chinese market, but at the same time, it will bring closer together the views of different cultures on the importance of a good environment and sustainable building. China continues to be an adventure to us, offering great challenges but even greater opportunities.”\textsuperscript{533}

\textsuperscript{530} ibid.

\textsuperscript{531} In recent years, several high-rise designs have emerged in the Pasila and Kalasatama areas in Helsinki that have met with strong opposition from Finnish society during the planning and design process.

\textsuperscript{532} In 2011, PES established a wholly owned subsidiary in Shanghai, aiming to enhance the capacity of the Shanghai office and eventually enable it to operate independently. Initially, the office had a relatively small team size and focused on communication and coordination with Chinese clients and design partners, while most of the design work was conducted at the PES office in Helsinki. However, over the years, the Shanghai office gradually expanded, and by 2018, it started participating independently in architectural competitions in China.
At the beginning of 2014, PES won another cultural complex, the SCAC, in Fuzhou (see Chapter Seven). These landmarks challenge the established conventions of Finnish architectural design and defy habitual perceptions, presenting an “out of scale” state for many architects in Finland. They represent a post-industrial society characterized by output services and information, which itself serves a command function.534 These large-scale projects by Finnish architects demonstrate that Finland, despite not being centrally located in Europe, can establish itself as a control node within an international network of services by leveraging its talent, information, and capital. At the same time, these works engage with Chinese social reality on a broader and more profound level, with aspects of local agencies, social norms, and cultural implications all involved in designs. As such, these large-scale design projects become meaningful objects for further research, which I unfold in the following chapters.

4.8 Summary

This chapter provided a primary picture of the historical lineage of Finnish architects’ practices in China and their achievements. In the beginning, a few key Chinese contacts, who were familiar with both Finnish and Chinese conditions, played a vital role in helping Finnish architects enter China. Subsequently, Finnish architects have established networks and adopted an internationalized practice model. Architects’ reputations and expertise are critical to entering competitions and ultimately winning projects in China. Compared to the early days of China’s reform and opening, large-scale public projects in China rely more on architectural firms’ impressive examples and architects’ media presence. Finnish architects often need benchmark works as a portfolio and entry ticket for the Chinese architectural design market.

Furthermore, Finnish architects expect to build a reputation by snowballing local projects in China. That is, one successful and high-quality case brings another. Nevertheless, continuously obtaining projects in China is demanding. Before a design is finally complete, Finnish architects often need to remain engaged in China for a long time and keep trying various opportunities. Finnish architects have participated in many architectural competitions and preliminary drafts in China, but the number of projects that can be realized is still limited. In contrast, China is still learning and experimenting with advanced Western architecture-competition-organization methods, and it needs to develop an open and transparent architectural competition system, similar to Finland’s approach.

After decades of rapid development, Finnish architects have done a considerable amount of work in both practice and discourse. This interaction has also led to a better alignment of their designs with the realities of China. Finland and Finnish architecture have left a positive impression in China, with merits recognized in various  

533 PES-Architects, 2013.  
534 Harvey, 1989.
areas such as high-tech industries, ecological architecture, livable cities, childhood education, and winter sports. This favorable national image has contributed to the media’s promotion of Finnish architectural design, establishing it as a recognizable cultural brand in the Chinese architectural market. The Finnish architects working in China represent a diverse group with varying approaches. Their projects, including the Expo pavilion, churches, and villas, consistently reflect the original Finnish design concepts and material perceptions, serving as symbols of the Finnish way of life.

At the same time, China provides practical opportunities and a heuristic site for Finnish architects to explore the possibilities of architecture. The environments of China can inspire Finnish architects in their designs and enrich architectural categories, material palettes, and design thinking in Finnish architecture. We can observe commonalities in Finnish architects’ practices, including localized thinking based on the transformation of building materials and the coexistence of scenographic and architectonic values. These design cases at different scales illustrate the importance that Finnish architects generally place on the selection of building materials and localization in their practices in China. Their thinking around materials reflects the foundational aspects of Finnish design philosophy. These Finnish architects’ cases in China show that Finnish architecture, conventionally defined as a kind of regionalist architecture, is not limited to any empirical paradigm but rather a set of universally relevant concepts of habitation and design methods.
This chapter is devoted to Finnish architects’ discourses in China, which usually appear as core design articulations, primarily at the beginning of various design documents or presentations. This study’s terminology treats a “concept” as a truth that shows the reality by which principal architects and their teams advance design projects. In most cases, discussions around concepts belong within the architectural profession. Instead, interpretations of architecture may come from diverse social groups, including the public, the media, theorists, and architects themselves. “Discourse,” “description,” “interpretation,” “explanation,” or “narrative,” which may be concept-based but undergoes a process of discursive manipulation and reinvention, represents a communication method with a world outside of the architectural profession.

For Finnish architects, their discourses in their projects in China reveal their desired visions and ways of looking at their missions. Finnish architects aim to construct an effective means of communication and convincing, reflecting their views of China’s realities and how their designs can complement or intervene in local situations. For researchers, examining Finnish architects’ Chinese projects can deepen our knowledge of how architects use discourse as a conduit for cross-cultural communication, responding to more culturally diverse situations. Also, researchers can better understand economic and material bases by understanding cultural aspects such as symbols, imaginary, and rational decision-making processes.

The central argument of this chapter is that Finnish architects, while sharing similarities with many other international architects in China, often use constructed and invented discourses to interpret their designs, which are inevitably accompanied by corresponding limitations. Nevertheless, the choice of imagery in the discourses of Finnish architects is characteristically Finnish, focusing on the ordinariness of the image and linking it closely to the imagination of Finland itself. The historical review of Finnish architects’ international practices (see Chapter Two) and the analysis of their multiple Chinese projects
(see Chapter Four) of this dissertation have partially demonstrated a dialogically discursive tradition in which Finnish architects argue how their works accommodate their environments and respond rationally and creatively to external changes. With the development of a globalized architectural design industry, new international practices have driven Finnish architects to adopt more diverse approaches, especially if and when designs are in distant countries with cross-cultural social relations.

However, in the extant research findings, studies, and categorizations of architects' discourses have been conducted at the general level of the architectural profession (see the literature review in Section 1.2.3). Few research findings can show how Finnish architects translate their values and beliefs into cultural terms for Chinese audiences to understand. How do Finnish architects articulate cultural connotations, and how are these representational systems received by the Chinese media, professional architectural juries, and other stakeholders? Using case studies, this chapter attempts to find an inherent connection between designs made by Finnish architects in China and their historical paradigms.

The case study in this chapter analyzes the six competition entries for the Sino-Finnish Center (SFC) in 2016 in Nanjing. As a diplomatic achievement between China and Finland's political leaders, the SFC is a large building complex with multiple functions, including offices, hotels, exhibitions, and conventions. The SFC competition serves as a cross-section of the exchanges between Finland and China at multiple layers, highlighting the mutual efforts of both countries to approach each other in their cultural ties and revealing the differences in perceptions and misunderstandings between the two sides. Moreover, what is intriguing about this competition is that it provides an opportunity to investigate and compare the similarities and differences between the multiple Finnish design discourses made for a Chinese project.

My focus is not on the competition's results or on comparing the entries' merits. Instead, I explore how multiple Finnish design teams articulate their designs based on the same task and context by studying Finnish architects' discourses. Although how architects interpret their ideas may change as projects progress, discourses in competitions usually reflect their unadjusted, original visions. These cases enabled me to analyze how images selected by Finnish architects could serve to refine their discourses and support imaginaries that both entail Chinese features and become metaphors for Finland.

### 5.1 Finnish Discursive Formations: Abstraction and Representation

The discursive formations within the Finnish architectural community reveal a state of "double knowledge" when interacting with people within Finland and abroad. Domestically, the discourses of Finnish architects

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536 The full name of the project is Sino-Finnish Economic Trade and Cultural Cooperation and Exchange Center, which for the sake of brevity is referred to as the SFC. The project has undergone several name changes since the end of the competition, and the name of the competition is used here.
tend to be subjective and non-binding, attempting to maintain a semantic openness. However, when Finnish architects venture overseas, they often turn to a more pictorial system of representation closely related to the overall national image of Finland, particularly when faced with the mission of articulating the identity of Finnish architectural design.

From the perspective of Finnish architects, the emergence of modern architectural design concepts is often regarded as an abstract, comprehensive process that encompasses both creative intuition and rational analysis and judgment. Prominent Finnish architects, such as Alvar Aalto, have characterized the process of generating design concepts. Aalto described the birth of his design ideas as an instinctive output from an “infinite space” of thought, achieved through a process of “knowing and forgetting” all objective constraints. In Aalto’s view, architectural concepts are usually based on an “artistic abstraction” rather than “a simple synthesis.”

Architectural design for Finnish architects, when describing the creative process based on feelings and experiences, is like poetry and music. It is difficult for architects to put into words what has been created and form a kind of communicable knowledge.

In a sense, Finnish architects aim to create perceived pleasure for themselves, architectural users, and appreciators. They employ various methods to continually guide or reinforce sensations throughout the creative process, drawing inspiration from daily observations and life experiences. Similarly, regarding the influence of Finnish architectural design on the world, Finnish architects may view it as a spontaneous process. For example, Aarno Ruusuvuori, another important Finnish modernist architect who was a contemporary of Aalto, took the interaction between countries for granted. According to Ruusuvuori, the world’s architecture is also developing because of the addition of Finnish architecture: “At the present stage of the world’s scientific and technological development, nationalism seems frankly meaningless. Everything we do reflects worldwide principles and everything reflects back into the international area where values are weighed up.”

Nevertheless, a universal, unconstrained discourse does not mean that Finnish architects deny the presence of vernacular traditions in their design practices. As researchers such as Pallasmaa, Griffith, and Connah have argued, design traditions with localized Finnish characters may derive from more abstract, ubiquitous linguistic structures. In other words, tradition is somewhat like a spontaneous presence in design. Finnish architects, without being driven by external forces, do not need to translate Finnish design philosophies into content-based representational systems. In Finnish architectural competitions, Finnish architects often use pseudonyms to summarize and positively present their designs. The discourses surrounding these designs tend to remain abstract when communicated to the Finnish public. Design entries are formulated concisely in Finland, often with abstract visions or short mottoes.

540 Ruusuvuori, 1967.
541 Pallasmaa 2007; Griffiths 2004a; 2009.
as project titles. Building names may originate from architects or public calls for suggestions, for example, Oodi (ode) for the Helsinki Central Library and Väre (ripple), the new building at Aalto University Otaniemi campus for its art and business schools.

In contrast, a discursive paradigm closely related to images of Finland has been preserved in the Finnish architectural community. This paradigm may emerge when there is a need to articulate Finnish cultural identity in forming relationships with others, such as via World Expo Finnish pavilions, Finnish embassies, or other architectural designs where there is a need to express Finnish characteristics. In these scenarios, Finnish architects’ discourses tend to cluster around images that represent Finland's geographical features, most notably natural landscapes, including forests and lakes, from which architects have borrowed to express their design origins. In her doctoral dissertation, Slovenian architectural researcher Petra Čeferin argued that Finland’s geographical and landscape features have become the subject matter of Finnish architecture, based on her study of Finnish architectural exhibitions from the 1950s to the 1960s. The presence of Finnish lake landscapes alongside architectural works implies a metaphor in which woods and lakes represent the essence of “real” Finland. Due to its simplicity, this naturalistic theory of imitation has become a common discursive choice for many Finnish architects. The construction of discourses in Finnish architectural exports has evolved over time, and such attempts are particularly pronounced in culturally diverse, non-Western contexts.

However, criticism of the image-based discursive tradition has also emerged in Finnish architecture. The contingent nature of Finnish architects’ external discourses exposes their vulnerabilities, and these discourses are scarcely sustainable when subjected to philosophical critiques. As an architectural researcher from the UK, Connah lived in Finland for a long time and worked for many years as Reima Pietilä’s assistant. He is an advocate for, as well as a critic of, Finnish architecture. According to Connah, a fundamental belief in modernist architecture is to detach itself from historical allusions and establish universality; Finnish architecture represents “a better form” of modernism or, rather, Finnish architects reinventing modernism without architecture itself being representative. Finnish architects’ works
are not limited to an allegory for a national image. In contrast, Connah believes that architects in Finland do not need to borrow an anachronistic method to convey picturesque metaphors and transform architectural discourses into enchanting cultural commentary. According to Connah, the “image politics,” or “image truth” of a poetic nature in Finnish architects’ discourse, have become a kind of folkiness, which implies that architecture has a programmatic position in shaping Finland’s national identity.

Beyond this dichotomy between the internal and external discourse of Finnish architects, a common concern for everyday life has always been present in Finnish architects. Finnish architects frequently employ metaphors that highlight the close connection between dwelling and nature, emphasizing the “everydayness” of life. In Finland, architectural discussions often revolve around practical matters, such as building economical housing, preserving and renovating historic buildings, promoting sustainable wooden constructions, or designing schools and daycare centers. Large-scale, high-rise buildings are relatively uncommon in Finland, and Finnish public opinion tends to be wary of tall towers and expansive shopping centers. Similarly, outside of Finland, the pictorial representations that Finnish architects refer to in their discourse are not necessarily striking tourist spots or prominent historical traditions, but often everyday scenes that the architects have experienced in their lives. The landscape used to illustrate the metaphors of Finnish architects’ form-giving are often anonymous (e.g., the “island” metaphor in the design of the Finnish pavilion at the Shanghai Expo), and the metaphors of urban types used to demonstrate Finnish architects’ design origins are also the spaces in which they inhabit. Finnish architects love ordinary scenes around them, recognize their beauty, and see them as a driving force for their designs that spread to other parts of the world.

5.2 Chinese Discursive Formations: Complexity and Ambiguity

Similar to Finland, a narrative approach combining visual and natural imagery has always existed in Chinese societies, and text-based interpretation has constantly occupied an important place in Chinese artistic creation and spatial perception. For example, ancient Chinese educational and intellectual classes deeply influenced the design of traditional Chinese gardens. Many classical Chinese
gardens represent a spiritual escape from secular society and express a will for an idyllic retreat.\textsuperscript{550} It is important to note that the discourse expression goes hand in hand with creating a landscape in classical Chinese gardens. Poems and inscriptions are closely integrated with the landscape, and these “words” further interpret the garden space on a discursive level.\textsuperscript{551} Chinese intellectuals, after being schooled by classical poetry and literature, still maintain the tradition of appreciating the beauty of nature and develop a resonance with artistic interpretations.  

Also, the connection between discourse and space is a cultural tradition in China that has extensively shaped contemporary Chinese urban life. Li Shiqiao argues that a “scenic narration” is constantly present in Chinese cultural traditions.\textsuperscript{552} Landscape painting is an essential genre in traditional Chinese painting, and landscape has become a medium of humanistic visions and an indicator of intellectual values.\textsuperscript{553} Li extends this perspective to the examination of modern Chinese urban landscapes, highlighting the continued reliance on discursive interpretation. According to Li, architecture in China never leaves systems of meaning: “Here, architecture without text is unimaginable; removing the text from architecture would have removed its intellectual content. In the world of semantic distributions, poetry reigns supreme in the empire of figures, forging its sensibilities in the productions of paintings, gardens, and reconstructed land.”\textsuperscript{554}  

Li observes this significant influence of text in Chinese living space as a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon. It manifests in various forms, from traditional literati gardens that embody spiritual realms to billboards in today’s consumerist society, from plaques showcasing government agency names to Spring Festival couplets adorning doorways.\textsuperscript{555} The Chinese discursive context, in a way, leads and encourages architects to reconstruct and reinvent their works through imaginary statements. Such reliance on discourse and meaning creates a parallel need for Finnish architects to develop stories and establish an intriguing coupling with the Finnish tradition of pictorial narratives.  

Based on the continuation of such a tradition of text-based interpretation, Chinese society’s understanding of contemporary new architecture relies heavily on the engagement of discourses and definitive, concrete representational images. In the view of clients of important public buildings in China, great works of contemporary architecture must be defined by having their originals revealed.\textsuperscript{556}  

Many people in China believe that design should be inspired, so the medium in which this discourse takes place has the characteristics of inspirational literature, often requiring poetic features and well-crafted imagery.\textsuperscript{557} Although these designs created by international architects are imported, they are still expected to participate in China’s historical and cultural reinventions, both on practical and discursive levels.\textsuperscript{558} Also, the goals for  

\textsuperscript{550} Peng, Y., 1986.  
\textsuperscript{551} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{552} Li, 2014, pp.183-190.  
\textsuperscript{553} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{554} Li, 2014, p.197.  
\textsuperscript{555} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{556} cf. Cuff, 2012.  
\textsuperscript{557} cf. Snodgrass and Coyne, 2005, p. 76.  
\textsuperscript{558} Zhou, 2003.
place-making and city branding from many Chinese actors, such as clients, local government officers, and architectural competition jury members, have fostered a longing to explore localized identities and meanings via new urban structures.

Such a narrative perspective has raised questions among Chinese architectural scholars, who adopt a more critical stance than journalistic descriptions, which often quote architects directly. The unquestioning acceptance of architects’ discourses makes Chinese intellectuals rethink why many Chinese officials and public media naively embrace fabricated interpretations. In their view, journalists’ coverage often lacks critical attitudes and accepts views that reduce artistic creations to objects. Some Chinese architectural scholars and architects call for the development of professional criticism and the establishment of independent agendas in China. Zhou Rong, one of China’s foremost critics of contemporary architecture and a professor at Tsinghua University, argued that these customized discourses are “exquisite camouflages” that international architects prepared for China, particularly catering to Chinese nationalist sentiments.\[559\]

Zhou did not deny and even greatly appreciated foreign architects’ designs, but he disagreed with how international architects articulate their works in China. The interpretation of architecture has become a marketing tool that provides information and pleasure. In his article commenting on Beijing’s National Stadium (i.e., the “Bird’s Nest”), Zhou thought many Chinese critics overly cared about cultural interpretation, even if it is a “great architecture” due to its functionality and aesthetic creativity.\[560\] He criticized that the picturesque method of storytelling and a decayed “Chinese aesthetic” derived from a “Feng Shui mind” still appeal to many Chinese architectural competition jurors, and they often dogmatically expect to decipher meanings from modernist architecture. In his view, this “lip service” is detrimental to architectural artistry: “They have appeased the Chinese minds by serving camouflages: colorful netting pattern earthenware, ice-crack style window lattice, Ge-ware ceramics, folk handicraft weaving, Zodiac signs, Chinese red, etc. These explanations that made journalists’ eyes shine and satisfied ordinary people’s vanity exactly distorted the original architectural thinking and downgraded it to a second-class, far-fetched work.”\[561\]

However, the reality is that many places in China often welcome symbolic narratives with demands for urban image-making. Zhou expressed disappointment with the widespread popularity of simplistic graphic descriptions in China. In Zhou’s opinion, many architectural design competition jurors, who are supposed to evaluate design works based on professionalism, struggle to distinguish between architectural concepts and readily accessible descriptions. Unfortunately, modernist architecture in China lacks a solid educational and practical foundation; China was prematurely exposed to the symbolic impact of postmodernism.\[562\] The absence of modernism has left many Chinese architects without a critical perspective and considering postmodernism merely as a stylistic genre.\[563\] Therefore, a binary also

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560 ibid.
561 ibid.
emerges in Chinese discursive formations, i.e., a spontaneous and chronic use of pictorial representations on the one hand and a rejection and reevaluation of this discursive habit within the architectural design community on the other.

Furthermore, China’s vast size, diverse geography, and rich historical traditions have contributed to internal cultural pluralism. When architects use their private thoughts to construct meanings, there is the possibility of creating ambiguities among local audiences. Occasionally, architects may unintentionally create awkward situations by borrowing symbols to shape their discourses. In some cases, architects’ discourses may misuse or misinterpret Chinese cultural symbols, highlighting a prevalent tendency towards discursive reductionism.

For example, the dragon, as an image representing China, and the dualistic doctrine of Yin and Yang, are characteristics associated with China that have become excessively well known. However, in the architectural design field, a dragon’s image has been ascertained to be a cliche or a primitive way of telling a Chinese story. The generic nature of these symbols, such as the dragon’s appearance, makes it difficult for individual cities in China to use them effectively to express their unique local character, brand their places, and differentiate themselves from other competing cities.

Also, as a group with advanced aesthetic training, architects may consider that any object can be perceived aesthetically, but other social groups sometimes hold different views. Some traditional symbols, which might be attractive to architects, may not be regarded by broader social groups as symbols of high culture or fine art. For example, hand weaving might be merely seen as folk art or even “peasant crafts.” The imagery of daily objects may represent connotations of backwardness and outdatedness. In the opinion of Chinese officials and architectural competition jury members, symbols of folk crafts may not be seen as discourses of elegant art represented by high-profile buildings. Such stratification and the politics of aesthetic tastes stored in local society make it difficult for architects outside of China to fully perceive such symbols.

Moreover, certain cultural symbols have gradually formed through a long historical process and have developed multiple meanings in local traditions. Transferring a symbol from one language to another often results in the loss or alteration of its original sense. As Hans-Georg Gadamer argued, a symbol is not an arbitrarily chosen or created sign but presupposes a metaphysical connection between what is visible and invisible. The knowledge on which these metaphors depend may carry several different, sometimes diametrically opposed, meanings. For example, in addition to the dragon, the phoenix holds significant symbolism in traditional Chinese culture. Typically associated with positive meanings, the phoenix’s connotations may vary across different regions of China. The “nine-headed bird” (i.e., the “Nine Phoenix”) is a cultural

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563 Zhi and Deng, 2019.
564 The sociological source here is primarily Pierre Bourdieu, whose theoretical contributions have spanned many fields, including arts, education, economics, and literature. Bourdieu analyzes the relationship between different social classes and their aesthetic preferences. A more highly educated population has a broader range of aesthetic abilities (Bourdieu, 1984, pp.18–63).
565 Gadamer, 1989, p.64.
character close to the phoenix in both image and representation. It is said to have been derived from the ancient Kingdom of Chu, whose territory covers the current Hubei Province. Over time, the term “nine-headed bird” has gradually evolved into slang used to refer to people from Hubei.

On the one hand, a “nine-headed bird” carries implications such as robustness, persistence, and savviness. On the other hand, it may also imply meanings, such as cunningness or even selfishness. Therefore, when incorporating phoenix imagery into design discourses in Hubei, architects are often advised to exercise caution, as interpretations can go either way. This discursive ambiguity again highlights the complexity of cross-cultural communication. Such cultural narratives require architects and their design teams to understand the cultural habits and symbols already embedded in Chinese society. Articulating these discursive details relies on localized knowledge, often with guidance from Chinese partners or local design teams.  

5.3 Case studies: Entries in the SFC Competition in Nanjing

Since the 1990s, Chinese governments at various levels have been testing and promoting “garden cities” or “national model cities for environmental protection” to guide local urban construction. Since 2000, “eco-cities,” “low-carbon communities,” and even “green centers” have sprung up all over China. According to a survey of 287 cities above the prefecture level in mainland China, more than 90% of them have proposed cities with “ecological” and “low-carbon” goals, and more than half of them have already started to build “eco-cities” as a theme, while the rest have similar plans and visions. On the positive side, these eco-city or community projects emphasize the use and improvement of technology in an attempt to integrate various aspects of environmental protection, the lives of ordinary people, and urban development. However, there are also negative aspects of these Chinese construction projects under the banner of ecology and low-carbon, as many of these projects are still the product of zoned urban planning and more of a model that lacks impact on the broader Chinese society, especially small cities and rural areas that would benefit most from eco-design.

Construction projects with the theme of Sino-foreign cooperation in ecology are a category of Chinese urban constructions that has received significant attention from Chinese policymakers and are favored by forward-looking Chinese metropolises. The SFC project between Finland and China is another example of China’s portfolio of ecologically and sustainably themed construction projects. In March 2014, China’s and Finland’s leaders agreed to establish cooperation on environmental protection and eco-cities. China aims to bring advanced European countries to the ecological sector.

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566 For example, Finnish architects have collaborated on several projects with cultural advisors (e.g., Fang Hai and Pan Jianfeng) who know customs from both sides.
567 de Jong et al., 2013, Li and Qiu, 2015
568 Yu, 2014
570 de Jong et al., 2013.
via several flagship projects. According to the outcome of this diplomatic meeting, China officially launched the SFC as a Sino-Finnish showcase for low-carbon cooperation.572

The SFC project is considered politically significant and aims to serve as a model for deepening economic and trade corporations and cultural exchanges between the two countries.573 SFC’s entries reflect a specific theme in the current globalization process, namely the expansion of sustainability practices on an international scale and the close association of sustainable design with particular national identities. Such a building complex focused on ecological design also serves as an example of “knowledge-gathering” or “idea-generation,” providing references and coordinates for future projects following the same approach.574

One of the SFC’s goals is to attract and accommodate Finnish and European companies interested in exploring the Chinese market, providing office spaces for these companies. The SFC is located in Nanjing, the capital city of China’s eastern Jiangsu province. In the summer of 2016, an architectural competition involving six Finnish architectural design teams (ALA, JKMM+K2S, PES, Pekka Helin, Sanaksenaho, and Tengbom Eriksson) was held for the SFC project.575

The SFC site is on an abandoned military airfield called Dajiaochang Airport, which was constructed in 1929. As the city of Nanjing expands, new urban structures gradually encompass the airport area. After the decision

Figure 59. The introductory brochure given to Finnish architects at the beginning of the SFC architectural competition included a description of the background of the diplomatic meetings between Finnish and Chinese political leaders (left), the official documents signed between Finland and China, and the history of Dajiaochang Airport (right). Image credit: Nanjing Southern New Town Development and the Construction Management Committee


ibid.573

de Jong et al., 2013.574

In this competition, two Finnish architectural firms, JKMM and K2S, formed a joint team.575
to relocate the airport, the Nanjing municipality initiated a redevelopment plan for the entire site. As one of the few undeveloped plots in Nanjing's downtown, it was given high expectations by local decision-makers. The former runway is envisioned to become the central axis of the new area, and the forthcoming SFC project aims to be one of the most important public projects in the vicinity. The SFC site was originally a green field adjacent to the airport runway and was in an undeveloped, natural state until the beginning of the SFC design competition. In the northeast corner of the site, there is a small lake connected to an ancient moat.

Considering the project’s ecological design theme, the relationship between the site and the building became one of the essential considerations for the Finnish architects involved in the competition. However, when the Finnish architects arrived in Nanjing, the planned road network was not yet in place, and the neighboring blocks had not yet begun construction. Not much could be gleaned from the site visit other than a grassy, dilapidated airport. After the visit, the Finnish architects returned to Finland to begin their work immediately. Since China does not have a month-long annual holiday in the summer, these Finnish architects and their design teams had to adjust their holiday schedules in order to complete the competition designs before autumn.

The SFC design brief required architects to arrange various functions, including a hotel, office spaces, and exhibition halls. According to the vision agreed upon in the diplomatic event between Finland and China, local Chinese officials demanded a complex of buildings with a range of “Finnish characteristics” to be reflected throughout the project. On the one hand, these symbols are expected to embody the ecological center's theme and serve as a design benchmark for low-carbon buildings. On the other hand, the SFC is expected to provide an additional channel for local people to learn about Finland. Therefore, the SFC architectural competition is situated at the intersection of two cultures, and the discourses between the participating Finnish architects and their Chinese clients reveal both the attempts at mutual understanding and inevitable misunderstandings.

My primary source for the discursive analysis in this chapter is SFC competition documents, which were presented by design firms. These texts, although not lengthy, were written by chief architects and served as the core narratives for unfolding their designs. To establish a cohesive framework for discourse

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577 The architectural competition was organized with the support of the Embassy of Finland in China (Nanjing Southern New Town Development and Construction Management Committee, 2016).
analysis, the content of these design proposals is paraphrased and analyzed in a table with six categories: 1) architectural discourses, 2) urbanistic discourses, 3) Finnish representations, 4) Chinese representations, 5) ecological discourses, and 6) the SFC competition jury’s comments. By utilizing tables, this current study can effectively analyze the various levels and contents of the Finnish architects’ discourses, making it convenient to compare across multiple design proposals. Following the table analysis, a concise summary is provided in two sections: 1) architectural characteristics and 2) discursive characteristics. The comments of the Chinese jury also serve as research data, offering valuable perspectives from local professionals. It is essential to exercise caution when interpreting these comments, as they represent subjective opinions and were influenced by the competition’s objective of selecting a final winner.

5.3.1 An Urban Block Prototype (ALA Architects)

As an example of a new generation of Finnish architectural firms, ALA emerged from the competition they won for the Kilden Performing Arts Center in Norway (see Section 2.1.4). Their notable project, the Helsinki Central Library (Oodi), has become an urban landmark in the heart of Helsinki (see Section 4.4). Compared with many other Finnish architectural firms, the architects leading ALA are keen to participate in architectural competitions on a global scale. Their design proposals for the SFC competition can be seen as a vital attempt to gain access to the Chinese architectural design market.
Table 2. Discourse Analysis of ALA’s Design Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Architectural Drawings</strong></td>
<td>The design concept was to divide the site into two distinct parts: a wetland landscape and a building complex. The architects sought to incorporate multiple functions into an architecturally “unified” and visually “interesting shape” inspired by the “traditional Finnish perimeter block.” The architects deliberately avoided the high-rise tower typology, stating that “there would be many towers in the future of the Southern New Town in Nanjing, but this Finnish block would stand out as an interesting and different addition.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Urbanistic Discourses</strong></td>
<td>The building’s curved facade facing the lake forms a public “staircase” that serves both as an access route to the roof and as an “outdoor auditorium” offering scenic views of the surrounding landscape. Also, this design proposal prioritized the site’s walkability by incorporating street spaces in the spacing between the individual buildings. According to the architects, the wetland park’s intricate walkway system was deliberately designed to blend with the city’s green spaces.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Finnish Representations</strong></td>
<td>As mentioned in the architectural discourse above, the proposed design is meant to be a representation of a “Finnish perimeter block.” The wetland park proposed by ALA in the design area serves as a representation of the “landscape of Lapland,” offering a glimpse into their imaginative interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chinese Representations</strong></td>
<td>This design proposal did not incorporate any specific Chinese symbols. Instead, it considered the possibility of the roof serving as a viewing platform, providing distant views of Nanjing’s old town and the well-known tourist spot of Purple Mountain (Zijin Shan), creating a “visual connection” between the SFC and Nanjing’s historical cityscape and natural landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecological Discourses</strong></td>
<td>The architects focused on eco-strategic statements such as the “Clean Tech Time-line,” which emphasized the importance of considering the entire life cycle of a building, from the initial design phase to demolition. ALA envisioned the park as part of the local ecosystem to help mitigate flooding by providing a “water storage zone.” The architects believed that these landscape elements in the SFC site and the sculptural double-curved roof could become vehicles for sustainable designs, such as rainwater collection and recycling. Also, the architects discussed using the roof to install solar panels and promised to find ways to integrate the solar panels into the roof landscape.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The SFC Competition Jury's Comments</strong></td>
<td>The jury took into account the proposal to showcase both Finnish urban neighborhoods and landscapes, offering a glimpse of Finland’s national profile. The jury found the architectural form “special” and “creative,” while questioning the feasibility of the architects’ idea to make the roof accessible to people. Moreover, there was a concern that the distance between the outer street-facing facades and the inner courtyard facades was too large, potentially resulting in issues with lighting and natural ventilation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this design proposal, ALA continued their signature curvy style. The architects linked the different buildings via a double-curved, green vegetation-covered roof, creating a sculptural form. Similar to the Helsinki Central Library and the Kilden Performing Arts Center, the proposed SFC design exhibits a duality in facades. It employs a contrasting approach, with a visually striking, dynamically curved front facade and a more regular, geometric, and restrained back facade.

From a discursive analysis perspective, ALA formed a collection of diverse discourses, which can be divided into three aspects: 1) the technical feasibility of an ecological building, 2) the prototype of a Finnish perimeter block, and 3) the evocation of Finland’s natural landscapes. These discourses are intertwined and form a logical chain that mutually reinforces each other. Following a holistic approach, the architects developed a narrative from urban typologies and natural landscapes, and the description of which is closely integrated with the generative strategies of the architectural form. As suggested by ALA’s design, the combination of these two prototypes—urban and natural—creates a comprehensive representation of Finland.

5.3.2 A Miniature City (JKMM and K2S Architects)
Two Finnish architecture firms, JKMM and K2S, teamed up for this SFC competition proposal. JKMM is one of the major architectural firms in Finland, and JKMM originated from the design competition they won for the Turku Main Library, which was completed in 2007. Over the years, they have secured critical architectural projects that include libraries, art galleries, and educational spaces. The Amos Rex Museum, located in the center of Helsinki, is a testament to a creative approach to combining historical structures, artistic spaces, and urban landscapes (see Section 4.4). With their design proposal for the SFC, JKMM has entered another design competition in China, following their previous success with the Finnish Pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai Expo. Meanwhile, K2S is another Finnish architectural firm with a relatively smaller but significant portfolio. For example, the Kamppi Chapel, also known as the “Chapel of Silence,” was designed by them and is located in the heart of Helsinki. This wooden chapel offers an impressive spatial atmosphere, making it a popular tourist spot.

578 ALA Architects, 2016.
579 ibid.
580 ibid.
581 ibid.
582 ibid.
583 ibid.
584 ibid.
585 ibid.
586 ibid.
588 ibid.
589 ALA Architects, 2016.
Architectural Drawings

Figures 64–65. The rendering of the facade along the river (left) and the bird’s-eye view rendering (right). Image credit: JKMM Architects and K2S Architects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourses</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architectural</td>
<td>According to the architects, one of the basic architectural principles is to incorporate “a piece of natural landscape” into the design area and to “build around nature.” The openings of the buildings reveal the hidden landscapes while maintaining square volumes and sculptural entrances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanistic</td>
<td>The architects envisioned the design of the SFC as a collaborative effort between Finland and China, creating a “miniature city.” They incorporated a Finnish city block prototype to create a space that intimately integrates the urban and natural environments, emphasizing accessibility and tranquility. According to the architects’ visions, as people approached, “the hidden nature within the courtyard would gradually reveal itself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish Representations</td>
<td>In this design proposal, the architects drew inspiration from Finnish landscapes, using them as a morphological reference for the architecture. They established an “artificial nature” in the courtyard, featuring a curved ground and scattered water features, symbolizing a “Finnish lake scene” or “Finnish archipelago.” The undulating ground surface and vegetation in the courtyard were intentionally designed to form a human-made landscape, representing a “fragment” of the Finnish landscape. The architects intended to present this “fragment” as a symbolic “gift” to the people of Nanjing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Representations</td>
<td>This design proposal’s spatial enclosure prompted the architects to recall the “Chinese city walls”, one of the typical symbols of ancient Chinese cities. Nanjing, one of the historical capitals in China, still preserves the city walls from the Ming Dynasty, and parts have become local tourist attractions or have been transformed into city parks. Nowadays, the city walls have become the “city name card” of Nanjing. In their discourses, the architects drew an analogy between traditional Chinese city typologies and Finnish urban block’s spatial structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Discourses</td>
<td>The architects view the project as a “laboratory” for sustainable construction practices, setting an “example” for the local community and promoting the ideas of “health,” “slow-living,” and “cooperation.” The architects also believed that the water surface in the building site could be used as a center for storing rainwater collection and mediating surface runoff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The SFC Competition Jury’s Comments</td>
<td>Several jury members regarded this design proposal as “pure” due to its integration of images such as the “city gate,” “Finnish courtyard,” and “forest greenery,” which contributed to establishing a solid Finnish character. The jury also acknowledged that this design demonstrated a “relatively high level of design capacity.” However, the jury perceived the enclosure features of this design as creating a separate space that seemed disconnected from the surrounding environment, describing it as a “fortress besieged (wei cheng).”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Discourse Analysis of JKMM and K2S’s Design Proposal
JKMM and K2S arranged the building masses around the site, creating an enclosed courtyard space in the middle. In this design proposal, the courtyard serves as the centerpiece of the architectural design with its undulating shapes. The courtyard represents a Finnish character by displaying special landscape designs above the ground. At the same time, the architects have given prominence to exhibition spaces below, highlighting their focus on art and creation. The way in which urban and art spaces are combined in a vertical orientation is reminiscent of JKMM’s design for the Amos Rex Museum in Helsinki.

From a discursive perspective, JKMM and K2S’s design proposal acquires a twofold meaning: cultural exchange and architectural innovation. On the one hand, the architects aim to offer a Finnish urbanistic utopia or urban prototype that integrates natural elements. On the other hand, they seek to demonstrate how Chinese city walls’ typology can be reused in a new form-giving process. The architects not only aim to share the imaginative Finnish landscape, but more importantly, to inspire Chinese audiences to imagine the recreation of their own urban heritage. This analogy illustrates the architects’ intention to constructively and creatively transform a local, historical symbol into their design theme.

5.3.3 The Ice Breaker (PES-Architects)
Before the SFC competition in 2016, PES had already accomplished significant projects, including the WGT in Wuxi. Additionally, two other major projects, the ICON tower in Chengdu and the SCAC in Fuzhou, were under construction (see Section 4.7 and Chapter Seven). As one of the most experienced Finnish firms in the Chinese architectural market, PES views the SFC as an exceptional opportunity to broaden its design portfolio and elevate its reputation in China.

591 ibid.
592 ibid.
593 ibid.
594 ibid.
595 ibid.
596 ibid.
597 ibid.
598 ibid.
599 ibid.
600 Urban-Rural Planning Committee of Nanjing, 2016.
601 The records of review comments are from the SNC architectural competition jurors whose names are hidden. “Fortress Besieged (wei cheng)” is a Chinese novel written by Qian Zhongshu, first published in 1947. The besieged fortress is not a positive metaphor. It represents a life dilemma in which those inside want to escape, and the outside people want to get in. In the novel, the besieged fortress implies marriage.
Table 4. Discourse Analysis of PES’s Design Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architectural Drawings</th>
<th>Figures 66–67. A bird’s-eye-view rendering (right) and the master plan (left). Image credit: PES-Architects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Discourses</td>
<td>In this design proposal, the main building structures occupy approximately three-quarters of the site, while the extant lake is transformed into a waterfront landscape. According to the architects, the architectural image was inspired by the metaphor of “massive ice blocks” being struck by an “icebreaker.” The design combines a group of high-rise buildings with low-rise timber structure pavilions and waterfront areas, creating an “ice-breaking image.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanistic Discourses</td>
<td>The central focus of the proposal’s urban strategy is the creation of a sunken plaza in the heart of the complex, intended to serve as an “urban living room.” Also, confronted with a flat area as expansive as an entire Finnish city block, the architects attempted to create a pedestrian-friendly scale that represents a slice of everyday life. In sum, the architects endeavored to restore a Finnish urban streetscape and introduce the Finnish way of life to Nanjing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish Representations</td>
<td>The architects thought that the image of the building complex resembled not only ice cubes but also a “four winds hat,” a traditional Sámi hat of northern Finland. As a material reference, the architects wanted to invoke “traditional Finnish streetscapes” with wooden structures, similar to the traditional wooden buildings in Porvoo. Also, the architects suggested using granite pavement, like Helsinki’s downtown streets or the Kauppatori market, for the paths between the buildings. Moreover, according to the architects, the plaza embodied the core values of Finnish urban planning and can serve as a “Christmas market” with the possibility of adding large Himmeli ornaments. A “Santa Claus cave” could be underground, and a “sauna club” could be added to the hotel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Representations</td>
<td>According to the architects, this image implied that their design proposal could be an “ice-breaking project for the cooperation between Finland and China.” The architects also used Chinese elements on a more detailed level. The intricate pattern on the SFC’s glass facade was inspired by the recombination of renowned calligraphic masterpieces from Chinese history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Discourses</td>
<td>The architects recommended employing wooden structures for the exhibition halls. And they continued the theme of ice on the building’s curtain wall, combining photovoltaic panels with patterns inspired by Chinese elements to create an abstract cultural metaphor and explore ecological technologies in architectural design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The SFC Competition Jury’s Comments</td>
<td>Several jurors found this design proposal to have a welcoming architectural gesture and appreciated its focus on ecological strategies and technical implementations. Nevertheless, one jury member expressed that the utilization of the “tower and podium building” typology for the hotel and exhibition functions fell into a “cliché” of typical commercial centers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This design proposal is created through a strategic analysis and synthesis approach, focusing on the relationship between urban spaces and landscapes. The building blocks have been logically arranged to contain different functions, and the architectural complex has a sunken plaza that serves as a central space. The architects have also taken individual feelings into account, demonstrating their consideration of personal experiences. Rather than reducing visitors’ experiences to modular proportions, the architects have attempted to establish a multidimensional connection between the surrounding environment and each individual’s body, incorporating building materials and cultural symbols.

In a discursive analysis perspective, this design proposal utilizes a variety of pictorial representations, adding richness to the overall design discourses. The association of icebergs with icebreakers provides an imaginable metaphor for the architectural form and signifies progress and breakthrough in China–Finland relations. The imaginative incorporation of natural elements is reflected in the architectural and geometric forms as well as the facade concept. This metaphor intertwines Finland’s regional and climatic characteristics, the significance of the SFC project itself, and the overarching theme of architectural design.

5.3.4 A Central Concourse (Helin and Co. Architects)
Helin’s team was probably the most experienced in the SFC competition regarding office buildings and sustainable designs in the Finnish architectural community. Helin and his firm have designed many notable structures in Helsinki, including office buildings, corporate headquarters, large shopping malls, and high-rise towers. Also, Helin has made many attempts to expand the firm’s presence on the international stage. For example, Helin has previous experience in Asian architectural design projects, such as the Pangyo housing project in South Korea and the residential building design in Chengdu, China.

602 PES-Architects, 2016a.
603 ibid.
604 ibid.
605 ibid.
606 ibid.
607 ibid.
608 ibid.
609 ibid.
610 ibid.
611 ibid.
612 ibid.
613 ibid.
615 ibid.
The architects argued that a “coherent, shared concourse” connected the multiple fan-shaped buildings to the central towers at both ends, incorporating various public functions. The design’s focal point consists of three fan-shaped towers housing the hotel, the Sino-Finnish exchange center, and the exhibition center. These three high-rise buildings fan out around the center of the water-scape. Visitors can directly access the gathering point from Runway Park and enter different spaces. Following the architectural forms’ orientation, the other buildings with lower heights but larger interior spaces are arranged in a fan-like pattern, creating a semi-enclosure around the central towers.

This design proposal began with an intuitive and effective urban strategy. The architects combined the programs specified in the design brief with the site context, dividing them into three clearly defined, functionally positioned components. Furthermore, this design proposal redefined the boundaries of the water and designed the landscape spaces inspired by water features.

This design proposal does not particularly address the representation of Finnish cultural or natural elements.

In this design proposal, the building facade is described as utilizing local Chinese stone, but it does not incorporate any elements of Chinese cultural symbolism.

The roof of the exhibition area is proposed as a steel truss structure. The architects believe that these fan-shaped undulating roofs would better accommodate solar panels.

One jury member noted that the design was functionally sound but seemed to “lack Finnish characters” and instead resembled a “common Chinese domestic design,” making it “indistinguishable from a typical large convention and hotel building.” The comments also expressed concern that the footprint of the three towers was too small and not economically viable for construction.
The design solution prioritizes logical circulations within the design area, with the entrance centered around the three towers that serve as the focal point of the site. The design style presents a modern internationalist architecture, which is in line with Helin’s domestic works in Finland. The roof features a ridged appearance reminiscent of Riola Church in northern Italy, designed by Alvar Aalto, both of which embody a structured design expression.

From a discursive analysis perspective, Helin’s design descriptions provide less emphasis on Finnish characters and the interaction of the structures with the local context. The descriptions are convergent, do not involve artistic or cultural imagination, and maintain a discursive anonymity. Moreover, Helin’s bland descriptions follow the objective facts of the design proposal, without attempting to evoke originality by associating with historical or natural symbols. The text is descriptive and primarily focuses on interpreting the building complex’s functions and the relationships between its components.

5.3.5 Saana (Sanaksenaho Architects)
Sanaksenaho Architects has a long-standing relationship with Nanjing. As discussed in Section 4.6.1, the firm has been actively involved in the design of Villa No. 20 in Nanjing, which began in 2002 with their participation in the CIPEA architectural exhibition event. Among all the firms participating in the SFC competition, Sanaksenaho is the only Finnish architectural firm that had completed a built-up project in Nanjing at the time the SFC competition commenced.

616 In his article, Imrie discusses the relation between the human body and architectural design. He points out that the human body is not just an object that follows codes or laws but a being, a connection between the human and the surrounding (Imrie, 2003).
617 Davey, 2010.
619 ibid.
620 ibid.
621 ibid.
622 ibid.
624 ibid.
625 In his evaluation and analysis of Finnish modernist architecture, Roger Connah identifies two distinct traditions among Finnish architects. One he refers to as the “divergent” tradition, exemplified by architects like Aalto and Pietilä, and the other he names the “convergent” tradition, represented by Aulis Blomstedt (Connah, 1999).
### Architectural Drawings

Figures 70–71. A bird’s-eye view rendering (left) and the master plan (right). Image credit: Sanaksenaho Architects

### Architectural Discourses

This design proposal also positioned the architectural part on the site's west side. The most significant feature of Sanaksenaho's proposal is the distribution of the required functional programs between two separate buildings. One is a long rectangular building with a minimalist glass curtain facade. The office space for Finnish and European companies and the hotel are housed in this typical modernist box, which the architects called “the wall”.626 In contrast, the other building acquires the appearance of a free, irregular geometric form, and its vast interior space accommodates several different types of exhibition functions. Its wood structure follows a metallic copper panel system as the building envelope.627 With solid-copper facades, the exhibition building’s mass is cut off at a corner to create an open front with glass facing the water.

### Urbanistic Discourses

The architects argued that local people can arrive at the atrium along the road, surrounded by varying, softly curved surfaces, and continue through the glass building’s opening to the other side of the site. The architects diverted the open facade toward the moat, allowing people to enjoy the views along the water.628 The existing lake on the site was enlarged, and a visual promenade was created, connecting the historical axis, landscape, and the new interior space.629

### Finnish Representations

The architects argued that the image of mountains in Finland is overlaid on the Finnish-designed building in China, constructing a vision with social significance. They referred to the “imagination of Saana Mountain,” a sacred area for the local Sami people and a popular tourist attraction in Lapland, northern Finland, to convey this image.630 The architects used the glass facade of the office building to evoke the image of still water in a lake, which, combined with the actual waterscape, symbolizes the Finnish natural landscape. Lighting effects were also considered, with the facade potentially transforming into a “media wall” that provides information and images during the evening hours.631 The architects suggested that the glass facade could serve as a screen for aurora borealis, adding to the building’s identity and cultural significance.632 Sanaksenaho emphasized the building’s material perception, such as the warmth of the wooden structure and the durability of the copper facade.633

### Chinese Representations

This design proposal did not incorporate any concrete Chinese symbols. Instead, the architects analyzed the urban context of Nanjing to develop new structures that would abstractly echo local history and reality. The architects believed their design’s connection to Nanjing was primarily based on respecting the city’s historical axis.634 As the architects argued, the architectural form was oriented by the historic urban axis leading to the Ming Palace on the site.635

### Ecological Discourses

The architects suggested that the substantial size of the two buildings could be used for energy conservation purposes, such as installing solar panels on the roofs.636 The large interior spaces also allow for the creation of an indoor microclimate that is advantageous for centralized energy consumption and management. The natural water on the site can also be used for rainwater harvesting and as a natural heat source.637

### The SFC Competition Jury’s Comments

According to the jury, this design proposal presented a highly “sculptural” and “clean” form, and the idea of using timber structures reflects Finland’s expertise in the construction industry.638 However, some jury members raised concerns about whether two single buildings could efficiently and logically accommodate the various functions required by the client.639 In addition, the long, rectangular building could interfere with the daylighting of the adjacent site.640
One can note, for example, the connection to and succession of the architectural forms in Sanaksenaho Architects’ SFC design for their competition proposal for the Helsinki Music Center (Musiikkitalo), which was shortlisted during the first phase.\textsuperscript{641} The juxtaposition of these two buildings of different styles in Sanaksenaho’s SFC design forces a dynamic contrast and represents two Finnish architectural images. One building embodies international convergence and restraint, symbolizing technology and rationality. The other suggests divergent thinking, imagination, and freedom. As a mega-structure in the city, this design proposal should influence the surrounding urban space more openly. In China, people typically enjoy various outdoor activities in the evening, especially during the hot summer months.\textsuperscript{642} Many architectural design projects in China emphasize how buildings can accommodate these evening activities.

From the discourse analysis perspective, Sanaksenaho’s discourses are analytical and descriptive. The architects did not fully explain the source of inspiration for their highly sculptural architectural forms. They introduced the Chinese audience to the architectural shape in an intuitive and straightforward manner. The architects analyzed the spatial sequences in their design and the experience it could offer visitors, based on an analysis of the local urban structures. Furthermore, the architects’ use of Finnish imagery, such as the Finnish landscape and the northern lights, reinforces the design’s Finnish character.

\textbf{5.3.6 Under One Sky (Tengbom Eriksson Architects)}

Prior to their involvement with the SFC competition in Nanjing, Tengbom Eriksson participated in the design of architectural concepts and urban master plans for several “eco-cities” in China. These eco-centric urban development projects were situated in Beijing, Tianjin, and Wuhan. The knowledge and experience obtained from these projects provided Tengbom Eriksson with a greater understanding of China, which later influenced their approach in the SFC competition in Nanjing.

\textsuperscript{626} Sanaksenaho Architects, 2016.
\textsuperscript{627} ibid.
\textsuperscript{628} ibid.
\textsuperscript{629} ibid.
\textsuperscript{630} ibid.
\textsuperscript{631} ibid.
\textsuperscript{632} ibid.
\textsuperscript{633} ibid.
\textsuperscript{634} ibid.
\textsuperscript{635} ibid.
\textsuperscript{636} ibid.
\textsuperscript{637} ibid.
\textsuperscript{638} Urban-Rural Planning Committee of Nanjing, 2016.
\textsuperscript{639} ibid.
\textsuperscript{640} ibid.
\textsuperscript{641} The competition was conducted in two stages, and it featured six finalists in the first phase. Ultimately, the top prize was awarded to LPR-Architects, led by principal architects Marko Kivistö, Ola Laiho, and Mikko Pulkkinen.
\textsuperscript{642} The term “furnace” is traditionally used in China to describe cities in the Yangtze River basin, including Nanjing, with hot summer climates where temperatures can soar over forty degrees Celsius during the day. This designation is not solely based on statistical temperature data but more on people’s intuitive impressions of the intense heat in these cities. Some of the prominent cities in the Yangtze River basin, such as Chongqing, Wuhan, Changsha, and Nanchang, are also known as “furnace cities” due to their scorching summers. The label “furnace cities” reflects the challenging conditions residents face during the sweltering summers, prompting architects and urban planners to explore solutions for creating comfortable and livable urban environments in these regions.
Table 7. Discourse Analysis of Tengbom Eriksson’s Design Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourses</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Drawings</td>
<td><img src="Image" alt="Figures 72–73. The bird’s-eye-view rendering (right) and the master plan (left). Image credit: Tengbom Eriksson Architects" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Discourses</td>
<td>The architectural gesture implies an inward-looking building, rich with landscape and activities in the enclosed courtyard. According to the architects’ vision, visitors should have an experience distinct from the outside world when they enter the courtyard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanistic Discourses</td>
<td>This design proposal arranged its architectural programs along the site’s perimeter and formed an urban block. The building curves at both ends, and in the lower part of the volume, the building combines the surrounding urban texture and the need for pedestrian flow to create a transparent space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish Representations</td>
<td>The design proposal envisages the SFC as a “miniature Finland.” The architects incorporated elements to highlight Finnish imagery, such as birch trees, small islands, pebbled shores, and a sauna in the courtyard. Drawing on the architectural form, the architects created a poetic microscopic scene of a “leaf floating on still water” via their design descriptions. The facade surrounding the courtyard is expected to exhibit an aurora-like lighting effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Representations</td>
<td>In their discourses, the architects did not refer to specific Chinese symbols. Instead, they based their design on a thorough analysis of the surrounding urban areas and axes, with a focus on creating a “sense of openness” and an “attitude of invitation and welcome.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Discourses</td>
<td>The architects proposed the installation of solar panels on the roof to transform the entire building into an “organism.” The northeast corner of the building opens up to bring water into the center, establishing a primary landscape space in the building’s courtyard. Eriksson described the courtyard as a natural “oasis.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The SFC Competition Jury’s Comments</td>
<td>According to the jury, the building’s upturned corners in its massing evoke a sense of “Chinese architectural style.” The jury also observed that the organic form of the building’s façade in the courtyard could provide a variety of spaces of different dimensions and accommodate multiple functions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this design proposal, the architectural mass was also arranged along the site’s edge, presenting a regular external shape and a soft, dynamic internal form. The facade, imbued with Finnish characteristics, encloses an internal landscape, creating a distinct courtyard space. Considering the design of Finnish pavilions in World Expos (see Section 4.6.3), people can observe that the concept of isolating oneself from one’s surroundings and creating an internal world is an archetype shared by several Finnish architectural firms.

From a discursive analysis perspective, these architects emphasized the Finnish-Chinese partnership at the project planning level, highlighted local urban structures and axes in describing the architectural form, and emphasized the Finnish specificity through the use of representational symbols. They positioned the building itself as a vessel for the image of Finland and an extension of Finnish nature in the Chinese urban space.

### 5.4 Reflections on Finnish Architects' Concepts and Discourses

After individually analyzing the Finnish architectural firms’ design proposals for the SFC, this section compares and discusses them collectively. Based on their architectural forms and building typologies, the design proposals from the six Finnish firms can be divided into two groups: 1) an open, radial gesture centered around dominant building(s), as seen in the works of PES, Helin, and Sanaksenaho, and 2) an enclosing gesture with buildings surrounding all or part of the site, as exemplified by ALA, JKMM and K2S, and Tengbom Eriksson. The first group presents prominent and striking architectural designs, aiming to make statements as landmarks. In contrast, the second group exhibits a relatively gathered architectural form, seeking to blend in with the environment.

However, upon analyzing these design proposals through the lens of this chapter’s theme—the discourse of Finnish architects—it becomes evident that they employ comparable discursive strategies and formations. Architects from Finland have actively participated in cultural dialogues, drawing inspiration from their cultural identities and life experiences to develop new designs in China. The proposed discourses share many similarities, and the metaphors surrounding these designs can be broadly divided into two categories: urbanistic strategies and pictorial representations. For comparison purposes, the table below displays the keywords utilized by Finnish architects in their SFC competition design proposals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>Urban-Rural Planning Committee of Nanjing, 2016.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ibid.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ibid.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ibid.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. List of Finnish architects’ keywords mentioned in their urbanistic strategies and pictorial representations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finnish Architectural Firms</th>
<th>Urbanistic Strategies</th>
<th>Pictorial Representations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALA Architects</td>
<td>• Finnish perimeter block</td>
<td>• landscape in Lapland and Rovaniemi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKMM and K2S Architects</td>
<td>• a gate for the city</td>
<td>• a “forest” that resembles the Finnish domestic landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a “micro-city” built together by Finland and China</td>
<td>• Nanjing’s historical city wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PES-Architects</td>
<td>• Finnish town planning fabric</td>
<td>• ice breaking and ice-breaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a “city living room” that welcomes people</td>
<td>• “four winds hat” (traditional hat of Sámi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Helsinki streetscape with granite pavement</td>
<td>• Santa Claus cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• an outdoor market like Kauppatori in Helsinki</td>
<td>• sauna club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ice breaking and ice-breaker</td>
<td>• Himmeli (straw mobile)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helin and Co. Architects</td>
<td>• a central concourse with lake view</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanaksenaho Architects</td>
<td>• extension of Nanjing’s historical axis</td>
<td>• Saana mountain and its reflection in water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a historical view corridor toward the Ming Palace</td>
<td>• landscape in Lapland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Saana mountain and its reflection in water</td>
<td>• Aurora Borealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tengbom Eriksson Architects</td>
<td>• an open ground floor, allowing pedestrians move freely through the site</td>
<td>• a “leave” floating on a Finnish lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Finnish lakes with sauna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Aurora Borealis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As observed in the table, Finnish architects have developed a double-narrative structure in China, an ahistorical, logical urban strategy, and a perceptual, cultural, and representational approach. There is no thematic difference in Finnish architects’ discourses, but rather a variation in emphasis between urban and cultural narratives. In the discussion of the SFC competition that follows, I examine Finnish architects’ discourses from different perspectives. These discussions include an examination of why Finnish architects construct discourses, how to perceive the relationship between the design process and its discursive expression, how to interpret the representation system of Finnish architects, and the identification of potential misconceptions when the SFC client evaluates Finnish designs. Also, I aim to reassess the approach taken in this study again and endeavor to uncover the implications and limitations of the analysis based on the SFC competition entries.

5.4.1 The Motivations of Finnish Architects’ Discursive Constructions
First, architects are tasked with succinctly presenting their ideas or intentions to non-specialists. Giving meaning to architectural
designs becomes a way for architecture to achieve self-transcendence from an “object” to an “ideological vehicle.”

Finnish architects’ target audiences that extend beyond the architectural profession, providing a pathway for non-professionals to expand their knowledge and imagination. For the Chinese client, carefully orchestrated discourses allow more people in China to perceive architecture emotionally and open doors for the public to engage in more imaginative interpretations of design outcomes. These discourses, which are closer to mass culture than jargon-laden expressions, capture the media’s attention when presented to the public. These discourses can provide a sense of certainty and accessibility in people’s uncertainty and anxiety when attempting to comprehend the meanings of abstract building forms.

To some extent, the SFC shares similarities with the Finnish pavilions at World Expos. Although its scale is much larger than an Expo pavilion or typical Finnish domestic buildings, the SFC is confronted with the same mission of presenting the image of Finland. What sets the SFC apart is that it is a Chinese project tailored to local needs. Unlike general building designs, the SFC strongly emphasizes sustainable designs and ecological strategies. Moreover, as a large public building, the SFC naturally embodies aspirations for symbolic expression. It is a product of top-down policy planning, with Chinese policymakers aiming to showcase their development directions and the significance of ecological strategies by introducing and presenting a vision of Finland. The Chinese clients envision the SFC as a “flagship project” that can serve as a future design reference and expect Finnish national imagery to contribute to the promotion of sustainable development in China.

Therefore, an image of affinity building, supported by Finnish architects’ purposeful words, can help to fulfill Chinese clients’ expectations of building a progressive society. Finland’s eco-technologies are intertwined with visions of low-carbon strategies, environmental management, water recycling, energy utilization, and green spaces. The implied notion of well-being in Nordic society through Finnish designs aids in establishing an identification in China. The discursive guidance provided by Finnish architects, along with the strengths of Finnish ecological designs, creates an overlapping, mutually reinforcing resonance. Winning such an important project can significantly boost architects’ career development and reputation. Through designing the SFC, Finnish architects can generate new consumer demands and lifestyles, offer conceivable visions to their clients, and raise public awareness of sustainability. External demands and the desire to distinguish their designs have compelled Finnish architects to develop carefully crafted discourses.

5.4.2  The Relationship Between Design and Discourse

In their design proposals for the SFC, Finnish architects strive to establish a humanistic scale and recreate tangible scenes from their idealized urban space prototypes. Their designs primarily consider the city’s ordinary
people and the end-users of the SFC venues rather than focusing solely on the building’s symbolic meaning. In China, Finnish architects encounter the challenge of dealing with building sites in a *Tabula Rasa* state, where territories encompass numerous urban plans that exist only as preliminary designs on paper. This situation differs from Finland and many other European cities where architectural designs are usually partial renewals of existing urban fabrics. Therefore, the design strategies employed by Finnish architects, which take advantage of urban fabrics to generate architectural forms and design narratives, are no longer applicable in Chinese contexts.

Urban public space types such as streets, courtyards, and squares are repeatedly mentioned in the SFC competition entries. These spaces exist not only in many Finnish towns but also in China. For example, traditional Beijing hutongs (i.e., small alleys) have contributed to the vibrant atmosphere of Chinese cities. However, with China’s rapid urbanization, these intimate street spaces have been largely eliminated, while the newly established housing blocks often lack such socially functional spatial structures. Of their own accord, Finnish design teams spontaneously referred to urbanistic prototypes that could divide and dissolve massive building volumes. Finnish architects aim to compensate for the absence of “transitional spaces” in contemporary Chinese cities dominated by isolated point blocks. As indicated in their SFC competition proposals, Finnish architects advocate for an urbanistic design model that integrates landscape and living space, offering an alternative perspective in China and proposing a “mini-city” concept with more coherent spatial structures. In this sense, Finnish architects continue to adhere to a nonhistorical approach to their designs, and their macro strategies trigger fundamental architectural gestures.

During the actual design production, Finnish architects’ SFC entries are characterized by teamwork, including mutual inspiration and iterative experimentation. The advent of new design tools, such as code-based parametric design, has provided architects with enhanced capabilities for shape creation, data analysis, and cross-disciplinary communication, thereby making traditional design thinking more versatile. Also, consulting firms from various disciplines can be involved in the early stages of Finnish architects’ discursive constructions, and their opinions may inform or facilitate a design’s narrative. For example, ALA’s design proposal commenced with a specialized “timeline” focusing on building sustainability—a sustainable objective that spans the planning, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and eventual demolition and recycling of a building, thus establishing an ecological loop. However, terms similar to “sustainability timeline” or “construction life-cycle chain” are prevalent among consulting firms that assist architects in developing green design strategies. While the decisive roles of principal architects in the creative process remain indispensable in today’s architectural industry, the formulation of concepts has extended substantially in depth and breadth, resulting in a comprehensive collection of design approaches.
In contrast, the actual design process is streamlined and rearticulated, and Finnish architects expect people to perceive their buildings as vehicles for these statements. Finnish architects’ discourses do not aim to fully explain the intricate and time-consuming process through which their architectural concepts are created, nor do they employ the esoteric jargon of critics and theorists. Instead, as the SFC entries demonstrate, Finnish architectural descriptions employ highly customized languages and purposeful visions in an “authoritative but friendly tone.” Their discourses are customized based on the background of the SFC, the local cultural context in Nanjing, and the constraints imposed by the SFC’s bid documents. Finnish architects use visionary descriptions to establish a source of architectural meaning that bridges the gap between the reality of design production and external interpretations of architecture.

Finnish architects employ a combination of intuition-inspired design concepts, rational planning, and representative systems in their design descriptions. They discuss their designs from various perspectives, including technical feasibility, ecological themes, architectural creativity, cultural connections, and social communications. Consequently, cultural representation stemming from imagination, empathy derived from architects’ personal sensations, and urban strategies and ecological designs rooted in logical analysis are all integrated within the discourses of Finnish architects. These discourses reveal a process of blending and synthesizing information and knowledge from multiple sources. Although these logical narratives and image-based interpretations can hardly be regarded as truly architectural concepts, design discourses serve as mediators between professional architectural thinking and mass culture, transforming elitist terminologies into socially comprehensible metaphors.

5.4.3 Finnish Architects’ Representational Discourses Critiques

In these SFC entries designed by Finnish architectural firms, it is common to observe that architects do not just explain their architectural solutions but also respond to broader cultural visions. What Finnish architects communicate to the client in Nanjing about their designs is more about beliefs and ideals than the operational principles that guide actions. Finnish architects move freely between time and place, borrowing (as needed) meanings that contribute to their discursive images, and they expect to transcend cultural barriers and create a sense of empathy with local people by using appropriate images based on a morphological imagination. The placement and replacement of cultural symbols from two sides (Finland and China) imply that when Finnish architects arrive in China, they attempt to rediscover themselves and eventually create something new in an unfamiliar environment. In these Finnish architects’ discourses, their designs become visual forms of the intersection of two cultures.

Finnish architects have primarily followed the historical trajectory of representing Finnish imagery by using abstract architectural forms to construct 652 cf. Spector and Damron, 2017, p. 12.
geographical imaginations. The natural images have been interpreted to varying degrees, from abstract to figurative. As analyzed in the case studies earlier, there are broad imaginations of Finland’s northern land of ice and snow (e.g., the iceberg metaphor from PES’s proposal and representations of site-specific landscapes, e.g., the metaphor of Saana Mountain from Sanaksenaho’s proposal). Although these architects do not explicitly use the term *genius loci*, such as their predecessors Raili and Reima Pietilä (see Section 2.1.3), the inherent naturalistic imitation logic continues, they present free-floating symbols, while a figurative description attempts to anchor and solidify a building into a certain kind of image. This familiarity with cultural representations helps link form giving and context, convincing people that a building has a defined origin. Through their discursive guidance, Finnish architects can shape meaning based on an “optimum reading.”

Nevertheless, as an attempt to build a temporary private myth, interpretative design discourses are vulnerable to criticism. Finnish architects’ discourses only sometimes successfully establish preconceived ideas for local audiences. The public’s spontaneous association with architecture precedes architects’ idealized interpretations and may render architects’ official visions ambiguous. In other words, the symbolic images that Finnish architects select for their discourses can be replaced by other images in dissemination, making the original intention of imposing a cultural enchantment meaningless. As in the case of JKMM and K2S, the original representation that the architects wanted to invoke was the city walls of Nanjing in an attempt to reinforce their design’s connection to the local cultural context; however, the competition jury was not attracted to this representation and associated it with “besieged fortress,” an image that suggests closure in a Chinese context. Since such design images are open to multiple interpretations, Finnish architects in China may find it difficult to prevent Chinese audiences from associating their designs with other images.

The Finnish architects’ attempt to draw their Chinese audience into specific interpretations and understandings opens doors to particular meanings but also inevitably denies other possibilities. Propositional words prevent questioning, setting a discourse as a unidirectional flow of information. The ambiguity of abstract images provides a provisional answer that, to some extent, prevents an audience from being motivated to inquire further. Though such an explanation can be an “official” interpretation from a building creator, it is essential for Chinese audiences to keep an open mind, understand that such representations are replaceable, and avoid taking them as a definitive reading.

5.4.4 Misunderstandings between Finnish Architects and the Client

During the follow-up process of the project, the SFC project’s client and local decision-makers continued to request additional “Finnish-specific features.” This request confused
the Finnish architects involved in the SFC competition. In their opinion, being architects who grew up and trained in Finland, there should be effortlessly and self-evidently Finnish features in their designs. According to Finnish architects, subtle differences exist in design styles even within the Nordic countries. For example, in the Finnish architectural community, Swedish architectural style is often considered too “minimal” and even “conservative,” while Danish architecture tends to be “excessive,” more “avant-garde,” and sometimes “decorative.” The Finnish features of their work are nuanced, reflected in the subtleties of architectural forms, their choices and combinations of materials, and a modest relationship between space and landscape. More importantly, this openness in abstract architectural designs becomes the basis for the existence of artworks, rather than merely a variety of subjective interpretations.654

On the other hand, Finnish architects’ image-laden discourses strive to convince Chinese clients of the presence of Finnishness in their designs. Finnish architects recognize that it is generally difficult for the public to distinguish the nuances between different design genres, when examined solely on design practicality and appearance. Finnish architects’ discourses help to shape and amplify a difference, distinguishing their proposals from homogeneous internationalized styles. Finnish architects reinterpret their architectural designs through cultural or historical lenses in their design narratives, and stories tied to cultures or mythologies increase the media impact and public visibility of their designs.

However, when these Finnish features, preserved in abstract architectural designs that required a cultivated aesthetic sensitivity to understand, were presented to Chinese clients, they expressed difficulty in recognizing these Finnish features. For example, the design proposals made by JKMM and K2S and Tengbom Eriks-son can be considered very Finnish. Both proposals prioritized a relatively defensive exterior while attempting to build a rich inner world. Finnish personality is known for its cold exterior, yet warm and friendly interior. This character is appropriately portrayed in these proposed designs, where the hard outer facades contrast with the inviting and abundant internal spaces. However, the client and the competition jury in Nanjing had difficulty accepting a design idea as an abstract expression without specific content. The SFC competition jury failed to recognize that the genuine creativity of architecture lies in the abundance of semantic ambiguity and unstated meanings inspired by the architecture itself, nor did they understand that the indefiniteness in the relationship between form and meaning becomes a way to understand abstract art.655

Several Finnish design teams mentioned including saunas in their proposals. PES once arranged a “Santa Claus Cave” in the underground space of the SFC as a commercial and entertainment area, drawing inspiration from Salminen’s 1960s drawing of a museum design in the northern Finnish city of Rovaniemi. Rovaniemi, located on the Arctic Circle, is considered the “official” home of Santa Claus. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 654 Gadamer, 1989, p. 117. 655 cf. Albrecht, 2002.
Rovaniemi was one of the popular destinations for Chinese tourists traveling to Northern Europe. PES also attempted to use the Finnish Christmas decoration, *Himmeli*, to illustrate their design intent, even planning to place a large, modern version of it in the central plaza of the SFC building complex. This symbolic representation was removed from the final design book, partly because it is not a uniquely Finnish tradition and partly because such objects are too foreign to China and do not exist in the majority of Chinese people’s knowledge base. Compared to long-established symbols such as Santa Claus, *Himmeli* seems too distant to resonate with the context in Nanjing. Understanding designs as something requires pre-understanding of what that thing is.

For the SFC’s client in Nanjing, their desired visions included not only architectural designs but were closer to a comprehensive branding plan. If they were unable to infuse a sufficient number of “Finnish features” into the architectural designs, the client intended to incorporate influential Finnish “national brands,” such as Marimekko and Iittala, to enhance the SFC’s “Finnishness.” Ultimately, the SFC’s client sought the inclusion of more recognizable consumer brands to portray what they perceived as “Finnish.” However, this type of work does not always fall within the scope and expertise of an architectural design firm. These misunderstandings within the SFC project implied that the communication and diffusion of a “national image” in a globalized, consumerist society could be a more comprehensive social phenomenon than the architectural field.

As argued in Section 5.2 of this chapter, reliance on discourse and images to understand architecture is a Chinese tradition. However, there is still a need for the Chinese client to take a more holistic view of architectural creation. Discourses based on symbolic imaginations and cultural interpretations are not conducive to genuine architectural discussions and cultural exchanges. As Salminen once commented: “From the Finnish perspective, a Chinese client’s approach to a project often seems superficial: what will it look like, what does it cost, and finally, how will it work? We prefer to present these considerations in a different order. On the other hand, we have come to understand the significance of stories and powerful symbols in Chinese culture and its approach to architecture. A Chinese client does not assess a project primarily from the viewpoint of efficiency, functionality, or ease of maintenance. Even major decisions are often based on an image, so that ultimately it is the skill, sense of responsibility and perseverance of the architect that ensures a successful end result.”

5.4.5 Implications and Limitations of the SFC Competition

In the SFC competition, the Chinese jury maintained an open mind to various expressions, predominantly evaluating entries from the perspective of functionality and feasibility. Like all architectural competitions, the outcomes and decisions are subject to
a degree of randomness; no specific strategy, including discursive construction, can guarantee victory for any architectural firm. Although design evaluations based merely on computer renderings have long been criticized in China, architectural shapes still occupy a crucial position in Chinese architectural design competitions. The analysis of architects’ discourses in this section does not imply that discourse can replace the importance of design integrity, novelty, and visual impact, which remain decisive factors in the architectural design profession.

Moreover, analyzing how individual architects introduce their entries still hardly reveals the broader picture of Finnish architects’ discourses in China. The SFC case study, although a collective snapshot of the Finnish architectural community involved in Chinese design practices, has its limitations. The context and positioning of the SFC require architects to discourse on Finnish characteristics, thus constraining the subject matter of the narrative. Finnish architects’ projects in China may adopt localized discursive models, and Finnish architects do not necessarily begin with their own identities in their discourses. For example, the WGT and the SCAC designed by PES or the Shenzhen Guoshen Museum competition created by JKMM (see Chapter Four) could provide more differentiated supplementary materials for discourse analysis in this chapter, enhancing its capacity for generalization.

As the “ancient capital of the six dynasties,” Nanjing is a well-known historical and cultural city in China, so it is often appropriate for Finnish architects to use cultural and historical discourses in Nanjing and other Chinese cities with a strong historical heritage. However, the connection between history and culture through architectural images applies only to some Chinese cities. For example, as cities composed of immigrants who rose to prominence with China’s economic reform, Shenzhen and Shanghai do not naturally have a nostalgic yearning like many other Chinese historical cities. People in Shanghai tend to believe that their successful development stems from a pioneering spirit, not the remaking of a past legacy. Artistic expressions that emphasize historical lineage or cultural nostalgia may not be ideal for delivering architectural design stories in these newly emerging Chinese cities. When designing in China, Finnish architects must carefully analyze Chinese cultural symbols and consider local contexts and stages of social development in order to apply appropriate forms of expression that are sensitive to the differences between Chinese cities.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, I examine how Finnish architects articulate their work, using discourse study as both the lens and analytical tool to illuminate the architects’ representative systems. Architects study local cultures as an artistic impulse and develop an effective method of communication. The Finnish design teams involved in the

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Fang, 2021.

SFC competition translated their architectural thinking into cultural terms and communicated these meanings to local audiences. The approach suggests that the architecture does not deal solely with technical solutions, but more importantly, with the expectations of the social relations that produced the building. This cultural connection needs to be based on practical experience and an understanding of local life.

By comparing the design discourses in the SFC competition entries and the design results, it reveals that the Finnish design philosophy is modernism at its core. Still, it maintains vernacular traditions, avoids populism, and exhibits an openness and curiosity towards other cultures. Instead of providing accurate descriptions, discourse aims to produce cultural symbols for a Chinese city and evoke an artistic imagination. This approach shows a historical paradigm that enables Finnish architects to choose representations associated with Finland, indicating that architects’ discourses still contribute to constructing Finnish identity.

However, when this paradigm of discourse takes place outside Finland, it maintains openness and intervenes in a local cultural imagination and construction, while at the same time, Finnish architects must reconcile with the external world by creating new practices and discourses. This constant dialogue with “others” on a cultural level, along with the argumentation around Finnish characteristics, extends the articulation of Finnish identity to places outside Finland. Finnish architects distinguish themselves from other international architects working in China by incorporating Finnish cultural symbols in their proposals instead of opting for random characters or oversimplified Chinese cultural icons commonly used in international designs.

For architects to realize a project in China, they must navigate the complex relationships among urban strategies, functional requirements, architectural forms, and social relations. Design discourse represents merely one facet of the spectrum of matters that architects must deal with in bringing their designs to fruition. The architects’ discourses highlighted in this chapter are noteworthy, as they exemplify one method by which Finnish architects contextualize their designs within the Chinese cultural landscape. However, to bring their designs to fruition, Finnish architects must go beyond such “soft” approaches to China and forge deep connections with China through social and economic networks. In the succeeding chapter, I highlight the collaborative partnerships between Finnish architects and other local firms in China to provide a more comprehensive view of the entire design process.

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661 This view draws largely on Gadamer’s hermeneutic conception of culture to account for the process of increasing knowledge and accumulation of experience. As he argued: “To recognize one’s own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other (1989).”

662 Tombesi, 2015.
This chapter explores the practices of Finnish architects in China, focusing on their engagement within a collaborative network that includes social interactions, knowledge transfer, and design partnerships. By examining Finnish architects’ interactions with Chinese collaborators and the intricacies of their collaborative design networks, this chapter provides insights into the interplay between external and local influences in transnational architectural practices.

As an embodiment of internationally networked design productions, Finnish architects’ practices in China are embodied in a consortium that relies on joint partnerships of multiple professions. With digital tools and the Internet, architects worldwide produce designs transmitted digitally to distant countries and remotely control design developments. Since globalized production networks geographically separate architects from construction sites and collaborators, such design practices require sophisticated communication and collaborative approaches. Architects must work with people from different languages, cultures, and working methods to advance projects in diverse, differentiated environments.

With the advancement of design complexity and a trend toward professional subdivisions, there is a “fractal mechanism” whereby parts of the architectural design field develop and become independent disciplines, leading to the emergence of new specialized contractors. Expertise has been compartmentalized into various engineering fields, specialist domains, and consulting roles, demanding that globalized architects have the ability to build networks and establish alliances. The intricacies of professional knowledge are no longer confined to a single team led by individuals but extend to a system of contractors and subcontractors of different professions and located in different places. Incorporating international dimensions into architectural designs makes this collaborative network complex, distributing weights and responsibilities to scattered actors. These networked developments in the architectural field indicate the importance of coordinated methods and design partnerships and illustrate the direction of change in architectural design.
Architectural designs typically undergo different phases, including preliminary concept, schematic design, design development, and detailed construction design. Collaboration among different firms is crucial for the realization of architectural projects. This diverse collaboration brings together various expertise and corporate profiles, combining the creativity of small firms with the delivery capacity of larger corporations, resulting in a strategic advantage. Design collaboration has become a prerequisite for obtaining projects in the highly competitive architectural industry.667

However, solely focusing on the architectural perspective may overlook the broader panorama of socialized networks within the construction industry and the principles governing labor production, of which architectural design is just one part.668 To thoroughly analyze how Finnish architects actualize their designs in China, attention must be given to the conceptual and economic underpinnings of architectural firms’ collaborative networks.

Furthermore, Finnish architectural designs must adhere to building codes and social regulations specific to the locations in which they are implemented. Local cultural and economic factors play a significant role in shaping the composition and organizational settings of design networks. These architectural design networks exhibit regional features, and the behavioral norms of the actors involved in these networks are influenced by geographical or national boundaries. For example, while European architects may engage in “international” or “globalized” architectural practices in cities like Beijing, Dubai, or Toronto, the organizational structures to realize their projects may vary significantly due to local contexts and conditions. Despite the common principles guiding the management and operation of design networks, they now encompass an array of distinct localities.

When analyzing Finnish architects’ collaborative design networks, China’s design institutes are indispensable subjects and occupy an important position in the design and construction activities in China, often acting as ultimate operators of various projects. Since China’s reform and opening in 1978, the idea of Sino-foreign cooperation has emerged in multiple industries and service sectors in China.669 Similarly, in architectural design, international architects must collaborate with China’s design institutes to form design consortia to undertake building design projects.670 Design institutes that establish partnerships with international architects are called local design institutes (LDIs). This collaboration model can be seen in many well-known buildings throughout China, such as the collaboration between the internationally renowned architectural

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666 Pelkonen, 2012.
668 Stevens, 1998.
669 For a long time, foreign investors must establish joint ventures with local Chinese companies in many industries and transfer some of their technologies to their Chinese partners. However, this ‘market-for-technology’ approach has been gradually changing in recent years, accelerated by the U.S.-China trade dispute that began in 2018. Taking auto manufacturing as an example, companies like electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla have established entirely foreign-owned production facilities in China.
670 “Where a foreign enterprise is to undertake construction project designing business within the People's Republic of China, it shall select at least one Chinese designing enterprise with a construction project designing qualification certificate issued by the administrative department of construction to carry out Sino-foreign cooperative designing activities (hereinafter referred to as cooperative designing), and shall undertake designing business within the scope of the qualification certificate of the said Chinese designing enterprise(s).” Notice of the Ministry of Construction about Issuing the Interim Provisions on the Administration of Foreign Enterprises Engaging in Construction Project Designing Activities within the PRC, 2004.
firm OMA and the East China Architectural Design Institute (ECADI) on the CCTV Tower, Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron, and the China Architecture Design and Research Group (CAG) on the National Stadium in Beijing.

In addition to LDIs, Finnish architects collaborate with design consultants and building component suppliers to process their designs (e.g., landscape architects, curtain wall design companies, acousticians, interior designers, sustainability consultants, artists, etc.). These subdivision experts are involved in different stages of design projects and form collaborative networks with architects. In China, where globalized architectural firms have developed localized managerial procedures, knowledge of such networks has become critical for understanding and articulating Finnish architects’ practices in China.

However, these collaborative models, set by social and business regulations (e.g., regulations that stipulate the qualifications of architectural firms and design bidding specifications), usually aim to deliver designs that meet specifications on time. This design-production assembly line expects each participant to operate within its scope to a limited extent, thereby maximizing production efficiency. As a mechanism designed to improve productivity, collaborative design production prefers to employ knowledge and experience verified by actual engineering. In a way, collaborative design networks, which aim to increase productivity, rationalize decision-making, and allocate design phases and responsibilities to different firms, also face uncertainties and additional challenges. Dividing a design project into phases and disciplines limits architects’ ability to manage details throughout a design process. For Finnish architects to advance their designs in China, design networks organized by local and international partners may demand more communication than what would typically be required for domestic projects.

On the one hand, Finnish architects are detached from their original management and supply chain systems in Finland when they deal with projects from China. Designs in China need to be done in cooperation with Chinese LDIs to complete subsequent procedures, making it difficult for Finnish architects to supervise their designs closely. The extent to which Finnish architects and LDIs can form close, complementary partnerships crucially impacts the quality of a final design. Although many Chinese design institutes completed their corporate transformations long ago, they are closely connected to the governmental agencies in China and retain solid bureaucratic systems. Communicative barriers between international architects and LDIs exist due to not understanding each other’s administrative realities, organizational complexities, and cross-cultural differences. Idealized, pre-determined commercial contracts are often insufficient to clearly define multiple collaborators’ boundaries of assignment and depth of work that collaborators experience in a design network and to deal with unforeseen challenges that may arise in a project.

671 Tombesi, 2012.
672 Tombesi, 2015, pp. 82–102.
On the other hand, Finnish architects who seek the integrity and purity of their designs often wish to fight for enough working time to process original thinking, take advantage of opportunities to expand their building material palettes (e.g., customized glass, bamboo, or ceramic materials), and strengthen their portfolios by building well-established projects. Many Finnish architects come to China as a long-term strategy and focus on finding ways to build their reputations. Finnish architects working in China often hope to have a positive cycle through exemplified results to expand the design market in China continuously. Meanwhile, many Chinese clients who approach Finnish architects expect new designs that are different from what they have seen. For Finnish architects, a stable development based on high-quality works becomes the key to building their reputations and realizing their architectural value. The autonomy and integrity of design make it difficult for many Finnish architects to be satisfied with becoming a specific scope of service providers or “design subcontractors” with a limited role.

Therefore, this collaborative design network has presented two coexisting but challenging-to-reconcile logics, one is based on monetized and networked design production and managerial decisions, and the other is on the autonomous domain of architectural design. In confronting such a network of cooperation, tensions, and competition (i.e., local Chinese design firms may grow to become international architects’ competitors), I investigated how this design network has influenced Finnish architects’ practices. In China, most market-oriented architectural designs are carried out under a design partnership that collaborates with LDIs. Similarly, this collaboration model applies to Finnish architects’ practices in China, except for a few artistic works and buildings not designed by Chinese clients (e.g., the architectural exhibition installations in Shenzhen or the Finnish pavilion at Shanghai Expo).

6.1 Collective and Individual: China’s Design Institutes

In China, design institutes play a crucial role in the architectural market and engineering sector. Originally established during the planned economy era with the influence of the Soviet Union, these institutes continue to hold a pivotal position in China’s building design and civil engineering systems. There are three main categories of design institutes in China.

The first category consists of vast state-owned design institute systems that cover various sectors, including civil buildings, roads, bridges, water conservancies, electric power, and shipbuilding. The architectural design institutes discussed in this dissertation are part of this extensive system. Historically, design institutes operated through anonymous and collectivist teamwork, producing functional designs for projects.
such as social housing, industrial plants, and iconic public buildings. Their work significantly contributed to China’s transition to an industrialized society and improvement of urban living standards. However, this rigid system, closely tied to the planned economy, became increasingly unsuited to China’s post-economic reform conditions and a longing to catch up with world design trends.

In response to the changing economic landscape, design institutes began implementing market-oriented reforms in the early 1980s, similar to other state-owned enterprises in China. Many of these institutes transformed into independently run companies while maintaining close ties with governmental agencies. They continue to dominate the design of most public buildings and infrastructure facilities in China. Some representative firms include the East China Architectural Design Institute (ECADI) and the Beijing Institute of Architectural Design (BIAD).678

Second, there are design institutes that belong to China’s universities. Universities in China, especially those with well-known architectural departments, often have affiliated design institutes, such as the Architectural Design and Research Institute of Tsinghua University (THAD) and the Tongji Architectural Design Group (TJAD). This combination of teaching and design production allows faculty and students to execute commissioned projects parallel to their academic studies.679 Talented graduates may have access to opportunities for fast-track employment. This system combines architectural education, professional practice, and research to form a comprehensive social network.680

Third, private design institutes began to emerge in China after the 1990s, and some have grown to a large scale with high-level urban planning and design qualifications. At the same time, these private design institutes have adopted multidisciplinary development strategies such as to state-owned design institutes, with representative ones including the Shanghai United Design Group (UDG), Shanghai Tianhua, etc. Private design institutes have competed with sizable state-owned design institutes in small- and medium-sized projects.681

China’s design institutes exhibit complex and overlapping identities, blending market-based approaches with collective working methods, and featuring influential individuals (e.g., well-known Chinese architects with social influence) alongside the corporate transformation.682 While state-owned enterprises, design institutes have embraced market-oriented strategies, becoming key players in China’s construction market.683 They are instrumental in exporting architectural designs to developing countries and serve as implementing agencies for China’s foreign investments and international aid policies, such as the Belt and Road Initiative projects in Africa.684 Additionally, some design institutes have evolved into integrated groups, covering various fields beyond traditional architectural design, such as investment, construction, manufacturing, and property management.685
In terms of organizational structures, China’s design institutes offer comprehensive design services, covering a wide range of building types and disciplines, from architectural and structural design to HVAC, electricity, water systems, landscape design, and interior design. Their scale advantage allows them to monopolize turnkey projects led by local governments in China. Nevertheless, there is fierce internal competition among design institutes with various backgrounds and from different regions. To enhance their competitiveness and secure high-end projects, design institutes collaborate with international architects, forming partnerships to pursue iconic projects that elevate their business achievements and brand influence. By engaging with international counterparts, China’s design institutes seek to gain insights into cutting-edge design ideas and methods, thus fostering a continuous exchange of knowledge and expertise.

Also, China’s local design power has been increasing in recent years, mainly in two ways: first, an increase in local, independent architects outside the design institute system, and second, the adoption of new organizational structures by design institutes to promote the production of original designs. Emerging “master studios” led by specific architects in large design institutes focus on producing high-level designs. These studios have enhanced design institutes’ competitiveness in architectural competitions and improved their management flexibility. By focusing on creating original designs via smaller teams, these studios have lower operating costs and less pressure to profit than typical construction design teams, allowing them to work on experimental projects and create work with higher design quality.

For example, Shao Weiping, the chief architect of BIAD, one of China’s most influential design institutes, argued that it was a rare opportunity for him to learn from international architects. He recalled his experience collaborating with Norman Foster in the T3 Terminal design at Beijing Capital International Airport. His Chinese team had the opportunity to significantly update their knowledge and experience, which included coordinating with various disciplines and the depth of design development. One of the most impressive gains for Shao’s Chinese team from co-designing the T3 Terminal was learning how to navigate complicated multidisciplinary coordination with explicit design logic. For example, Shao and his team realized that the geometries established in architectural designs not only exist in conceptual stages but should also be seen as a principle used throughout the design process as a constraint for various refinements. A few years later, the completion of the Phoenix Center by Shao’s studio in BIAD proved that LDIs are gradually becoming capable of delivering complex buildings with creative design mindsets.

In short, design institutes are extensively involved in different projects and have become the final executing arm of various
designs in China. Behind active architects with social visibility in China's architectural community, there is a group of relatively silent but essential design institutes. Schematic designs from various sources, including design institutes' “master studios,” international architects, or independent Chinese architects, need design institutes to be involved in the production of construction drawings to varying degrees.

International architects' branch offices in China or local architects' studios often exist as consulting firms. These design firms, which do not have a license for construction drawings, must complete a design procedure by working with design institutes. In other words, although some “schematic designers” can make construction drawings themselves, they still need design institutes’ qualifications to confirm and stamp construction drawings. From the perspective of a Chinese design institute, collaboration with international architects allows them to obtain the construction drawing part of a design contract. Although design institutes often do not have design leadership in this collaborative scenario, they occupy an essential design procedure and take legal responsibility.

Therefore, many architectural designs in China are based on combining two types of organizations: small teams generating schematic designs, and large organizations completing subsequent procedures. Design institutes in China demonstrate a localized infrastructure for design production. Zhu Jianfei concluded that design institutes are the actual “production machine” of Chinese architectural design, serving the country's political, economic, and social life; design institutes also echo China’s binary social structures, such as state-market and collectivism-liberalism.

Zhu's insight emphasizes the need to study both prominent individual architects and the collective dynamics within China's architectural landscape. Understanding the interaction between individuals and large design institutes is crucial for gaining insights into the Chinese architectural scene. The coexistence of relatively small international architecture firms and large institutes creates a dichotomy reminiscent of “boutique” versus “bureaucratic” architectural firms. However, it is essential to recognize that these categories of design organizations are not mutually exclusive; instead, they work together in tandem. By forming an alliance, they integrate design production, construction development, and design documentation, creating a holistic approach to architectural projects in China.

### 6.2 The Collaboration With LDIs

Generally, the collaboration between Finnish architects and LDIs continues through different design stages. At the initial phase, Finnish architects take on the role of primary authors, creating core concepts and defining overall architectural identities for the projects in China. In the early design stages, a situation often
develops in which Finnish architects lead design development and complete major design tasks. However, under current regulations, most architect-led international architectural firms need a license to produce working drawings in China.\footnote{During China’s reform and opening up until the 1990s, international architectural firms faced many restrictions in opening branches in China. After China acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the market access conditions for international architects were relaxed. Many international architectural firms have gradually localized in China and acquired Class A design qualifications through acquisitions of local design institutes, gaining the possibility to produce construction drawings in China. However, those mega transnational design groups that can obtain the construction drawing qualification in China are still a minority. Many architect-led European architectural firms still have no licenses to draw construction drawings in China independently.} By convention, the main working stage for international architects stops at the design development stage. As the design progresses, there is a greater need for coordination with technical disciplines, such as structural or HVAC engineers, and LDIs become primarily responsible for construction designs, documentation for design approvals, and intensive coordination and communication with multiple parties.

In the later stages of a project’s progression, LDIs gradually take on a larger proportion of the workload.\footnote{In various cases, the situation may vary depending on the contract negotiated between the parties. For example, in some urban planning or large-scale architectural design competitions, the collaboration between international architects and LDIs may be so significant that they jointly design the competition proposal while delineating different scopes of work. In other competitions, international architects may not be responsible for the majority of the design but may only be involved in specific design aspects. Consequently, international architects might not be liable for producing design documents or presentations. This study focuses on cases where international architects take on the primary role as designers.} However, the cooperation method and workload vary greatly depending on a project’s size and type. For smaller-scale buildings, LDIs may play a relatively limited role, and Finnish architects can handle most design tasks, including architectural detailing and material selection. In certain cases, such as CIPEA Villa No. 20, Sanaksenaho Architects completed almost all the construction drawings independently, with the LDI providing only review work. The collaboration with the LDI mainly involved advice on building code issues, such as Chinese staircase dimensions and the minimum distance between the building and the lake’s edge.\footnote{Sanaksenaho and Sanaksenaho, 2021.}

In contrast, Finnish architects may face more complex situations when collaborating with LDIs on large public buildings. During the competition stage, Finnish architects may form a consortium with an LDI, or participate individually and then work with an LDI during the subsequent design phases.\footnote{ibid.} When Finnish architects and LDIs participate as joint bidders during a prequalification for a competition, the consortium can form a more convincing seniority. Architectural reputations can have a promotional effect even before a building is constructed.\footnote{ibid.} More importantly, the selection of collaborators is primarily based on references to previous cases and expertise.\footnote{Chen, 2022; Lukasczyk, 2021; Salminen, 2021; Sanaksenaho and Sanaksenaho, 2021; Silvennoinen, 2021.}

A combination of corporate profiles brings out the strengths of multiple firms: the reputation of international architects and large local firms’ comprehensive execution
capabilities, social connections, and market sensitivity. The consortium aims to leave the impression that a creative, sophisticated, and influential international architectural firm is combined with a Chinese design institute’s solid, reliable ability to deliver completed buildings. Therefore, LDIs working with international architects can be seen as an institutional approach to streamline clients’ internal discussions and disputes and increase their confidence in project completion.

Moreover, architects usually begin their work by carefully reading design briefs via which they receive instructions and inspiration. To avoid deviations, a design team needs to know as much as possible about a client’s needs, while a client’s preferences may only suggest and describe a general direction. Similarly, in many Chinese architectural competitions, clients often do not thoroughly study their own needs before approaching an architect; they rarely conduct detailed, in-depth research on demanded programs. In the Chinese architectural competitions of the first decade of the twenty-first century, many design briefs that should have listed the design programs were often in draft form and had ambiguities, leading architects to rewrite or add their envisioned scenarios. Also, architects need help from professional consultants and specialists in large, complicated projects in which they have never been involved.

In recent years, the background information and functional requirements provided in architectural competitions’ design briefs in China have been significantly refined, especially in first-tier cities. For example, compared with other Chinese cities, the management of architectural competitions and the dissemination of competition information in Shenzhen are carried out more transparently and efficiently. Chinese clients have also begun to focus on operational issues in public buildings and expect architects to make sensible suggestions for the long-term maintenance of venues.

Therefore, LDIs may become a “translator of design programs,” enabling Finnish architects to understand the requirements of clients and local municipalities. A technical review from an LDI during schematic design allows Finnish architects to avoid criticism of technical issues that do not comply with mandatory local regulations. In addition to providing design advice, LDIs may act as cultural consultants. As mentioned in Chapter Five, architects’ discourses are produced collectively and are bound by various factors, and how designs are narrated is part of architects’ tasks. LDIs can be consultative partners, helping Finnish architects build interpretations that are appropriate to local cultural contexts.

When a project progresses to the design development stage, the design scope may be divided between Finnish architects and LDIs. In large public buildings, the schematic designs made by Finnish architects may be split into two parts: public areas closely related to core design concepts, and non-public areas for technical spaces and logistics. Using buildings such as opera

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698 See Chapter 3.
699 Kreiner, 2009.
700 Verhulst, Eisen and Heylighen, 2016.
702 Lukasczyk, 2021; Salminen, 2021; Silvennoinen, 2021.
703 Salminen, 2021.
704 Lukasczyk, 2021; Salminen, 2021; Silvennoinen, 2021.
705 ibid.
706 Salminen, 2021.
707 Chen, 2022.
708 See Chapter 4.
houses or concert halls as an example, Finnish architects may be responsible for overall architectural imagery and important interior spaces, including foyers, public lobbies, auditoriums, etc. LDIs, however, may develop designs for nonpublic areas, such as logistical and equipment spaces, backstage areas, etc.

So far, the labor costs of a Finnish architectural firm tend to be higher than those of a Chinese architectural firm; the wages of the average in-house architect in China are still lower than in developed Western countries. This collaboration has allowed Finnish architectural firms to focus on the critical aspects of a building and reduce repetitive work. Additionally, for non-public areas that need to accommodate large amounts of engineering equipment, parking lots, and bunker facilities (i.e., wartime civilian-shelter space), a great deal of knowledge of Chinese regulations is required, which is an area in which LDIs specialize.

After the design development stage, the focus of a project’s design work gradually shifts to LDIs, who take on responsibilities such as building permit applications, construction drawings, equipment tender drawings, and engineering systems coordination, including structural, HVAC, water, electrical, etc. Many LDIs are experts in building codes, and some well-known design institutes have been involved in compiling Chinese national regulations. LDIs may act as interpreters of local Chinese conditions and design codes, helping Finnish architects understand the constraints of their designs. When a building is large and complex, certain aspects (e.g., fire protection design), may enter uncharted territory with existing codes. Therefore, to find solutions, LDIs must carefully study and coordinate with Finnish architects responsible for schematic designs and local municipalities accountable for building approvals.

During the construction design and administration phases, LDIs typically take on the primary role in executing design work. They are tasked with providing realistic, feasible solutions, including helping to solve construction teams’ day-to-day problems and assigning architects and engineers to construction sites. Typically, architects spend more time on working drawings and specifications than on a design’s conceptualization and schematic phases. LDIs can effectively leverage their advantages of scale, localization of their workforce, expertise in facilitating building approval, and conducting fire safety reviews, all of which require intensive communication and coordination in the later phases of a design project.

Clients place special emphasis on costs and deadlines. Given the cultural and spatial distances, LDIs act as intermediaries, facilitating continuous communication and coordination between Finnish architects and their clients. As producers of construction designs, LDIs share much of the responsibility for cost control. Clients often exert more pressure on LDIs to reduce the cost of non-public areas rather than...
prioritizing the reduction of areas that involve critical architectural effects, which are the responsibility of Finnish designers. As part of a design consortium consisting of Finnish and Chinese architects, LDIs may also help Finnish collaborators receive more time and favorable design conditions from clients.\(^\text{717}\)

Finnish architects’ work in the construction design phase gradually shifts from design production to supervising and verifying the final architectural effect.\(^\text{718}\) However, Finnish architects still need to continue their work. They must ensure that their designs are not compromised by uncoordinated equipment installations, building code restrictions, or other compromises. Therefore, Finnish architects may still carry out the heavy responsibility of supervising technical procedures and providing updates and details during the construction phase.\(^\text{719}\)

In sum, this partnership between Finnish architects and LDIs reflects an international division of labor that combines the strengths of both parties while reducing design costs.\(^\text{720}\) LDIs’ knowledge of architectural codes and construction processes, as well as language proficiency and proximity to construction sites, constitutes an extensive knowledge bank and comparative advantage. LDIs can utilize their human resources and relatively lower labor prices to address technical and equipment installations, requiring significant time to progress and coordinate. This part of the workload is billed at local wages, thus effectively controlling design expenditures. Throughout the design process, other outsourcing activities reflect similar economic considerations, in addition to the collaboration between Finnish architects and LDIs. For example, local companies in China are often commissioned to produce computer graphic renderings, scale models, and 3D animations to save time and costs.\(^\text{721}\)

### 6.3 The Challenges of a Transnational Working Mode

In the design of large public projects in China, Finnish architects face increased amounts of information and more frequent communication compared to domestic projects. Various variables in internationalized practices, such as communication methods, working habits, and time differences, come into play on a day-to-day basis.

One major challenge for Finnish architects is the use of multiple languages, which can increase their workload. Many documents, such as comments from local experts, meeting minutes, clients’ feedback, emails, etc., need to be translated into English, serving as a middle language between Finnish architects and their Chinese collaborators. Depending on the project’s location, recruiting locals with appropriate language skills has become a common practice for many globalized companies. For their practices in China, Finnish architectural firms need to build a team with a combination of skills familiar with both sides’ conventions and cultural backgrounds. Although modern communication software and hiring Chinese
architects can facilitate smooth communication, cultural complexities, and language ambiguities can still pose significant obstacles when collaborating with design teams from different countries on large and complicated projects. In a globalized context, misunderstandings, loss of comprehension, and ambiguity can occur more frequently during information exchanges between architects, design partners, and clients. The subtle expressions and obscure meanings in communication are difficult to translate accurately, resulting in a more intensive communication workload to clarify the intentions of all parties involved.

Second, there are differences in work habits between Chinese and Finnish architects. In Finland, the use of email separates personal and work matters, and architects respond formally after careful consideration. Compared with Europe, architectural firms in China rarely use email for work communication. People in China communicate most of their daily matters through the instant messaging software WeChat, an indispensable communication application and payment tool for most Chinese people in their daily lives. The reliance on instant messaging applications for mobile communications is “both a blessing and a curse” for many Finnish architects. Communication in China often takes place in group chats based on topics and participants. This digital space allows for the coexistence of formal, informal, personal, and work-related discussions across different time zones and countries. In addition to text, participants can easily share documents, screenshots, photos, and short videos via WeChat, and members of the groups can add their perspectives in time.

In a way, WeChat has dramatically improved communication efficiency, allowing architects to track the progress of projects in real time and respond immediately to problems as they arise. However, for chief architects, who need to keep the big picture in check, these lengthy conversations create “information inflation,” leading to missing critical information. Moreover, text-based conversations can hardly make significant design decisions in a short time. Because of the time difference, China begins its day before Europe. Architects working in Europe often find themselves receiving a flood of messages as soon as they open their eyes in the morning. Using instant messengers has significantly increased work intensity while improving the tempo of communication. Also, the heavy use of chat tools increases the casualness of the work, making it challenging to keep all the files that need to be backed up and archived well.

Third, the time difference between Finland and China has a multifaceted effect on the work of Finnish architects in China. In general, Chinese subsidiaries of many international architectural firms can start work first and later transfer it to their European offices at the end of the day, where it is usually

723 Lukasczyk, 2021.
726 Lukasczyk, 2021.
727 Salminen, 2021.
729 Lukasczyk, 2021; Salminen, 2021.
731 Salminen, 2021.
733 Salminen, 2021.
734 ibid.
The time difference between China and Finland is five hours in daylight saving time and six hours in winter. European offices can deliver the work to their colleagues in China again before the end of the day so that the Chinese team can start work the following morning, late at night in Europe. Similarly, Finnish architects can utilize the time difference, namely coordinating the design teams in different cities to work continuously to improve the efficiency of the design process. However, Finnish architects must also be aware that their time to interact with their Chinese colleagues is limited and that the morning is a valuable meeting window. In the absence of an effective coordination mechanism, the time difference can lead to a Chinese branch office working late in the evening following European time. In short, the time difference is a double-edged sword for architectural firms with offices worldwide. It can be a resource but demands superior project management abilities and individual architects’ awareness of coordination.

6.4 The Challenges and Tensions in Working With LDIs

In the later stages of a design project, as LDIs become more involved, tensions and challenges may arise in the collaboration between Finnish architects and LDIs. Collaboration risks inevitably increase pressure to execute the project, resulting in reduced design quality and efficiency. After discussing the collaborative part of a design partnership between Finnish architects and LDIs, this section analyzes the tensions that Finnish architects and LDIs may encounter in their collaborations in China.

First, institutional factors may constrain design-related communication between Finnish architects and LDIs. Although China’s design institutes have made great strides since the economic reform and have become efficient actors in driving China’s rapid urbanization, one of the institutional problems with LDIs is that architects can hardly control an overall situation. Under the current system of China’s design institutes, architects are one of many “technical teams.” When design tasks arise in interdisciplinary coordination, architects must strive to convince engineers from other departments to adopt an integrated design strategy for an overall design.

In general, Chinese LDI architects coordinate and communicate with Finnish architects. Although architects are usually nominal project leaders in China’s design institutes, in practice, engineers are likely to follow the orders of their department directors. As a result, many engineering departments in design institutes tend to work within their “comfort zones” and lack a sense of active coordination. Due to this
management system, in which various departments are in a collaborative relationship, it sometimes takes work for LDI architects to coordinate effectively with engineering teams. Although intensive coordination between Finnish architects and LDIs may eventually resolve issues during the design process, Finnish architects may invest additional time in communicating with their Chinese partners.

LDIs’ engineering departments often prefer to avoid remaining on a project to resolve subsequent issues due to cost considerations, and they move on to new assignments once construction drawings are completed. However, in the architectural design field, the completion of drawings does not mean the end of a design process; instead, it is accompanied by a long process of revision and communication. Current design fees in China are still not up to Western standards and are even lower when shared with design partners. Not to mention the problem of delinquent design fees that often occur in China. Not to mention the problem of delinquent design fees that often occur in China. Low design fees and narrow design scopes limit the time LDIs’ engineers and architects can devote to a project, leaving many potential issues for construction coordination.

According to the convention of Chinese design institutes, design fees are allocated in a ratio for each discipline of architecture, structure, HVAC, electrical, and drainage. Except for architecture, the remaining fields (e.g., structure, HVAC, electrical, or drainage) have fewer design fees, meaning that many engineers must work on multiple projects simultaneously to achieve a similar income level as architects. As a result, LDIs’ engineering teams consider their costs based on a more realistic perspective and show varying degrees of voluntarism and motivation. China does not have regular practices like Finland, where engineers can be hired as consultants in a project’s early stages or design competitions and paid consulting fees. The absence of schematic design phases leaves China’s engineers exclusively working on later stages. In contrast, LDI architects can still earn income by participating in competitions or making preliminary designs. Also, an annual bonus, an integral part of the Chinese salary system, is based on the profitability and number of engineers’ projects throughout the year. The possibility of less income makes LDI engineers reluctant to spend too much time working with Finnish architects; many are unwilling to offer iterative revisions to complete one high-quality project.

Second, the construction quality and design integrity of projects rely on a combination of Finnish architects’ designs and coordination inputs and LDIs’ overall execution capabilities. Unlike the Western convention of billing for working hours, payments for design projects in China are, in a sense, an act of trading design documents rather than a service with continuity. As Jiang Yong pointed out, China has not been traditionally accustomed to paying for services, leading some clients to view architects as solely

743 Chen, 2022.
744 Lukasczyk, 2021; Salminen, 2021.
745 See, e.g., an interview with Tuomas Silvennoinen, one chief architect in PES-Architects (Karhapää, 2021).
747 Jiang et al., 2020.
748 Cao 2016, pp. 118–119.
749 Cao, 2016.
750 Li, 2010.
751 Chen, 2022.
responsible for producing drawings. Detailed design elements, such as curtain walls, interior spaces, and landscapes, often become outsourcing projects subcontracted to other companies. LDIs may expect suppliers and subcontractors to provide off-the-shelf solutions, transferring the detailed design work from architects to the manufacturing side.

The lack of systematic control, tight schedules, and cost constraints have resulted in varying levels of completion for Chinese projects, with some achieving relatively high construction quality, while others may fall short of the standards seen in developed countries. Confronted with variable quality, Chinese architectural critics often use the term “degree of completion (wan cheng du)” when evaluating architectural works. The emergence of this term indicates that China’s modern construction industry can produce high-quality architecture. However, it also suggests that China’s construction standards and quality levels sometimes do not meet the expectations of international architects. To achieve their desired results, architects working in China must proactively invest their efforts and invest more time than anticipated.

According to Chinese architectural critic Zhu Yimin, the term “degree of completion” shows the immaturity of the Chinese architecture industry. Construction based on drawings and contract fulfillment should be the norm, but it is only sometimes the case in China. China’s construction supervisor system (jian li) can guarantee construction quality to a limited extent. In practice, this supervisory role is often more symbolic and does not effectively serve as a quality control function for clients and architects. Construction supervision should be a profession that requires a high level of expertise. However, the income level of construction supervisors in China is disproportionate to the level of responsibility they are required to take on, leading to instances of power and rent-seeking opportunities.

Third, the division of responsibilities and workload indicates that Finnish architects and LDIs have different attitudes toward creative designs and demands for revisions. To establish a reputation or experiment with cutting-edge ideas, many international architectural designs in China often require more time and effort from architects than initially planned. Finnish architects realize that they must control construction quality and perfection of details, including working drawings, specifications, and an established system for materials and accessory suppliers; it is difficult for them to delegate these tasks entirely to LDIs. When design collaborators cannot complete tasks or face delays, adding staff or allocating additional work time becomes an unavoidable decision. In other words, when Finnish architects attempt to maintain design or cultural assertiveness, it is likely to be at the expense of economic gain.

753 Jiang, 2005.
754 In Chinese design institutes, the outsourcing project is called “shuai xiang” (甩项), which means “throwing out project” (Cao, 2016, pp. 254–255).
755 Cao, 2016, pp. 227–228.
757 Lukasczyk, 2021; Salminen, 2021.
758 Salminen, 2021.
760 Deng, et al., 2014.
761 Jiang, 2005; Cao, 2016.
762 Jiang, 2005; Wang, 2009; Deng, 2014; Cao, 2016.
763 Salminen, 2021; Silvennoinen, 2021.
According to the commercial terms between Finnish architects and LDIs, Finnish architects may only take supervisory responsibility at the construction design stage, and they receive a small percentage of design fees.\textsuperscript{766} Although Finnish architects are nominally responsible for the drawings until the design development stages, they often exceed the required standards because they usually do not have contracts at the construction design stage and cannot make refinements.\textsuperscript{767} As a result, they attempt to bring forward work that belongs to the construction design stage to achieve better architectural details and quality. Moreover, Chinese clients often cannot adequately reimburse Finnish architects for their extra workloads and billable hours.\textsuperscript{768} This situation forces Finnish architects to decide whether to take on more responsibilities or risk compromising the depth of their designs.\textsuperscript{769}

However, due to the challenging deadline of a project, investing more time in earlier design phases and making frequent revisions significantly reduces the time available for LDIs to produce construction drawings, putting more pressure on Finnish architects’ design partners in China.\textsuperscript{770} LDIs tend to focus on the implementability of materials and engineering solutions that have already been tested in extant buildings. Their primary aim is to ensure the project’s completion. Moreover, from a contractual perspective, LDIs, which usually do not carry out schematic designs, are not obligated to help Finnish architects convince clients to accept creative or artistic effects. Under pressure to meet schedules, LDIs favor safe, proven ways of operating and thus have less desire and time to refine a design.

In addition to pushing limits regarding technical challenges and refinement of processing details, construction contractors are more concerned with work safety, project schedules, and cost control.\textsuperscript{771} Adopting new methods requires local architects and engineers to master these new technologies and regulators to update design codes to make the latest technologies legally compliant. Likewise, LDI architects and engineers have legal reasons for being cautious, as they are required to stamp final drawings and are thus responsible for the designs in which they are involved.\textsuperscript{772} As a result, Finnish architects may complain that LDI architects’ and engineers’ works do not meet their expected standards.\textsuperscript{773} In contrast, LDIs may consider that Finnish architects occupy too much time for their schematic designs and compress a schedule for preparing construction drawings.\textsuperscript{774} Also, LDIs may think that Finnish architects focus only on perfecting their design ideas without considering realities.\textsuperscript{775}

\textsuperscript{765} ibid.
\textsuperscript{766} Salminen, 2021; Silvennoinen, 2021; Xu, 2022.
\textsuperscript{767} Silvennoinen, 2021.
\textsuperscript{768} Salminen, 2021; Sanaksenaho and Sanaksenaho, 2021.
\textsuperscript{769} Lukasczyk, 2021; Salminen, 2021.
\textsuperscript{770} Chen, 2022, Xu, 2022.
\textsuperscript{771} Cao, 2016, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{772} Xue, 2006, pp.85-90; Xu, 2022.
\textsuperscript{773} Lukasczyk, 2021; Salminen, 2021.
\textsuperscript{774} Zhao, X., 2015.
\textsuperscript{775} Chen, 2022.
6.5 The Tensions and Risks from Working With Clients

In the context of working with clients in China, Finnish architects typically encounter two categories: private companies and public institutions. Private property developers and corporations often have a more direct and involved approach to building designs as they seek to generate income through selling or renting properties. However, these developers may prioritize pragmatic decisions, leading them to intervene in architects’ design processes, especially with cost-saving concerns. In many cases, Chinese developers may purchase only preliminary designs from international architects and then assign the subsequent steps to their in-house design departments or other local design institutes. As a result, international architects may have limited control over the detailed execution of their designs in private property development projects, except for select, high-profile projects.

On the other hand, large-scale public buildings in China, such as theaters, libraries, concert halls, and stadiums, are seen as prestigious opportunities for international architects to create influential works. These public projects are often financed by the state treasury through state-owned enterprises and public institutions. Compared to private investment projects, public projects are generally perceived to offer higher stability, predictability, and consistent payment for design services.

However, the uncertainties in China’s architectural design market challenge Finnish architects due to the extant gap between China and more developed countries in the construction sector. Public institutions are susceptible to government officials’ will and national policies. Additionally, Finnish architects are approached not by real investors but by the individuals and organizations that manage the construction on their behalf. Even in some priority public projects, Finnish architects have fewer chances to explain their designs and opportunities to communicate fully with decision-makers.

The difficulty of communicating directly with real decision-makers and the lack of design professionals in clients’ organizations often affect the progress of projects and the implementation of sound decisions for Finnish architects. For example, in many public architectural design competitions, final decisions are usually in the hands of local public authorities rather than professional juries. The opinions of local government officials have a decisive influence on the selection of public...
projects, and professional jurors’ choices are more of a recommendation or feasibility study than the final results. In many cases, panels of experts in architectural competitions may submit multiple candidates tied for first place, but the final decision remains with local officials. In some instances, Finnish architects may win a bid on the jury’s opinions but ultimately miss out on projects. Such decisions from local officials, made by non-professionals, often make a building’s symbolic value outweigh its actual functions, and designs with exaggerated forms are likelier to win out from the final candidates. In comparison, the innovativeness of architectural thinking and the feasibility of urbanistic strategies do not always have priority. Juries of architectural competitions in China are still dominated by architects and lack representatives of urban planners, end users, and experts in specialized fields. This has led architects working in China to question the equity and transparency of China’s competitions. The absence of sound project management has led to an unpredictable evaluation process for Chinese projects and inevitably undermines the fairness and professionalism of China’s architectural competitions. As Salminen once commented:

“Nowadays, the jury members in Chinese competitions are generally professional. They are often university professors, or they can even be Chinese academicians in architectural fields. There is nothing to complain about the jury itself. But the final decision about who will be the competition’s winner always depends on high-level clients. Whether the professional jury has the right to decide on the winner is a significant difference between the Finnish and Chinese systems. In China, the jury always chooses three of the best proposals. But, the high-level client, who is usually one person, will make the final decision about the winner.”

Moreover, the distance from the real decision-makers also drives architects to invest more in presenting their design outcomes and to use the more costly image- and video-based means. Influential Chinese competitions emphasize computer graphic renderings and often require participants to produce multimedia videos with animated renderings and professional dubbing. As laypersons in the architectural profession, governmental officials may be more caught up with external architectural appearances and how a design looks in pictures. These renderings and multimedia videos can be presented directly by clients in meetings with higher authorities, even if architects are not present. In a way, these documents become virtual representatives of the architects explaining

| 785 | ibid. |
| 786 | ibid. |
| 787 | For example, in the competitions for the Shanghai Natural History Museum (2006) and the Nanjing Performance Center (2015), a jury of professional architects awarded the first prize to PES-Architects. However, the results were changed by local government decision-makers (PES-Architects 2006; Salminen 2021). |
| 788 | Cao, 2016, pp. 82–84. |
| 789 | Salminen, 2021. |
| 790 | Cui Kai, a Chinese academician-architect, briefly summarized the unfairness in Chinese architectural competitions into three aspects: 1) interference from local government leaders, 2) the special relationship between the jury and the client, and 3) the client’s favoritism toward local or specific architectural firms (2002, p. 20). Finnish architect Pekka Helin has also mentioned that several Chinese architectural competitions he participated in were organized in a non-anonymous way (Mukala, 2010). |
the concepts and visions through animations, dynamic diagrams, and professional discourse to the governmental leaders.

Also, clients’ ability to organize projects and their financial health can significantly impact design progress. A client’s financial crisis and unclear project management may extend a project for years. On the one hand, some projects in China can move forward at a breakneck pace, rapidly completing the design and construction of complex public projects. For example, the WGT was initially planned to be completed in three years. Nevertheless, after architect Salminen communicated with the city authorities, the client in Wuxi eventually extended the project to four years (2008-2012) for quality and safety reasons.

On the other hand, project planning in China faces uncertainty, making its schedules challenging to predict. Some reasons can lead to the suspension of a project for years, while a dormant project can suddenly become active. Several cases that I studied in Chapter Four underwent a relatively long and bumpy process before they were finally built. For example, in CIPEA Villa No. 20, Sanaksenaho Architects underwent an eight-year wait before the building was finally constructed. The ICON Tower in Chengdu lasted from 2009 until 2017, when the entire building was completed. The majority of the designs of the Moganshan Villa Group and Resort Hotel did not materialize because their investors were bought out. The SFC in Nanjing, which began in 2016, is expected to be fully completed within two years. However, due to the transfer of land ownership and changes in local officials, the construction of the SFC’s foundations did not begin until four years later.

Such project stagnation impacts smaller architectural firms more than large design agencies do. Sizable companies can disband the team and assign in-house architects to other projects whenever a project is delayed due to funding issues, policy adjustments, or client leadership changes. However, it is more challenging for smaller architectural firms to make timely adjustments, resulting in higher-than-expected project costs. The unknown risks in the Chinese market give a competitive advantage to large, well-funded architectural firms with sizable in-house design teams and branches in China. Commercial risks and a lack of control over the design process pose challenges for Finnish architects regarding construction quality and long-term development in China. In the absence of an established supply chain to support an architect, clients are more directly involved in the design production and control of construction quality. Also, Finnish architects must develop a close working connection between LDIs and clients to ensure a project’s smooth realization.

In sum, an architect’s work comes from a trust-based engagement of services. In monetized design activities, clients are decisive for the project’s progress, and its adverse impact will lead to significant design changes or termination. Clients not only

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792 Lukasczyk, 2021; Salminen, 2021; Wikar, 2021.
793 Salminen, 2021.
795 Sanaksenaho and Sanaksenaho, 2021.
796 Silvennoinen, 2021.
797 Wikar, 2021.
798 Lukasczyk, 2021.
799 Jiang, 2005.
800 Wikar, 2021; Wu, 2021.
refer to those who invest in a building and purchase design services but are themselves important participants, facilitators, and decision-makers in the design process. Their quest for quality can adequately support an architect’s work by becoming a “partner” in the design process, helping the project achieve a good result. Clients can drive the implementation of architects’ creative and specific decisions, and architects need a positive relationship with clients to ensure the successful completion of the design.

In complex structures, mastering technology can effectively mitigate the conservative attitude of clients facing innovative designs and construction methods. The individuals responsible for construction are professionals with technical competence who need to work out a series of communication and coordination mechanisms and make decisions on major technical issues. However, architects rarely have the opportunity to work with enlightened individuals; more often than not, architects interact with many middle managers, who are usually only interested in the economic bottom line. Meeting a good client may be a small probability or even a stroke of luck for an architect.

6.6 The Design Networks and The Pandemic

In writing this dissertation, the COVID-19 pandemic, which began at the end of 2019, has extensively affected human society and Finnish architects’ practices in China. Since the pandemic, the world has experienced city closures, entry and exit controls, quarantines, crowding restrictions, remote work, and other measures to stop the spread of the virus. By examining globalized architectural design networks in China during the pandemic, we can observe that the pandemic is not just a temporary and unpredictable factor but likely has more far-reaching impacts on design production patterns.

From the outbreak’s start until December 2022, China adopted a strict “zero-covid” policy to control the pandemic spread within mainland China using measures including city-wide lockdowns. These means have significantly restricted the ways people travel and work. Between 2020 and 2022, China required anyone entering China from outside the country to be quarantined for two weeks in designated hotels, followed by one week in their place of residence. These measures made Finnish architect’s travel to China inconvenient. However, some Finnish architects were still working on Chinese projects during the pandemic, including competitions and project deepening. Nevertheless, the pandemic changed the rules of behavior and how people interact in collaborative design networks. New changes in how globalized architects work present opportunities and challenges for international architectural practice.

First, a “digital boost” has been widely integrated into people’s lives, using big data or artificial intelligence algorithms to optimize their life quality and strengthen people’s
connection with electronic networks. Globalized architectural practices blend digital spaces with physical spaces, and the pandemic further enhances this integration. Before the pandemic began, such a remote design network had been operating steadily for a long time, and the pandemic advanced the intensity and density of communication among the various professions in this collaborative design network. In an online meeting, different participants, including architects, engineers, clients, etc., can sketch together to express their views based on one shared drawing, which may be even more convenient than traditional face-to-face meetings. The home office and travel restrictions caused by the pandemic have become the driving forces behind the promotion of new online communication tools. The presentations and jurying of large competitions have been moved online. Whereas it was once a relatively rare phenomenon for international architects to be invited as jurors for Chinese competitions, online jurying has dramatically reduced the difficulty of participation. In a way, the pandemic has become an external pressure, motivating people to learn and use digital tools.

“Without the pandemic, we wouldn’t have any remote meetings with our Chinese clients. I was supposed to take ten to fifteen trips to China this year, spending a lot of time expending energy on travel, and increasing my carbon footprint. And that didn’t happen. Then, impressively, we have more direct contact with our Shanghai office and clients than we did before the pandemic.”

However, many important decisions and meetings still require Finnish architects to travel to China. Compared to the period before the pandemic, these measures significantly restricted the free movement of people, making it impossible for Finnish architects who had to work on multiple projects around the world to travel from city to city, as they did before. In contrast to remote online meetings, face-to-face communication is still an irreplaceable tool for gaining trust, dealing with crises, and breaking through difficult situations. Large-size material samples and 1:1 mock-ups on construction sites require architects to visit sites to inspect and make decisions. Also, these globalized architectural companies have developed a proven training system that often recruits interns worldwide to their hub offices and sends them back to their home countries after completing their internship to become a talent pool for the branch offices. The impact of the pandemic has also limited the movement of in-house architects, with many international architectural firms focusing more on localizing their workforce by employing local teams.

With such a network, globalized architectural firms can coordinate projects worldwide, avoiding irresistible factors in a single market that can bring a company to a halt. On the one hand, we can observe that the pandemic has made the movement of people around the world inconvenient, with Finnish
architects unable to travel to China in person to deal with critical issues in their projects. The pandemic poses challenges for Finnish architects working on Chinese projects, making it more difficult for them to gain the complete trust of their clients and partners from China through face-to-face communication. On the other hand, the pandemic has also had positive impacts by promoting new digital communication tools, which have saved designers and project managers time. The pandemic has improved the efficiency of remote communication through the increased use of the Internet and digital platforms. It is foreseeable that, even in the future, many of the working methods developed during the pandemic will be retained and become new conventions in transnational design practice.

6.7 A Discussion of the Relationship Between Finnish Architects and LDIs

On the one hand, along with reducing architects’ involvement in the construction process, teamwork plays an increasing role. It ensures that clients and the public receive a more comprehensive and detailed service.\footnote{Cohen et al., 2005.} Collaboration brings higher efficiency and deliverability, and it has become a practical choice under the urgent demands of China’s rapid urbanization. Also, Sino-foreign partnerships help Chinese design firms connect with cutting-edge thinking and transfer expertise from developed countries to Chinese design firms. With the progress of China’s economy and society, cooperation with Finnish architects helps improve local designers’ capacity and working quality. Many local investors or clients usually expect LDIs, such as Chinese enterprises with large design engineering teams, to act as insurance measures to ensure the completion of planned buildings.

On the other hand, to some extent, productivist rationality encounters resistance from architects, who desire to preserve the autonomy of creation and guarantee the integrity of designs and construction qualities. Finnish architects are responsible for the complete process of Finnish domestic projects, from conceptual sketches to overseeing construction details. However, when Finnish architects practice in China, a more decentralized production method challenges the autonomous tradition of architects controlling the entity. A system based on subcontracting has shared some of the architects’ design scopes and responsibilities in traditional design activities.\footnote{Cohen et al., 2005.} Likewise, inescapable dependence on the support provided by clients and technical solutions from subcontractors undermines the privileged position of elite designers.\footnote{Larson, 1993, p. 12.} By measuring this design partnership from different perspectives, I can find positive results in some respects, and at the same time, there are adverse effects and path dependencies in others.
6.7.1 An Essential Partner for Achieving Designs

International architects, including Finnish architects, bring their creativity, expertise, and media influence to projects in China.\textsuperscript{814} They have effectively improved the quality of Chinese urban space through their practices when China’s local design power has yet to reach the same level as that of the West. However, design occupies only a fraction of an architect’s total work time, and architects often spend more time in design development and interacting with other disciplines.\textsuperscript{815} In the Sino-foreign design partnership, LDIs process architecture more from a technical perspective, focusing on feasibility and providing the workforce with massive construction drawings and technical expertise. It compensates for Finnish architects’ unfamiliarity with China’s building regulations and handles the massive technical communication in construction coordination stages. With a sizable Chinese subsidiary, securing the completion of a demanding project can be a manageable task for many international architectural firms.\textsuperscript{816} This rational resource allocation by market actors shows the economic rationality and the roles of different design firms in the globalized division of the industrial chain. Therefore, Sino-foreign partnerships help Finnish architects supervise projects with lean and efficient teams and complete their projects within tight schedules.

At the same time, being in charge of construction drawings and coordination means delivering locally implementable solutions.\textsuperscript{817} Given China’s speed and technical conditions, Finnish architects can hardly solve numerous problems that emerge during the construction phase of a project in China. With the help of LDIs, many issues arising during the construction process can be solved on-site, and LDIs’ designers who drew up the construction drawings can visit the site frequently.\textsuperscript{818} Having design documentation and the construction coordination team handled by a local company provide clients with a sense of security. LDIs’ involvement provides a commitment to concentrate on complex situations and ensures local clients can successfully realize designs, which is critical in China’s top-down decision-making system.

Therefore, in the opinion of Finnish architects, cooperation with local Chinese design institutes is beneficial and necessary.\textsuperscript{819} LDIs’ expertise in interpreting Chinese building codes, design documentation, and construction coordination effectively reduces Finnish architects’ difficulty in realizing their designs in China. A design consortium of Finnish architects and LDIs can reduce the unpredictability of the Chinese market and increase self-protection by understanding the client’s true intentions as profoundly as possible.\textsuperscript{820}

More importantly, in Chinese practices, where Finnish architects attempt to achieve high quality with a small team, discovering reliable subcontractor partners is an indispensable step. Therefore, cooperation between Finnish architects and LDIs is based not only on economic reasons but also on differences in expertise, efficient communication

\textsuperscript{814} Fang, 2021.
\textsuperscript{815} Gutman, 2010.
\textsuperscript{816} Chen, 2021.
\textsuperscript{817} Chen, 2021, Xu, 2022.
\textsuperscript{818} Chen, 2021.
\textsuperscript{819} Salminen, 2021; Sanaksenaho, 2021; Silvennoinen, 2021.
\textsuperscript{820} Fang, 2006.
during the construction coordination phases, and the tight project schedule. These tasks are place specific, and the necessity of local experts prevents the architecture industry from easily shifting work elsewhere or simply controlling the design schedule from afar.

However, Finnish architects in China inevitably encounter challenges and risks that expose projects to various uncertainties. Finnish architects must proactively network and seek stable and dedicated partners, requiring architects with local experience to assign highly skilled personnel and strategically assess partners. Finnish architects must coordinate key design areas and even take steps beyond their scope to supervise the design to achieve a relatively high architectural quality. Without Finnish architects’ supervision, LDIs, and other local design participants can still complete the remainder of a collaboratively designed project. Nevertheless, its quality and detail level might be compromised. To some extent, qualified architectural art can hardly exist when an assembly line replaces leading architects’ full participation and coordination.

### 6.7.2 An Effective Way of Learning

Dealing with complex projects provides Chinese design institutes with an opportunity to challenge themselves, learn, and improve their technological abilities. Since the early 1990s, collaboration between Chinese and international architects has had a positive impact on China’s architectural design industry, management systems, technologies, and building materials. This cooperative mechanism has upgraded China’s domestic architectural sector and encouraged local firms to learn from their international counterparts. Additionally, international architectural firms have contributed to training design talent for China with a global perspective and localized practical skills.

For example, architects like Li Hu (the principal architect of Open Architects) and Dong Gong (the principal architect of Vector Architects) gained valuable experience while working on Steven Holl’s Chinese projects before establishing their firms.

LDIs have also evolved from relying solely on technically rational decisions to adopting a more holistic architectural approach. Collaborating on complex building shapes and new materials designed by Finnish architectural firms has pushed local Chinese construction companies to continually challenge themselves. Therefore, Sino-foreign design collaboration serves as a model of professional paradigms for LDIs, demonstrating how Finnish architects can produce high-level designs under the same building regulations and construction conditions as Chinese architects. Cooperation with Finnish architects may create an external driver for local Chinese design teams to break away from conventional methods and technical strategies, leading to the discovery of innovative solutions. Although the integrity and maturity of China’s modern construction industry may have yet to reach a world-class level, many large engineering teams have been formed to deepen and construct complicated contemporary structures.

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821 ibid.
822 In Chinese architectural publications, there are many articles in which Chinese architects reflect on themselves and summarize how to learn from their international counterparts (Gu, 1993; Fei, 1997; Xiang and Ji, 2008).
823 Fang, 2021.
6.7.3 A Drive to Produce Original Designs

Working with international architects on important projects helps LDIs establish their brands, which enhances their competitiveness in obtaining similar projects in the future. Similarly, through the collaboration between Finnish architects and LDIs, Chinese architects have noticed the effectiveness of original architectural designs in promoting brands, contemporary culture, and creating enormous commercial value. The significant share of schematic designs in the overall design fee allocation also drives LDIs' ongoing efforts to develop original designs.

At the same time, international architects in China rely on their visibility and professional strength to effectively convince local clients to accept their proposals. They are likelier than Chinese architects to avoid clients' challenges and repeated revision requests. In contrast, Chinese architects often spend energy preparing multiple design options and lack the voice to defend their designs. LDIs want to change the situation of being positioned as the "contract processing" side and a labor-intensive player at the back end of the architectural-industry supply chain. Building high-quality projects that establish a brand image is equally motivating and promotional for LDIs.

Nevertheless, the existing organizational structure of Chinese design institutes (i.e., the combination of a decentralized, modern subcontracting system, and the collective-design tradition) limits their flexibility and autonomy in the design market. Often, large firms with more formalized rules reduce architects' influence. Therefore, while maintaining the practice of large teams handling a design collectively, design institutes may highlight the personalized labels of the renowned architects in their groups. Some local Chinese architects with social prestige, or the talent of younger generations returning from studying overseas, are given greater autonomy and more freedom to allocate resources within the original structure of state-owned design institutes. Therefore, through cooperation with international architects, LDIs attempt to progress into original design producers and acquire an opportunity to upgrade their architectural industry supply chains. These independent architectural offices and semi-independent studios belonging to prominent design institutes have become critical driving forces for original design in China.

6.7.4 A Path-Dependent Trap

The division of architectural design tasks and roles in design assembly lines can catalyze an inertia force for LDIs. In other words, LDIs may become accustomed to working with international architects, and this design partnership has developed into an excessively stable model of continuous production and dependence on existing business paths. Because Finnish architects take on primary works in the early stages of a design, they are both primary creators and risk-takers, especially in architectural competitions in which

824 Cao, 2016, p. 110; Luo, Ye and Bai, 2011.
826 Blau, 1984, pp. 31–35.
827 Zhu, J., 2018b.
both parties jointly participate. An LDI usually does not require much input into this collaborative design model but plays more of a corporate image provider and local networking contacts. The advantages that LDIs provide, including social connections with contractors and familiarity with building codes or approval applications, are also critical to achieving a design.  

In some cases, LDIs are awarded construction design contracts before an architectural competition begins. Therefore, LDIs do not rely exclusively on the superiority of conceptual proposals to win design competitions, as do international architects. In such circumstances, LDIs may not be interested in developing their original ideas or striving for self-improvement. The presence of Finnish or other international architects may not promote the development of China's original design as previously envisioned. Therefore, this Sino-foreign design partnership creates a path dependency for Chinese design institutes, settling for stable construction drawing work and avoiding high-risk design competitions. LDIs are content to be technical experts and brokers of connections and to leverage their expertise and public resources to establish stable revenues. In contrast, small, independent Chinese architectural studios have made more significant inroads into the design markets of developed Western countries than prominent Chinese design institutes. International architects also see these smaller Chinese design firms as potential competitors in the design field and as signs of progress in the quality of Chinese design.

6.8 Summary

This chapter connects different pieces of knowledge and provides insights into the interplay between Finnish architects and other networked actors in the modern, monetized design industry. The focus has been on how Finnish architects engage with Chinese LDIs and clients, and how their interactions lead to tensions, negotiations, and compromises. This collaboration model is based on China's national regulations, the status quo of China's design market, and enterprise expertise. The Sino-foreign design partnership leverages the strengths of both parties and adheres to the principles of the architectural design market, proving to be instrumental in the successful execution of Finnish architects' projects in China.

This chapter enriches the analysis of organizational settings in globalized designs by focusing on the multifaceted connections between Finnish architects and LDIs. The success of projects in China depends on close cooperation between Finnish architects and LDIs. For LDIs, working with Finnish architects has led to increased design thinking and, at the same time, fostered path dependence on existing business models. On the other hand, this transnational, collaborative design model challenges the autonomy of Finnish architects compared to their involvement in the design process of domestic projects. They often find themselves making
trade-offs between construction quality and the time invested by the design team, which directly impacts the cost of a design project for architectural firms.

Moving forward, the next chapter will explore the full process of Finnish architects' practices in China, focusing on a real case study—the Strait Art and Culture Center (SCAC). Through this case study, we will gain further insights into how this collaborative design network works in practical scenarios.
The chapter presents a case study of the SCAC in Fuzhou, China, designed by the Finnish firm PES-Architects. This extensive cultural complex includes an opera house, concert hall, multifunctional hall, art museum, and film center. Led by Pekka Salminen, the design team completed the overall architectural design, primary interior spaces, and landscape schematic design. The China Construction Engineering Design Group Corporation (CCEDGC), a subsidiary group of the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC), collaborated as the LDI, responsible for construction drawings and detailed technical and service area design. This chapter aims to analyze various aspects of the project, including the design process, socio-economic context, architectural discourse, and collaboration with local partners. Through interviews, documentation analysis, and first-hand experience, this chapter offers insights into the project’s significance within the Finnish architectural community.

As a vast project led by a Finnish architectural design firm, the SCAC’s design and construction process encompasses all the themes discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation. An in-depth study of this case allows us to synthesize themes (including the socioeconomic context of China, Finnish architects’ design thinking, the use of architectural discourse, and collaboration with local design partners) and understand how their interplay unfolds in a real-world scenario.

At the same time, such an ambitious project raises new questions for the Finnish architectural community. The SCAC’s scale goes beyond typical Finnish architecture and provides new ways to study Finnish architects. For example, the SCAC was included in the 2020 Finnish Architectural Biennial Review, a portfolio representing high-level cases from the Finnish architectural community. The Biennial Review jury felt that the SCAC maintains the characteristics of Finnish design and could be a representative work of an architect’s career.
the Biennial Review chose a one-dimensional, nationalistic tone of voice in its summary: “Does a palace of culture built in China present Finnish architecture? Our answer is yes, as long as the building is designed by Finnish architects.”

In contrast to this somewhat arbitrary statement, this chapter uses a multi-scale, complementary approach to provide facts and systematic perspectives for understanding the project. In Finland’s architectural export history, some projects are challenging to categorize, such as Reima and Raili Pietilä’s project in Kuwait and Heikki and Kaija Siren’s conference center in Baghdad. These buildings articulate Finnish architects’ localized considerations of sites and cultural contexts, resulting in different appearances from Finnish domestic customs. These works are not just an inheritance of Finnish architecture but more of a development in new regional contexts. Similarly, the SCAC is a megaproject born in a completely different context than Finland. It was designed by a collaborative network of professionals from different countries led by a Finnish architect. In brief, the SCAC is an icon that can bring “wowness” and, at the same time, be a source of controversy and a puzzling phenomenon to decipher. With the support and cross-comparison of data sources, I analyzed how architects advanced the design and reconciled the difficulties they encountered, the architects’ discourses, feedback from various stakeholders, and the actual use of the cultural complex.

7.1 Historical Background and Project Decision Process

While first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou are slowing their urban expansion and even imposing limits on population growth, some of China’s smaller towns are still rapidly growing, often accompanied by policies to attract investment and talent, encouraging residents to settle in newly established areas. The SCAC is located in Fuzhou, Fujian Province—a province on the southeast coast of China, across from Taiwan, with predominantly mountainous terrain and few plains.

Although Fujian is one of the more economically developed coastal regions, its economic level has not grown as quickly as neighboring provinces, such as Zhejiang and Guangdong. Moreover, in the decades following the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Fujian found itself in a conflict-ridden geopolitical environment that was not entirely conducive to social development. The coastal areas of the Strait have been considered potential sites for military conflict between the China mainland and Taiwan, leading to a lack of external investment and relatively slow growth of its cityscape and infrastructure. In addition to the island of
Taiwan itself, the islands of Kinmen and Matsu, which are adjacent to the mainland China coast, are also under Taiwan’s administrative jurisdiction. Kinmen is close to Xiamen, while the Matsu Islands are located at the mouth of the Minjiang River, only thirty kilometers from the coast of Fuzhou.

Due to the changing national-security situation across the Strait, the likelihood of a high-intensity military conflict that occurred in mainland China has decreased. Fujian has gained a long-term, stable external environment of the national-security situation, and its economic development has been dramatically boosted in recent decades. In 1992, the Taiwanese government disbanded the War Zone Administration in Matsu, which lost its significance as a frontline fortress and began to transform its role into a scenic tourist destination. Since the end of the cross-strait confrontation and the resumption of civilian exchanges, the direct ferry service between Matsu and Fuzhou, which began in 2001, has increased trade, logistics, and folklore activities between the two areas.

Economic and cultural exchanges between Fuzhou’s Mawei and Matsu have contributed to the accumulation of experience in implementing civilian exchanges between mainland China and Taiwan on a larger scale, playing the role of a policy testing ground. In 2009, China’s State Council adopted a strategy to develop the Western Taiwan Straits Economic Zone, which includes transportation infrastructure, industrial policy, and people-to-people
communication with Taiwan. This strategy covers four provinces (i.e. Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong), and Fuzhou is one of the key cities in the plan.  

Moreover, although Fuzhou is the political center of Fujian Province, Fujian’s two other major cities, Quanzhou and Xiamen, have developed a competitive stance against Fuzhou. Quanzhou has long been the leading economic city in Fujian Province. Meanwhile, Xiamen has gained high media visibility due to its tourism resources and favorable open policies. Faced with competition between cities, Fuzhou has developed guidelines to increase its influence and economic competitiveness as a provincial capital, including merging its previous administrative counties into new urban areas.  

More intriguingly, a change in China’s top leadership has accelerated the development of Fujian, particularly the city of Fuzhou. Xi Jinping, who became president of the People’s Republic of China in 2012, had spent seventeen years in Fujian Province, including six years as CCP party secretary in Fuzhou. With Xi’s administration in Beijing, Fuzhou has put forward plans for urban development, received significant political and financial support, and entered a period of rapid expansion.  

One of the most notable urban development projects in Fuzhou is the MNT. Its origins can be traced back to the beginning of China’s economic reform. In 1985, the Fuzhou Economic Development Zone (FEDZ) in Mawei was among the first groups of economic development zones (EDZs) established by the central government. Since 2010, Fujian officials have proposed upgrading Mawei from a regional policy-driven EDZ to a new urban community, prompting its transition from a monofunctional area focused exclusively on industrial sectors to a self-sufficient new town. Consequently, the local urban planning department formulated the conceptual planning and urban design for MNT in 2012, which also included the proposal for Fuzhou’s first metro line connecting MNT to the city center. MNT’s planning approach continues to follow a top-down strategy common in China, incorporating many villages, farmland, and open riverside spaces that were once part of the suburbs, into Fuzhou’s urban area. This

Figure 76. Fuzhou city map showing the location of the SCAC and the area of Mawei New Town (MNT).

840 Lin, 2014.
841 The Western Taiwan Straits Economic Zone is a strategic concept proposed by Fujian in 2004. In 2009 the Chinese State Council discussed and adopted the “Several Opinions on Supporting Fujian Province to Accelerate the Construction of the Economic Zone on the West Coast of the Strait.” The five central cities in the economic plan are Fuzhou, Quanzhou, Xiamen, Wenzhou, and Shantou.
843 In Chinese bureaucracy, the party secretary is the head of a local leadership group, and the mayor is usually the deputy party secretary.
ambitious plan aims to expand Fuzhou from its current location, with its mountainous backdrop, to a site located at the mouth of the Minjiang River. This move creates a more open position for the city and marks a decisive step in shaping Fuzhou’s development.

The Urban Design of MNT consists of several clusters that focus on different urban functions. The Sanjiangkou area, consisting of Cangshan, Kuai’an, and Majiang, is planned as the new governmental center of Fuzhou; the plan includes significant buildings, such as an administrative center, a business district, the South Railway Station, and a plan to build a world-class performance center (one like the SCAC). Adjacent to the Minjiang River, Fuzhou placed its planned performance center, the SCAC, at the end of the landscape corridor formed along the Liangcuo River, making it an essential part of the future city skyline. The competition organizers outlined the positioning of the SCAC and its significance in the design brief as follows:

“To promote the construction of urban culture in Fuzhou, to enhance the cultural taste of the city, to create a stage for urban cultural life and an essential platform for cultural exchanges with Taiwan, to become a new highlight of the cultural facilities of the southeast coastal cities, the latest business card of Fuzhou city image.”

Initially, the Fuzhou government would have liked to follow the direct investment development approach of the SCAC. However, it soon realized that the project would create much public debt in a short period and place a heavy burden on Fuzhou’s finances. The SCAC became Fujian’s first public cultural facility built under the PPP model, bringing a diversified funding source to co-finance the project. Finding other investors has also been an arduous process for Fuzhou. After operating and maintenance costs, cultural spaces and the profitability of their accompanying commercial areas was limited, and the SCAC was unattractive to private capital. Following the failure of the initial tender, CSCEC Strait (established by CSCEC to develop the western zone of the Taiwan Strait) became a co-investor and construction contractor in the SCAC and assumed parts of venues after the inauguration. The local government sought a reasonable cost through the PPP model, which encouraged the investor and operator to consider at the design stage how to use spaces. Therefore, the SCAC became a project co-financed by a Chinese SOE in partnership with a local municipality in Fuzhou. In this case, limited public investment implies that local officials took a cautious approach to large-scale cultural projects with high investment and low returns.
In 2012, Fujian issued official documents to invite “architectural masters” to design critical buildings, promote the city’s brand, and expand its media presence. In November 2013, Mawei New Town Construction and Development Cooperation, an SOE established to develop MNT, initiated the SCAC competition. The winner would be responsible for the design from the conceptual stage to the construction drawings. Therefore, Fuzhou’s strategy of leveraging reputations in conjunction with the SCAC’s iconic architectural identity required the inclusion of necessary “renowned architects” in a candidate design team.

Under the influence of the WGT, completed in 2012, a branch of the CSCEC Group in Fuzhou began to contact PES. As a result, the CSCEC Fuzhou branch formed a consortium with PES to participate in the SCAC architectural competition. The tender document was divided into two parts: PES carried out the entire design work, and CSCEC’s Fuzhou company provided technical notes and documented past project performance. In March 2014, the design consortium officially received a first-prize confirmation letter. After winning the competition, CSCEC’s Beijing-based design agency, CCEDGC, a subsidiary with more experience in theater design, became the cooperating LDI. Since then, PES and CCEDGC have been confirmed as the two primary designers of the SCAC.

### 7.2 Urban Strategy and Publicity

The design of the SCAC started with a focus on creating a public strategy that seamlessly integrates with the urban space, encompassing the master plan and functional layout. In the competition proposal’s master plan, the SCAC complex is divided into two groups, 854 Fuzhou has deliberately planned iconic public buildings in the new metropolitan area with ambitious planning and invited nationally and internationally renowned architects to update its cityscape. As the document mentions, local leaders believed there was a gap between the cityscape in Fujian province and first-tier cities in China. The document further provides criteria for the so-called ‘masters,’ which refers to architectural academicians in China, the winners of international achievement awards or the Liang Sicheng Architectural Prize, and individuals recognized by authorities as masters. According to the document, the masters also include individuals who earned the National Engineering Survey and Design Master from the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) or the Engineering Survey and Design Master from the Fujian Housing and Urban-Rural Development Department (Fujian Housing and Urban-Rural Development Department and the Fujian Development and Reform Commission 2012). Before the SCAC, several globalized architectural offices completed several projects in Fuzhou. In June 2007, the architectural and urban planning institute in Germany, Obermeyer, received the commission for the urban design of East New Town in Fuzhou. The Dutch office, NEXT, designed a housing complex in downtown Fuzhou. The American office, MZA, created the Strait Youth Exchange Camp, which offers communication space for young people from mainland China and Taiwan. The giant Strait International Conference and Exhibition Center was designed by a collaborative team of Obermeyer and the Chinese institute BIAD.

![Figure 77. A bird’s-eye-view of the SCAC.](image)}
connected by a two-story central concourse. The frontage of this concourse, along with the nearby business center, encloses a “Jasmine Plaza” designed for public events. Despite the SCAC’s original design brief not emphasizing commercial space, PES decided to include an additional concourse of approximately 10,000 square meters, envisioning the Jasmine Plaza and Concourse as a central hub for major public events in the neighborhood and evening activities for local residents.

In the post-competition design revisions, the most significant adjustment to the master plan was a mirror flip along the long side of the complex. Meanwhile, Fuzhou’s road planning department adjusted the road design accordingly. Instead of running along the Mingjiang River, the motorway forms an arc around the site’s perimeter. The new master plan further enhances the integration of the plaza with the waterfront landscape. The SCAC stands on the waterfront, with steel and glass office buildings planned for the Mawei New Town in the background, creating a new urban skyline. People can enter the site from either end, walking to the central plaza, entering the concourse, or leading to the waterfront landscape space. PES even envisioned that, in the future, with further development of urban infrastructures in the Mawei district, people could walk across a pedestrian bridge to a sandbar of the Minjiang River.

Also, this pedestrian connection in the center of the site extends to the city side and connects to the metro station. Arriving from the metro station, one can walk through the commercial space along the path and waterfront landscape and ascend to the main entrance on foot via a revolving ramp (called the “eye ramp” by PES). These design strategies sought to eliminate the site’s boundaries and articulate the landscape space with the urban fabric.

In China, the functional arrangements of large performance venues are often similar; oftentimes, the drafters of one city’s theater design guidelines copy another’s guidelines (usually those considered competitors or more advanced cities). As a result, architects, based on their professional experience, often need to adapt the proportions of a public building’s various functions to find solutions to make a venue sustainable in the long run. According to PES, commercial functions are crucial to gaining popularity

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CCEDGC mainly used the design team from their previously completed Tangshan Grand Theatre (Chen, 2022; Xu, 2022).

An urbanist entry point was not only the pursuit of the design team under Salminen’s leadership but also an objective requirement of the competition. In the design brief, the urban and landscape strategy is one of the main subjects of the design. As mentioned in the brief: “The SCAC should meet the requirements of tourism, leisure, and cultural activities and form an open space system of relaxation, recreation, and vitality in the city through public places such as plazas” (Mawei New City Construction Development Corporation, 2013).

During the competition, in addition to the architectural design of the art center, architects also had to provide planning concepts for adjacent commercial parcels.

PES-Architects, 2018, pp. 52–53.

Fang, 2021; Salminen, 2021.
and ensuring long-term operations in public buildings. Urban transportation infrastructure (e.g., subway interchange hubs or high-speed rail stations) and cultural venues are typically integrated with commercial spaces with sustainable operation goals.

Regarding the SCAC, for Salminen, it was “the success or failure of the project” to design a central concourse that could be open for long hours and full of functional programs to help the SCAC achieve sustainable operations and avoid vacancies due to high operating costs.867 During the architectural design process, the creation of publicness revolved around the central concourse, which architects call the “Culture Concourse.” People can enter the concourse first and then proceed to different spaces, including the opera house, concert hall, multifunctional hall, art museum, and cinema center.

Concerning the SCAC’s functional configuration, Salminen mainly consulted two experts from Finland, Timo Tuovila (the technical director of the Finnish National Opera) and Johan Storgård (the director of the Swedish Theater in Helsinki), who suggested that the crucial way to run a theater is to attract audiences via adequate commercial space.868 In addition to a ticketing function, PES expected the lobby to provide flexible exhibition space, a bookstore, a café, children’s play facilities, etc.869

At the same time, the concourse roof can be used as an observation platform, providing an interactive, functional complement to public events in the square. Across the Minjiang River from the SCAC is the Kua’ian cluster, which is part of MNT and is also planned as a future urban district. Thus, the design allows people to view the distant skyline of the emerging city across the river. In June 2014, as the project advanced to the schematic design phase, and after a four-day workshop with CCEDGC in Helsinki, Salminen explicitly expected the concourse roof to be open, with an accessible viewing platform for everyone:

“The most popular new opera building in Europe, the Oslo Opera House, is well known in the photos when plenty of people are on the sloped roof. I hope Fuzhou’s art center would be well known on the Internet with plenty of people in the Jasmine Plaza, ramps to the roof terrace, and inside the Culture Concourse.”870

867 Salminen, 2014b.
869 Salminen, 2014b.
870 In June 2014, CCEDGC’s Chief Architect Xu Zongwu led a nine-person team of architects and engineers to Helsinki for a four-day workshop with PES. This is the summary Salminen sent to the client after the workshop, summarizing his main points about the design (Salminen, 2014b).
PES encountered two main challenges during the project. First, due to the lack of clear guidelines in the design brief and the absence of a professional management company as a coordinating partner, determining the appropriate size of the concourse became difficult for the architects.\(^{871}\) In the SCAC's original plan, Beijing Poly would operate the three performance venues (opera house, concert hall, and multifunctional hall), while CSCEC Strait would co-invest and operate the film center, art museum, and advertising business.\(^{872}\) While Beijing Poly had no objections to a spacious concourse, they insisted on keeping it to a reasonable size to avoid high operating costs and energy consumption.\(^{873}\) However, when PES proposed a two-story concourse, it raised uncertainties about who would manage the additional floor, leaving PES without a clear direction for design development. Moreover, the two-story concourse posed challenges in terms of fire codes compliance and evacuation considerations, necessitating significant adjustments to the existing design.\(^{874}\) After careful consideration, Salminen made the decision to reduce the concourse to one floor, which was later confirmed in writing by the client.\(^{875}\)

“Now I got a message from the CCEDGC from a meeting in Beijing on September 22 that they think the idea violates fire rules etc., so a two-story lobby with shops would be nearly impossible. Additionally, since the client hasn’t appointed the management company for the particular commercial design for this area, it looks like there would be an oversized and empty lobby on two floors, which is closed daily as generally in China. We already have this type of comment from Poly management. That is why I strongly suggest the client consider if it would be better to cancel the second floor of the Culture Concourse?”\(^{876}\)

Additionally, PES aimed to extend spatial publicness further into curved spaces on one side of each venue, which PES calls the “curved galleries.” PES envisioned these galleries to be open spaces accessible for long hours, even when performances are not taking place, to significantly enhance the spatial publicity of the SCAC. These galleries feature glass curtain walls on one side and bamboo panels that rise from the ground and curve over the top on the other. Once again, PES prioritized creating practical functions in these spatially attractive galleries, rather than using them merely as empty foyers before people enter the auditoriums. However, a primary challenge in implementing functional programs, such as retail and catering, arose due to fire codes. Although these open spaces are close to the building facades, the floors gradually rise from the entrances, making it impractical for people to evacuate directly to the outside in most areas of the curved galleries.

Furthermore, in China, there are local demands for such functional spaces. For example, the opera house’s curved gallery,
the largest among the five venues, offers approximately 1,000 square meters of available space. In the original proposal, the opera house’s curved gallery could accommodate a banquet hall—a function often combined with performance spaces. Nevertheless, Chinese banquet halls usually require large service areas, including sizable kitchens with access to open fires. In this case, Chinese fire regulations made it nearly impossible for compliant kitchen space to exist here.

When Salminen realized that the building's public spaces would be significantly reduced, he wrote in a worried tone to Lin Tao, the person in charge of the entire MNT development:

> “Dear Mr. Lin, I need to send you this letter since I see that the situation with the SCAC project is alarming. (...) In the competition proposal and the approved SD-phase drawings, we had clear commercial and service functions for the Culture Concourse and the Curved Galleries. During the DD-phase design and communication process, CCEDGC and Poly canceled all the above-mentioned additional functions. PES-Architects could not agree on that because the whole original competition idea was destroyed. (...) The new type of diverse activities must be offered to all citizen groups in Fuzhou. This multifunctional cultural activity center should be attractive for families with children, young people and seniors, school classes, and temporary visitors like tourists. To be successful, the door of the cultural center must be open more than 100 evenings a year, as this kind of center usually is in China. The central Culture Concourse with its activities needs to be available at least 300 days a year: daytime for school classes, seniors, tourists, etc., and late afternoon and evening for everybody.”

Nevertheless, as one of Fuzhou’s most critical public projects, deviating from existing national regulations would pose a significant risk to those responsible. Also, the theater’s management company, Beijing Poly, found it convenient and easy to separate each building from the public concourse by closing the shutter of each venue, thus simplifying the operation and management of the entire complex. After all these efforts, PES had to make trade-offs regarding planned public spaces. Although the SCAC’s floor area has been reduced, the “Culture Concourse” as an urbanistic public viewing platform and event hall has been realized. In the subsequent design process, PES further developed a single-level concourse design. For example, PES subdivided the space into smaller areas by adding partitions to the concourse to meet fire codes and introducing skylights to improve lighting conditions.

Since its completion, the “Culture Concourse” has become one of the most frequently

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877 Salminen, 2015a.

878 The fire-risk review of such a large building is a complex process. During the design of the SCAC, many situations arose that could not be determined based on the existing fire codes. Therefore, the review resulted from a combination of code provisions and additional simulation evaluations. In China, this fire simulation allows architects to gain limited room for looseness in code articles; however, it does not mean that architects are exempted from the principles. In a public project of this magnitude, local officials often insist on the latter when faced with a choice between maximizing the effectiveness of a building’s design and ensuring a building’s fire evacuation quality by sacrificing part of a design concept.

used spaces in the entire complex. Its convenient location on the ground floor allows for a wide range of activities and thus serves as a venue for temporary exhibitions. However, most of the “curved galleries” in the SCAC could not accommodate the public functions envisaged by PES due to fire regulations and management issues, which was disappointing for the architects. 880

**7.3 Material Selection and Tactility**

A perspective (and tactility) based on building materials common in Finnish architecture continues in the SCAC and has become another principle design theme parallel to urban strategy. 881 The building material-oriented approach also continues Salminen’s structural expressionism. For example, in the cases of the Museum of Winter Sports in Lahti (1999) and the WGT (2012), inclined facades made of different materials form a structural motif, and the architectural spaces are coordinated with these structural artifacts.

Similarly, building materials’ performativity emerged with the SCAC’s concept and advanced simultaneously with the evolution of architectural forms. An early handmade draft model shows five ship-shaped solids in white clay and aluminum mesh rising above the roof on one side of each solid, resembling the sail image. These manually cut meshes eventually evolved into a structured curtain wall design in the SCAC. Also, the tactile sensation implied in the clay shaping continues into the building’s details and materials selection.

The SCAC uses two main materials in its exterior and critical interior spaces: ceramic and bamboo. However, PES initially envisaged aluminum and bamboo, with ceramic mentioned as an alternative option in the design description. 882 In the competition proposal, the idea of using aluminum curtain walls inherited the concept of a mesh-like architectural texture from the initial draft model. Similarly, the tradition of bamboo, the iconic material that symbolizes the Chinese version of “Finnish wood,” continues in the SCAC and is used extensively in its facades and interiors. In the SCAC competition proposal, the exterior bamboo walls gave these structures a more holistic image and echoed the appearance of traditional wooden ship hulls. PES also stated that the dark wood-like texture is reminiscent of the historic Sanfang Qixiang (literally, Three Lanes and Seven Alleys) area in downtown Fuzhou. 883

After the competition, and after feedback from several parties, the design underwent a round of revisions. The competition jury felt that the sail structures of the SCAC proposal were excessively like those of the Fujian Grand Theater (FGT), completed in 2008. The jury requested a new proposal based on the existing design. 884 One of the most important changes to the SCAC’s architectural appearance after the competition phase was the addition of a double-curve-shaped...
roof, shaping each venue into a curved mass. This revision shifted the SCAC’s architectural image from a discrete, structuralist style to an organic, holistic form.

From a symbolic imagination point of view, the modified appearance of the building is closer to a flower petal than to a ship. The space that emerges under the curved roof can accommodate large-sized air conditioning units, resolving an inadequate consideration of technical areas during the competition phase. Moreover, the competition jury questioned the durability of the bamboo material, and there was no precedent for using bamboo for large building facades in China. Salminen proposed changing the primary material of the building’s facade to ceramic, which has since been adopted as the architectural expression theme of the SCAC.

“When canceling the ‘ship’ image, we could—actually we should—also cancel the large-scale idea of using bamboo as a façade material. It would be best to create the overall white image of the ‘Jasmine.’ It means that the bamboo will be replaced by white aluminum panels or even white, high-level custom-made ceramic tiles. The icon of our time, the Sydney Opera House, designed by a Danish architect, Jørn Utzon, is covered by beautiful white ceramic tiles. This material would also be both ecological and Chinese material.”

Nevertheless, bamboo is used extensively in the SCAC’s interiors. For example, bamboo became the theme material for the auditorium and foyer of the multifunctional theater and is used extensively throughout the structure for flooring and furniture. In the multifunctional theater, the construction method of these bamboo materials, which form the walls’ wavy appearance and texture, follows PES’s proven approaches in the WGT. Other typical bamboo spaces in the SCAC include five curved galleries, where curved bamboo surfaces connect to the facade, integrating the

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887 Bamboo and wood are rated up to B1 in China’s fire code. These materials are available for interior ceilings in small-scale, overall low fire-rated buildings. However, in large public buildings, such as opera houses, the fire rating required for interior ceiling materials is A (i.e., non-combustible materials, such as gypsum board, metal panel, or concrete).
ceiling and walls. PES used regular bamboo squares suspended by light structures from the main steel trusses, creating complex double-curved surfaces.

According to China's civil building fire regulations, combustible materials, including wood and bamboo, cannot be used for the interior ceilings of public buildings, requiring architects to develop this design facet more strategically. In addition to solid bamboo, two similar-looking materials were available to designers: aluminum profiles with printed wood textures and aluminum profiles with natural bamboo veneers. Based on tactile thinking, PES expects people to touch authentic materials. Eventually, the interior surfaces of the curved galleries within two meters of floor height were covered with natural solid bamboo, as these surfaces can be defined as walls at this height. In response to the building design code, an aluminum profile covered with a layer of bamboo lamellae became the material for the upper parts of the curved surfaces in the curved galleries. The aluminum profile has the appearance of solid bamboo, is lighter in weight, and meets fire codes.

At the same time, ceramics, the materials most studied by PES for the SCAC, are used extensively in facades, foyers, and auditoriums. Ceramics are likewise utilized in SCAC's architectural details, such as the custom-made handles for the main entrance doors. In the multilayered, double-curved curtain wall system, ceramic louvers cover the outermost layer, the middle layer is a glass layer that defines the interior and exterior, and the innermost layer is composed...
of steel columns arranged at different inclinations that provide load-bearing structures. Considering people’s viewpoints, the ceramic louvers are densely, and orderly arranged in the upper part of the building and appear random and sparse as they approach the bottom part.

On the one hand, the curtain wall in the SCAC is a typical example of parametric design, where PES controlled the 3D digital model of the curtain wall by scripting variables from multiple sources. For example, the distribution of ceramic louvers is primarily based on the intensity of sunlight. Various parameter settings in the curtain wall system, including the deflection angle, length, and overall density of the louvers, were simulated and studied using programmed modeling tools.

Such a model, showing all the louvers, steel structures, and many other elements, laid the foundation for multidisciplinary cooperation in the construction design phase. In line with the Chinese custom of having abundant evening activities in urban spaces, the night-lighting effect of the building is an integral part of the design. PES wanted the exterior ceramic curtain wall to be a color screen displaying dynamic images. Therefore, an urban-scale concept ultimately requires a deepening of architectural details to be realized. Lighting components and cabling became another layer of technological devices integrated into the curtain wall.

On the other hand, traditional physical model-based refinement still plays an essential role in design deepening. The curtain wall detailing was done in collaboration between PES and the curtain wall consultant, Schmidlin. PES completed the preliminary design of the curtain wall by providing digital models to represent the complete appearance and modeling scripts to generate the shape. The curtain wall consultant was responsible for deepening the construction details and feasibility.

This design decision-making process was based primarily on traditional physical prototypes, material samples, and large-scale mock-ups on the construction site. Using tangible models that people can better perceive, architects made several decisions about details. For example, the surface of a ceramic louver has a semi-matte texture, while the clay used to fire the ceramic also needs to be white, so that when the louver is cut short, its cross-section remains consistent with the whole. A steel tube must run through each ceramic louver to make it more secure and to help prevent broken louvers from falling to the ground.

Also, connections had to be made of

888 Schmidlin’s design capability in the curtain wall field is more potent than CCEDGC’s curtain wall design department. So, they were working as a consultant for the curtain wall section and a subcontractor to produce the corresponding construction drawings.
stainless steel to prevent rusting and staining of the white louvers. One of the most critical junctions in the entire curtain wall system is the junction where the ceramic louver meets the steel structure, which goes through several design iterations. Initially, the junction in the earlier version retained adjustable sills in several dimensions. The curtain wall designers were very concerned about the accuracy that could be achieved on the construction site, so several adjustable structures were reserved to ensure the successful installation of the ceramic louvers. When PES’s Helsinki design team received the ceramic curtain-wall junction prototype from China, they found it too cumbersome and bulky. After several revisions, a more compact solution was finalized, which required higher on-site construction precision.

At the same time, the opera house and concert hall auditoriums are two other major spaces where ceramics are used in the SCAC. The curved surfaces in the 1,600-seat opera auditorium and the 900-seat concert hall are composed of millions of custom-made ceramic tiles, presenting challenges in design depth and construction methods. During the competition phase, the initial concept for the opera auditorium was to use glass fiber-reinforced gypsum (GRG) material that could be formed into free-form surfaces. A well-known example of GRG materials in China is the Guangzhou Opera House, designed by Zaha Hadid, whose gold-painted GRG shapes the main hall in flowing forms. However, the painted surface is prone to wear in corners, especially in crowded auditoriums. PES sought to use the opportunity to design the SCAC to experiment with new materials and construction methods. Therefore, while using a similar curved shape, the architects of the SCAC wanted to cover the surface with another durable layer of wear-resistant material, and ceramics became an ideal choice.

Furthermore, Salminen believed that the ceramic finish, consisting of many small mosaic-like tiles, should be customized and be a culturally significant work of art in this crucial space. The ceramic pattern came from artist Shih Hsuan-Yu, who redesigned the ceramic tiles by referring to the traditional Chinese peony pattern. Approximately fifty ceramic tiles of varying morphology form a hexagonal mat via a flexible plastic mesh that is bonded to the backside. The ceramic pieces are available in three similar yet distinct shades. These intricate and

Figures 91–95. Figure 91 shows a photo of the completed walls of the opera house auditorium. In Figures 93, 94, and 95, workers at the construction site in Fuzhou were hand-laying ceramic pieces for corner-curved ceiling surfaces. Image credits: Marc Goodwin (Fig. 91) and PES-Architects (Fig. 92, 93, 94, and 95)
detailed ceramic textures allow visitors to see and touch the material up-close, creating a subtle echo of the SCAC’s overall pictorial motif.

The SCAC concert hall also has ceramics as the primary material for the interior. Unlike the opera house auditorium, the concert hall needs to present instruments’ authentic sounds. Therefore, it required a more sophisticated acoustic design, which demanded that architects focus on interdisciplinary coordination while creating the expressiveness of materials. Integrating multiple disciplines makes the auditorium’s ceramic layer a technology-dense system. Compared with the opera’s free-form, the concert hall auditorium has spherical surfaces covered with white ceramic tiles.

The acoustic model divides the surface into two types: one is uneven to produce diffusion, and the other is smooth to create reflections. PES realized these ceramic tiles using a parametric approach, fitting multiple simple polygons to a spherical surface. Additionally, the same artist designed the surface pattern of the tiles, which were carved out by automatic mechanical processing equipment. These subtle shallow indentations can only be felt when an individual is very close or reaches out to touch.

The challenge that PES had to solve with the artists and construction teams was how to bond ceramic tiles to curved surfaces. After testing the mock-ups, PES accepted the construction plan to install these customized ceramic tiles in the opera house auditorium using the adhesive laying method (i.e., ceramic tiles directly adhere to the curved GRG surfaces via an adhesive without the use of metal connectors). In contrast, ceramic tiles in the concert hall were fixed on curved surfaces using adhesives plus mechanical fasteners due to their larger size. Mounting so many ceramic pieces on curved surfaces was done by hand. In some ways, using hexagonal mats containing multiple ceramic tiles in the opera house auditorium sped up construction, but covering the entire space with small ceramic elements was a huge undertaking. Likewise, many gaps were created between the fixed-size ceramic mats on a double-curved surface, requiring a great deal of manual adjustment work to ensure an even, continuous pattern.

The architects had considered using metal connectors to reinforce the connection between the ceramic pieces and the GRG surface.
In refining these details, the architects adhered to a principle oriented to a user’s perspective, as we can see in a significant modification late in the design of the opera auditorium’s interior ceramic surface. Due to the free forms in the opera house auditorium, the flat, rigid ceramic pieces could not fit well on curved surfaces with a small turning radius. The appearance would be uneven and leave sharp edges, such as on solid balcony railings and the turning corners of walls, creating a safety hazard.

Therefore, Salminen decided to use bamboo on these edges. In the completed auditorium, one can notice that curves near the stage, edges of the handrail of balconies, and corners of walls form a kind of “elbow patch” design composed of bamboo that replaced the original ceramic-tile design. As a result, the end users were highly considered in terms of materials’ tactility, creating soft contact surfaces between the human body and the material while visually creating a culturally meaningful texture.

7.4 Discourses

As a significant cultural project, PES developed rich interpretations and created various relationships between discourse and design concepts in the SCAC. Throughout the design progression, PES crafted a discursive portfolio that encompasses different perspectives on its design interpretations. The discourses in the SCAC entail two parallel and distinct logics. Initially, the architects stated their design principle as providing a favorable space that serves the ordinary people who use the buildings.

“The starting point for the design was ‘extraordinary experiences for ordinary users,’ with the aim of creating a new type of cultural shopping mall, i.e., a mix of different cultural functions and a range of commercial services. This format is typical of the new phase of cultural buildings in China.”

PES’s discourses implied how they defined the users and which social groups this cultural building should serve. While various stakeholders influenced the architect’s design process (including the client and the local municipalities, which managed the design and construction of the SCAC and were partially responsible for its operations), PES focused on prioritizing the needs of ordinary end users who did not have
the opportunity to participate in the design process. The SCAC was seen as a way to enhance local urban space, not just as a landmark. The statement presents the architect’s vision of functionality, reflects the city’s urban strategies and operational principles, and suggests the target population.

Moreover, China has yet to adopt the common Finnish practice of involving theater management experts, musicians’ representatives, and other professionals in several workshops with the architects to discuss the detailed use of space in similar large cultural building projects. As previously discussed, the architects felt obliged to optimize the functional arrangement of the building and consulted theater management experts in Finland. This statement implies that the architects took the responsibility of deepening and adjusting the functions within their capabilities, which had a lesser impact on the architectural effect but contributed to the user experience and sustainable operation.

This demystifying principle of urbanistic strategies is more of a straightforward statement than a source of inspiration. Nevertheless, there still needs to be a piece of the architect’s discursive puzzle that argues for the design specificity and its connection to Fuzhou as desired by the client. PES adopted a narrative approach based on cultural symbols, presenting a more precise and concrete image, essentially becoming a naturalistic theory of imitation. During the competition phase, PES chose sails and jasmine flowers as symbols in the design discourses. PES reformulated the architectural structures in “Five Sails and One Flower,” which morphologically offered two ways of interpretation.

“Japanese, the official flower of the city, is a true symbol of today’s Fuzhou. As a source of world-famous jasmine tea, it not only provides a strong cultural and economic basis to Fuzhou but also presents an ecological image of a modern and beautiful city. (...) Almost a hundred years before the famous voyages of the Italian Christopher Columbus, the Chinese Zheng He made his seven great voyages of discovery across the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, reaching as far west as the east coast of Africa. (...) The strong shipyard culture, the unique maritime heritage, and
the city flower jasmine have been the main inspirations for our ‘Five Sails and One Flower’ concept of the Fuzhou SCAC.”

First, the architects analogized the source of their design inspiration as a process of reinterpreting history, resonating with memories and symbols already ingrained in local society. The architectural image associated with sailboats echoes oval and double-curved shapes, incorporating the significance of Fuzhou in ancient Chinese maritime history. During the Ming Dynasty, Fuzhou was the forward base and supply port for the navigator and explorer Zheng He, who led a fleet of ships to embark on a grand voyage. The symbolism of the ship is at the same time linked to both Fuzhou’s history and China’s contemporary plan to expand the Maritime Silk Road. As the birthplace of ceramics and one of ancient China’s most important export commodities, ceramic establishes a cultural connotation. Ceramics becomes both an expression of design thinking and a vehicle for discourse.

Second, Chinese cities often select certain flowers as their symbols. Although a “city flower” in China is often an artificially selected, discursively constructed concept, and for many residents of Chinese cities, their city flowers are not common knowledge known to many, it provides at least an entry point for Finnish architects to interpret their designs. In the beginning, the imagery of sails and jasmine flowers appeared simultaneously. However, later, significant modifications to the architectural form led to corresponding adjustments in the textual representation by PES. Jasmine gradually became the dominant symbol when the architects changed the design to a more integral form and chose white ceramic for the SCAC’s facades. It reflects the architects’ combination of material symbolism and rhetoric to find a cultural justification for the design decisions.

At the same time, a holistic approach to design themes has long been considered an essential characteristic of architectural design. Once the primary image is established, architects can develop it as a geometric and decorative theme for subsequent steps. In the SCAC, the architects situated the design development and the discourse in a mutually shaping relationship. The chosen graphic theme did not remain at the level of discourse but detailed the design. For example, the symbolic ceramic patterns in the opera house and concert hall add an interpretive layer above the architectural details. Although these patterns are more of a veiled hint, the architects guide visitors to imagine the whole by reading the details. PES has established a logical chain that continues from the whole to the partial, present-
ing a symbolic theme at different scales. The logical chain offers two types of coherence: discursive, and pictorial, which support and reinforce each other and construct a framework for interpreting the design. Moreover, since the building is involved in the effort to recreate Fuzhou’s cityscape and cultural brand, the SCAC’s operators favor accepting the jasmine element as an official symbol. As a result, jasmine has become a symbol of SCAC in local media coverage and marketing. In a way, the material and immaterial elements have become intertwined in architectural production and appreciation in the SCAC.

In sum, the discourse presented by the SCAC’s architects is a hybrid, tactical, goal-specific interpretation that constitutes a diverse corpus. This discourse mixes architects’ goals of a design vision, action principles, cultural imagination, and self-promotion. From another perspective, a naturalistic pictorial narrative reflects the architects’ neutral attitude toward different cultural contexts and helps underscore the connection between architecture and place. At the same time, the discourse conceals the massive and iconic volume of the building, thus transforming it into an artistic symbol inspired by nature, culture, and history. The intention of the architecture and the symbolic patterns on the surface of the space constitute a self-consistent discursive logic that corroborates each other and facilitates the media communication of the design.

However, the symbolic motifs form a veil of understanding that draws much public attention to the cultural dimension. The urban strategies and publicity implicit in the design are less interpreted. Moreover, the intuitive source of abstract forms cannot be reflected by strategic principles or words with boundaries. These discourses can hardly be regarded as the source or basis of the design, and it is difficult to surmise the architect’s entire design thinking through discourses.

### 7.5 Reviews and Responses

In China, there are several rounds of expert review sessions to review and comment on the designs of significant public buildings, especially for projects with complex shapes, new materials, and special construction techniques. This review mechanism applies to all design firms, and both international and local Chinese architects must face and respond to such evaluations. The review panels typically consist of university professors, directors from Chinese design institutes, and other experienced designers who act as advisory boards since most clients lack design expertise. The experts’ comments are often not confidential but are given back to the architect in written form. The reviewers’ comments, although not decisions, can have varying degrees of influence on the design, and the extent to which they can influence the process varies from project to project.

The SCAC project holds immense importance in Fuzhou, making it inevitable for PES to receive extensive feedback from reviewers.

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899 Ibid.
local professionals. Throughout the design process, the SCAC client organized several expert review meetings covering different design phases and disciplines, including overall architecture, curtain wall, landscape, acoustics, and interior design. This section examines expert reviews and PES responses, including the architectural design development review, the schematic interior design review, and the schematic landscape design review. These expert reviews play a pivotal role in intervening in the design and reflect the views of local Chinese designers on imported designs, providing valuable insights into the decision-making process of the Finnish design team.

Also, local experts’ comments may have suggested a different design philosophy and strategic approach. For example, with the thought of creating multiple public functions, the Finnish design team carefully divided the landscape space and tried to create different activity spaces on the site, including a children’s activity space, an outdoor theater, and an outdoor wedding shooting area. However, local experts suggested making changes to the schematic landscape design. The main comments were that the landscape of such a large building is not suitable for being divided into many small sections. Local experts felt that since such a large building would be constructed, architects should expand the landscape scale accordingly and avoid designing too many small fragmented spaces.

“Along Jiangbin Road, the design should create a coherent interface and avoid fragmentation and division. The four groups of ‘mounds’ on the roadside are too abrupt and lack a sense of unity; the height changes are too significant and lack continuity. I would suggest using continuous undulating terrain combined with underground buildings, planting fewer soil trees in the upper part, and using more shrubs.”

The experts did not oppose the various scenarios created around public events but emphasized that the landscape and architecture should form a more tightly integrated organic whole. To some extent, these experts’ views borrow from the perspective of traditional Chinese gardens, arguing that the artificially created landscape space should become independent content that can be appreciated individually. According to the Chinese jury, it is not wise for Finnish architects to arrange too many areas with defined functions in the SCAC landscape space. For example, instead of creating small artificial islands in the river, the experts thought it would be better to keep the water as open as possible:

“It is advisable to simplify the design at the intersection of the Liangcuo River and the buildings to form a lake and reflect the surrounding buildings while removing the islands, bridges, and wetlands in the water and striving for simplicity and clarity.”

At that time, the SCAC involved a large number of participants. The different professions were reviewed by multiple rounds of experts. PES mainly needed to respond to comments about the architectural design. Also, other design firms were responsible for comments. For example, comments regarding the structural design or HVAC design were primarily responded to by CCEDGC. Comments on the stage, lighting, and sound equipment were the responsibility of respective design firms.

Cheng, 2015.
ibid.
ibid.
ibid.
ibid.
ibid.
Also, the client’s opinion might influence PES’s response to the comments.\textsuperscript{907} In this case, the client supported the recommendations to simplify the landscape. Their primary concern was choosing a relatively concise landscape design to reduce costs and facilitate maintenance later, aiming for straightforward functionality.\textsuperscript{908} Consequently, the Finnish design team adjusted accordingly, eliminating the connecting bridge across the river and the small islands in the river.

Despite the questions raised by the experts, PES was sometimes able to develop the design based on their original ideas.\textsuperscript{909} This type of comment was like a reminder, often a periodic challenge in the design process, and would be addressed with more in-depth studies. For example, in the architectural design development review, the experts’ primary concerns were whether fire safety measures were adequate and whether the architects had fully implemented accessible designs.\textsuperscript{910} Local experts also questioned the design proposals’ new materials and construction methods. For the flower-shaped ceramic tiles used in the opera house auditorium, the experts questioned whether this overly dense pattern would cause visual discomfort to the audience.\textsuperscript{911} These concerns were difficult to address and convince the experts with drawings and digital models. PES continued to develop its designs, convincing clients and experts with proven mock-ups and material samples. This process demanded close collaboration between architects, material suppliers, interior designers, and construction teams to produce results that could withstand multiple tests.

In sum, the feedback from experts is an integral part of the design decision-making process, showcasing the interactive nature of the design process.\textsuperscript{912} While the Finnish architects export their designs, they also engage in a dialogue with the local design

\textsuperscript{907} In the interview, Salminen mentioned that the degree to which a client may rely on expert reviews varies from project to project. And international architects do not always have their clients’ trust. The correct use of experts’ opinions tests the capacity of a client’s project managers (Salminen, 2021).

\textsuperscript{908} Cheng, 2015.

\textsuperscript{909} Salminen, 2021.

\textsuperscript{910} The fire protection design was an ongoing issue throughout the process. As the design progressed, architects needed to adjust handicapped access routes and handicapped seating in the performance spaces several times.
community through these review sessions. These expert review meetings serve as a platform for negotiation with local social organizations and cultural traditions. The evaluation by local experts presents both challenges and opportunities for the architects. On the one hand, it increases their workload as they have to incorporate and address the feedback received. On the other hand, these reviews and subsequent design revisions deepen the building’s connection to the local environment.

However, there are pros and cons to this process. The accuracy and relevance of the experts’ advice depend not only on their expertise but also on the depth of their study and the time they spend on reviewing the design. In the case of the SCAC, the experts’ comments were part of a temporary review mechanism, rather than an extended engagement with the project over years. Their comments are based on short-term meetings, and some experts may travel from other cities and not have enough time to study the project thoroughly. As a result, the effectiveness of the review system in enhancing the design process still requires further examination and study.

7.6 Design Coordination and Collaboration

The design of the SCAC relies on a collaborative and globalized network of designers located in different places. First, PES, as the architect of the overall proposal, hired numerous consultants, such as acousticians, stage and theater design consultants, landscape architects, lighting design specialists, etc. These consultants ensured the feasibility and reliability of critical aspects of the building, such as the acoustics of the main auditoriums and the logistic circulations of the backstage areas. They also facilitated a knowledge basis for the reviews and challenges that architects would encounter.

More importantly, there was a close link between the PES design team in Helsinki and the Shanghai office, which was a critical information outpost and communication hub. PES carried out the main design work for the SCAC in Helsinki; the PES team in Shanghai was mainly responsible for communicating and liaising with numerous stakeholders in China. For PES, the Chinese project managers in Shanghai are the “translators of problems” as they understand Chinese social norms and the working methods in Finnish architectural offices. Also, since the Shanghai office has no time difference for the Chinese participants, they have more accessible contact with the client and design partners and attend meetings more frequently at CCEDGC’s office in Beijing or
the construction site in Fuzhou. Salminen gives a brief overview of this information flow:

“At this point, a fascinating question comes up: how is it possible to coordinate so large a project in a situation in which the Chinese partner is in charge of all technical design work, but the key architectural matters and special design—from sketches to interior design—are coordinated by the teams of PES-Architects in Helsinki and Shanghai? Coordination took place this way: the client, special designer, or contractor phoned Lai Linli, the Chinese project manager, in our Shanghai office. Lai emailed me the question. Project architect Martin Lukasczyk and I investigated the matter, and the answer was emailed from Finland."

Second, coordination was mainly carried out between PES and its LDI, CCEDGC, the two design teams of the SCAC. According to the design scopes and agreements between PES and CCEDGC, PES completed the competition entry and schematic design. Subsequently, during the design development phase, the design consortium divided the building into two areas. PES was responsible for the public areas, and CCEDGC developed the non-public areas. CCEDGC completed construction drawings in various disciplines, including architectural, structural, and HVAC. PES was also responsible for reviewing these drawings and focusing on key aspects that affect architectural quality and public spaces.

As the project progressed, more design subcontractors were brought in for specialized areas. Some parts of the construction drawings were separated from the original CCEDGC scope and outsourced to several firms, including interior construction company Gold Mantis and curtain wall consultant Schmidlin. Once PES had completed most of the design work specified in the design contract, its focus shifted to communicating with the various design firms to ensure that the results met their expectations.

Regarding communication methods, the collaboration between PES and CCEDGC included remote contact via the Internet and regular face-to-face meetings and workshops. In the schematic design and development phases, CCEDGC sent two teams of architects and engineers to Helsinki to work with PES. The first team consisted of two architects, and the second team included an architect, a structural engineer, and an HVAC engineer. These months-long workshops completed the basic framework of the design collaboration between PES and CCEDGC. Also, the designers from both sides got to know each other by working together, and this personal relationship facilitated online communication even after the workshops were over.

Traveling between cities in China is much more convenient than the journey from Finland to China. However, the high frequency of meetings in Fuzhou could be exhausting for architects from PES and CCEDGC. Beijing, Shanghai, and Fuzhou are geographically distant (about 1,900 km), requiring about three hours by air from Beijing to Fuzhou and about four and a half hours (about 800 km) of high-speed rail from Shanghai to Fuzhou.

According to the collaborative design agreement between PES and CCEDGC, the two companies are equal design collaborators. PES was the primary author of the design. And the two parties were assigned different workloads at different design stages. (PES-Architects and CCEDGC, 2014).

The CCEDGC also sent a third group from its interior design department to Helsinki. However, since CCEDGC’s design department did not do the final interior design construction drawings, PES had no further contact with this group afterward (Li, 2022).
Salminen and the PES design team members in Helsinki flew to China to participate in meetings or confirm various material samples and mock-ups on-site. PES often used these face-to-face meetings to resolve remaining issues that were difficult to agree on via online communication, and they greatly facilitated design progress.928

CCEDGC took advantage of its large size and the ease of interpersonal communication to move projects forward in the late stages of the design. We can observe the liaison role of CCEDGC in some difficulties that must be solved jointly by multiple parties. For example, the Liangcuo River runs through the center of the site and feeds into the Minjiang River, and a great deal of the landscaping and equipment space is integrated with the river itself. The Fuzhou Water Resources Bureau required PES and CCEDGC to construct flood control facilities, including river banks, sluice gates, machine houses, floating debris collection facilities, and corresponding logistic areas.

Although the design and construction of the levees and floodgates were the responsibility of the Fuzhou municipal government, PES and CCEDGC had to coordinate with the municipal department and the client to integrate the river facilities with the landscape structures, such as the petal-shaped platforms and waterfront walkways.929 It was more convenient for CCEDGC, a local Chinese state-owned enterprise, to communicate directly with Fuzhou government agencies; CCEDGC could more directly access municipal data and share it with PES.930 CCEDGC became an information source and helped the Finnish design team understand the situation on-site. As summarized by CCEDGC project manager Chen Zongrui, they served as a “lubricant” in the communication between PES, several Fuzhou city departments, and the client.931

“I think my position requires more communication and coordination skills, where the difficulty lies. Pekka was very committed to his design for this project, but the client was very concerned about the cost. At the same time, the client had set a tight deadline to deliver the drawings, which left very little time to produce the construction designs for us. So I need to find the most favorable or achievable solution that all parties could allow and coordinate and communicate with all parties. This process is quite demanding for me.”932

From CCEDGC’s perspective, since the design schedule was limited, they would like to have as much time as possible to produce construction drawings; nevertheless, the continuous iteration of the design would result in insufficient time for CCEDGC’s work.933 This sequential workflow led CCEDGC to expect PES to finalize the procedure quickly rather than continually deepen and modify it. As the company provided design qualifications and signed the final construction drawings, CCEDGC was legally responsible, which led CCEDGC to adopt a
cautious approach to ensure that the design was compliant. Additionally, CCEDGC took more responsibility for controlling costs than the Finnish design team.\footnote{Chen, 2022; Xu, 2022.}

However, the accuracy of CCEDGC’s structural design became a prominent issue in determining the quality of some critical spaces, and the technical problem affected the entire design process. In the SCAC, the opera house and the concert hall have curved interior surfaces, so the beams behind the GRG surfaces require careful designs that would otherwise accentuate the finishing layers. However, CCEDGC’s drawings had made several structural deviations in the auditoriums.\footnote{PES-Architects, 2016b.} Typically, a convenient solution for this structural check is to merge architectural and structural 3D digital models, allowing architects and structural engineers to visually identify conflicts.\footnote{Li, 2022.}

CCEDGC did not provide an accurate 3D structural model, and the situation became quite urgent as the concrete pouring at the construction site had already reached the bottom of the auditoriums.\footnote{PES-Architects, 2016b, Li, 2022.} CCEDGC’s structural engineers must contact the construction site in Fuzhou while making revisions to confirm the current progress and send the revised drawings to the site as soon as possible.\footnote{ibid.} Otherwise, the construction team would have built the wrong structures at full speed.\footnote{PES-Architects, 2016b, Li, 2022.} PES had to spend more time modeling the structures according to CCEDGC’s design to identify the problems.\footnote{PES-Architects, 2016b.}
“We have demanded a full 3D model of structures in the performance spaces from CCEDGC from the beginning to make sure that the hall geometry can be realized and doesn’t collide with the structures, avoiding extra work for design revisions based on planning mistakes. Until the present day, we haven’t received any 3D model of performance space structures, even though the concrete structure construction of the performance spaces has already passed ground level. Due to schedule pressure, we have, therefore, finally decided to invest extra resources and build our own 3D model based on the 2D CD drawings we received from CCEDGC. We compared our 3D models of structure and the 3D model of the interior shape and came to a significant conclusion; the structures do not match our 3D model in many places.”

Moreover, the auditorium interiors resulted from long-term coordination and communication between several professions; the Finnish design team combined architectural effects with the audience’s view studies, acoustic engineering, HVAC equipment, and lighting systems. For example, PES strongly recommended that the seating area be constructed of steel because of two significant advantages: First, steel structures are more precise and suitable for complex shapes than concrete. Accurately designed steel structures are better able to avoid collisions with final finishes. Second, steel structures are more flexible and easier to coordinate with other professions. For example, air vents in auditoriums are typically located under the seats. Concrete structures must retain openings when the slabs are poured, and these holes must be positioned to match the seating.

In contrast, a steel structural system allows flexibility in the placement of ventilation systems, and architects can still adjust seating arrangements during the interior design phase (if necessary). In a way, opting for concrete structures puts pressure on the design schedule, requiring architects to quickly detect any structural design errors to prevent serious consequences. The decision between concrete and steel is a technical one regarding quality and is a holistic issue that affects design progress. A system-wide structural deviation could ultimately make a design that involves...
multiple disciplines impossible. Using the right design tools and a suitable structural system can lessen the architect’s workload by minimizing the need for repeated adjustments. However, in the case of the SCAC, CCEDGC opted for a traditional concrete material in the structural design of the auditoriums instead of using steel. PES must pay attention to critical public spaces, including curved galleries, facades, and auditoriums, and carefully review the associated outcomes.

### 7.7 Completion and Operation

The SCAC was completed under a tight design and construction schedule. Initially, the client wanted the SCAC to commission and be the host venue for the “Silk Road International Film Festival” in Fuzhou in 2017, and construction could start in August 2014. Although the start date was eventually postponed by several months, by December 2014, piling operations began at the site. While PES’s architectural design team was still processing in design during the design development stage, CCEDGC engineers had already completed the piling design based on the preliminary architectural designs available at the time. Soon afterward, the piling for the SCAC was underway. Eventually, after four

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943 There might be several reasons for CCEDGC to use a concrete structure. First, a steel structural design would be more demanding for engineers, and a steel structure requires a 3D model and detailed component drawings. When I visited CCEDGC’s Beijing office for a meeting, one of its engineers explained to me that not everyone on its structural design team had mastered steel design and modeling methods.

944 Li, 2022.

years of design and construction, the SCAC was completed and opened in 2018. The first three venues put into operation were the opera house, the concert hall, and the multifunctional hall. The art museum and the film center were still in the interior design and construction phase and opened a year later.

The SCAC has been in regular commercial operations since its opening. Its architectural specularity and cultural significance have made the SCAC a place for international events (e.g., it was the main venue for the 2021 World Heritage Committee Session). The SCAC promotes the development of the local market for artistic performances and the training of professional talents. SCAC venue operators mainly use China’s Internet platforms to promote performances and provide ticketing services. In late 2020, a significant development occurred when Fuzhou introduced a metro line connecting the SCAC to the city center. This improvement in accessibility has brought the expansive cultural venue closer to the heart of the city, making it more convenient for residents and visitors to attend events and activities at the SCAC. Furthermore, the SCAC has emerged as a popular destination for photography enthusiasts. Many people in Fuzhou choose the SCAC as a picturesque backdrop for capturing their wedding photos. A search via location tags on Chinese social media platforms can bring up many images, with the SCAC as the background. This trend showcases the growing recognition of the SCAC’s architectural grandeur and its status as an iconic landmark in the city.

However, many European theaters, such as the Oslo Opera House, are production spaces for theater companies equipped with workshops and studios where performance groups can make costumes, props, and stage sets. Many European performance buildings explicitly require metal workshops, wood workshops, and backdrop painting studios within the building. These fully equipped studios and predictable functional planning allow theater companies to produce original productions.

In contrast, theaters in China are dominated by touring shows arranged by theater management companies such as Beijing Poly. Similarly, the SCAC has not become a permanent home for local theater companies. The absence of a resident theater company makes it difficult for such a large performance center to fully utilize its space and facilities. As a result, the SCAC operates more as a venue for touring performances rather than a production hub for theater companies, limiting its ability to create original productions and fully leverage its resources. This difference in operational approach reflects the contrasting priorities and practices of theater

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946 Since its first year of operation, the SCAC has performed 178 shows and received 150,000 visitors. On one weekend per month, the SCAC opens its multifunctional hall, including stage equipment, lighting, and dressing rooms, for the community to perform and for the public to attend free of charge (Chen, 2019).

947 As natural and cultural sites of outstanding value to humanity certified by UNESCO, the World Heritage List is intended to respect cultures' diversity and continuity.
management between Europe and China. While European theaters prioritize in-house production capabilities, Chinese theaters often focus on hosting external productions and maximizing revenue through touring shows and events.

Likewise, this Tabula Rasa strategy has resulted in new cultural venues often being built away from the city center. Before the MNT was fully developed as an urban area, people had to spend a lot of time traveling to reach the newly built venues. These remote locations, especially in the absence of public transportation, make it difficult for people to use them, leaving the buildings vacant and increasing operating costs. While the metro has dramatically improved public access to the SCAC, it is still about a forty-minute drive from downtown. In an interview with Finnish architect and architectural researcher Hannu Tikka in 2020, Pekka Salminen pointed out that SCAC’s venues are still underutilized:

“We have heard that people are excited about the design of the building and its outdoor areas. However, a year after its opening, the main halls have only about half the number of performances per year, which is considered to be a minimum in the West. (...) The client wanted the art and exhibition venue to be an important national architectural exhibition space, but this was not realized, and the future use of the building is still unclear.”

As a result, the SCAC is building ahead of schedule compared to the ongoing demand; the full utilization of all its venues depends on constructing the MNT. The SCAC’s distant location may impact its economic viability, as it struggles to attract enough audiences to cover operational costs and maintain the facilities, potentially leading to financial challenges in the long run. The extent to which the SCAC can fulfill its role as a central cultural facility needs to be examined over time.

7.8 Reflections on the Design of the SCAC

The SCAC is an outgrowth of the regional development strategy of Fujian Province and the west coast of the Taiwan Strait, which aims to be a new cultural flagship project while helping to shape the future direction of Fuzhou’s urban expansion. This case illustrates how a sizable cultural complex in China goes from decision to implementation. It is part of China’s elaborate, state-led urban development program, shaped by cross-provincial strategies. Fuzhou authorities adopted a more diversified approach to financing the SCAC, and the project’s positioning was closely tied to the new city’s social and economic development plans.

To achieve a state-of-the-art architectural effect, Fuzhou developed a policy involving international architects in the design of the SCAC. PES eventually won the opportunity to design this critical project with its already completed projects in China and its design proposal. From PES’s perspective as a Finnish architectural firm, the SCAC was a project that
was utterly awarded by winning a proposal competition. Nevertheless, both CCEDGC and the investor of the SCAC (i.e., CSCEC Strait) belong to the same parent company, CSCEC, a prominent Chinese state-owned construction group. Therefore, it was inevitable that the Chinese LDI (i.e., CCEDGC), in combination with the Finnish architects, played a crucial role in securing the project. The SCAC has significantly renewed the local cultural facilities, become a highlight in Fuzhou’s contemporary cityscape, and contributed to the pride of the local people. At the same time, the Chinese context influenced Finnish architects’ way of working and their responsibilities, making the SCAC an intermediate state between two cultures and social norms.

First, the SCAC’s planning is based on a top-down decision-making system. This model, in which local SOEs responsible for developing new cities are the leading players, allows for the pooling of resources and the rapid completion of complex projects. However, this system also results in a lack of multi-stakeholder consultation mechanisms, which are directly reflected in the homogeneity of the architectural typology and internal functions of large theaters across China. Although Fuzhou’s local government believed that the SCAC should contribute to expanding public urban spaces, there was a need for more specific arrangements at the detailed level in the architectural competition brief. When the client provided only a preliminary list of space programs, PES insisted on adjusting the overall functional ratio in the SCAC, expecting it to contribute to the venue’s long-term sustainable operation. While completing the design work, PES also took on the consultant role in architecturally critical spaces.

On the one hand, the architects adhere to human-centered principles, including adding end-user-oriented features open to the city. Their urbanistic approaches, integrated with the commercial space, the landscape, and the public events, reflect that the architects focused on the daily use of the building and, in fact, became the central concept of the entire SCAC project. On the other hand, the Finnish design team needed the cooperation of many parties to achieve its design intentions. Without the support of the client’s operational and marketing strategies, the SCAC can hardly realize the architectural ideas or functions proposed by the architects. The client was not only the manager of the project but also a participant and collaborator in the design itself. Also, Chinese building regulations and local experts impose restrictions and adjustments on Finnish architects’ concepts; designing in China is constantly negotiating and communicating with multiple constraints.

Second, PES continued to embrace a material-oriented design approach, emphasizing tactile sensations as a means of cross-cultural communication in the transnational architectural practice of the SCAC. The initial handmade model already showcased the integration of material-oriented intuition into the concept. Throughout the design phases, PES maintained a strong focus on the relationship between material texture and human perception, utilizing design specifications, models, material samples, mock-ups,
and extensive coordination. This collaboration between architects, engineers, artists, and construction teams ensured a sense of craftsmanship was upheld during the construction process. The finalized spaces exhibit distinctive tactile sensations, resulting from the various properties of the materials used. In the SCAC, PES expanded its material library and tested new construction methods, making creative and extensive use of ceramics for the façade and crucial interior spaces. The architects' experimentation with ceramics made it a prominent design theme in the SCAC, celebrating the rich cultural and historical significance of ceramics in China and Fuzhou.

By experimenting with materials in the SCAC, PES may find that some results can be reused while other experiences are difficult to replicate. For example, the architects drew on their previous experience at the WGT to use bamboo as an interior material for the multifunctional theater. The shape of the bamboo and how the architects installed bamboo panels were derived from proven methods. Although architects have developed the use of these ceramics in the context of China, these newly acquired experiences are not limited to projects in China. PES can use them in future projects, including those within Finland. However, PES realized the complex ceramic surface in the opera house auditorium through extensive and intensive manual work. This costly construction method requires the support of the client and a significant investment of time by the architects to ensure quality. As China's construction costs rise and the level of construction industrialization increases, the likelihood of replicating such extensive manual labor in China's future is diminishing.

Third, on a discursive level, PES links the design to local cultural and historical symbols, such as the jasmine flower and sailboat. As a representative system built for the SCAC, these images provided an imaginative way for architects to articulate the flower and the sailboat's cultural and historical connection to Fuzhou. These discursive interpretations reflect the narrative tradition valued in China, which PES combined with its choice of building materials. The coherence of the theme extends from the overall architectural image to subtle details, forming a logical chain of discursive meanings that provide visitors with a cultural explanation. PES selectively translated local cultural and historical elements, offering options rather than definitive definitions. These symbolic meanings and interpretive discourses are subjective and mutable.

The SCAC relies on the collaboration of several teams, which requires close cooperation between architects, engineers, specialized consultants, and construction teams. The architects' understanding of each other in real life can make their remote communication more effective. In cases where architects are trying to experiment with new materials and construction methods, face-to-face communication is indispensable. Participants in the SCAC could share a great deal of information exchange through remote communication, but critical decisions were often made in person. Communication in real and virtual spaces forms a complementary position in design collaboration.
At the same time, participation in a collaborative design network for an international architectural practice creates numerous external factors that can significantly affect design production. The SCAC’s design process illustrates that this collaboration is not only formally compliant but also reasonable in terms of design scope distribution and cooperation. On the one hand, the SCAC was designed and built on a tight schedule. The extensive fundamental and technical work done by CCEDGC’s architects and engineers ensured that the design consortium completed the project within the tight deadline. CCEDGC served as a guarantee mechanism to ensure the realization of the SCAC and demonstrated a solid ability to deliver. On the other hand, CCEDGC struggled to provide quality construction design in the critical parts of the SCAC. Some mistakes could have a significant impact on architectural quality and functionality. Without PES’s quality control of important spaces and building interfaces, the SCAC would not have achieved the desired results.

PES and CCEDGC have defined their respective scope of work according to the terms of their design collaboration, forming a coherent workflow. However, the design of the SCAC, with its multiple subsystems, is a tightly integrated whole; it requires a chief architect responsible for the overall image and spatial quality who can work until the building’s inauguration. As a result, PES spent a lot of time in later stages, much more than expected, to fill these technical gaps or correct deviations. PES had to adjust its scope of work and control the parts of the building that significantly affected the outcome, with a limited team size. This overinvestment was detrimental to the Finnish architectural firm from a profitability perspective.

The case of the SCAC presents the practices of Finnish architects in China, highlighting their communication with local Chinese social organizations and opinions in design thinking, discourse, and collaborative design networks. Overall, the SCAC set a benchmark as one of the most complex projects undertaken by a Finnish architecture firm outside Finland. The SCAC allows us to examine how the various issues discussed earlier, including Finnish architects’ design thinking, discourses, and design networks, play out and influence each other in an actual project.

The design work of the SCAC is a multi-dimensional synthesis, the outcome of which is driven by Finnish and Chinese architects and conditioned by their external contexts. Finnish architects have developed a delicate balance between local demands and architectural visions. Finnish architects try to create stunning architectural forms while anticipating a venue’s operational strategy and extending the sharable urban function of a cultural building as much as possible. For PES, the SCAC further solidified its professional brand as a theater designer and became its ticket to other projects.

Finnish architects have constructed a corpus that covers a range of discursive categories. The thematic image of the SCAC in
the design discourse has changed with adjustments in architectural forms. However, the design’s material perception and humanistic spatial strategies have remained unchanged. The Finnish design team and the Chinese LDI (i.e., CCEDGC) formed a kind of complementarity that ensured the completion of the SCAC. Local architectural design professionals were conveyed to Finnish architects from within such a design collaboration network via mechanisms such as expert reviews, thus further mediating the relationship between the SCAC and local environments, cultural perceptions, and functional needs.

The SCAC has also become a learning platform for local Chinese architects and construction teams, expanding the boundaries of their expertise and skills. The SCAC has advanced design depth standards and stimulated the development of local construction techniques. The design strategies used for constructing the SCAC, and the related discourses, open a window for researchers to observe Finnish architectural thought, giving us a partial glimpse of its development in the context of globalization.
This dissertation explores the international architectural contexts of Finland and China to study a representative group of Finnish architects practicing in China and examine how architects are influenced differently in this context. The study examines the design thinking, working methods, discursive constructions, and collaborative networks of Finnish architects. My key research questions are: “How can Finnish architecture—an architectural tradition often associated with Finland’s own identity and imagination—reconcile with the Chinese context at the level of practice and discourse?”, and “What unchanging Finnish design principles can we observe by studying Finnish architectural designs produced in the Chinese context?”

Throughout the dissertation, these questions are approached from various perspectives. The first two chapters elucidate the historical context of Finnish architects’ international practices, taking into account both the tradition of international practice inherited from Finnish architectural history and the global appeal of China’s urban construction boom. The convergence of these historical currents shapes the core subject of this dissertation, exploring the practices of Finnish architects in China.

Unlike previous research paths that closely linked Finnish vernacular with Finnish architecture, this study focused on the systematic thinking about Finnish architecture in a context of differentiation. It presents an analytical framework to evaluate the designs and discourses of incorporation within Finnish architects’ international practices. The dissertation raises awareness of the multi-layered nature of Finnish architects’ practices in China, examining the phenomenon from both practical and discursive perspectives. The practical perspective includes architects’ design thinking and methods as well as collaborative design networks formed based on market-oriented and monetized design activities. The discursive dimension involves architects’ interpretations of design, their mission, and how they reconcile their designs with the Chinese context. Finally, the concluding section of the dissertation discusses future-oriented opportunities and challenges for Finnish architects in China. I discuss and reflect on these findings from a developmen-
tal perspective, exploring possible shifts and directions for Finnish architects in China’s highly competitive design market.

### 8.1 Conclusions

For more than one century, Finnish architecture has had many achievements and has actively participated in constructing Finland’s own identity. Finnish architecture is modern, without neglecting the close, subtle relationship between a building and its environment. Finnish architects establish their design characteristics from various perspectives, including architectural form, scale, function, material, and discourse. Many Finnish architects’ designs in Finland are associated with Finnish geographical features and are incorporated as a positive element in constructing the Finnish national image.

However, Finnish architects also have a tradition of international practice. Historically, Finnish architects have undertaken projects outside Finland, even before the country’s independence. With the emergence of internationally renowned individuals, Finnish architects have built a reputation and gained a wider practice worldwide. Finnish architects have gradually expanded their horizons by looking beyond Europe and North America to the broader world in an era of expanding globalization. With China’s economic reform and opening, Finnish architects have either taken an initiative to enter or have been invited to step into China for their design practices. China’s rapid development at the beginning of the twenty-first century offered numerous opportunities for architects worldwide. They have developed many projects, from significant cultural landmarks to small-scale residential buildings, churches, pavilions, and artistic installations.

Thus far, China has become a relatively concentrated region for the international practices of Finnish architects, who have become competitors to other renowned globalized architects in notable projects and are deeply involved in China’s rapid urbanization and cityscape construction. While gaining more practice opportunities, Finnish architects in China can experiment with the types of buildings that are difficult to achieve in Finland, such as giant opera houses or high-rise towers. Some Finnish architects have practiced successfully in China and have even established branch offices there.

The construction of China’s urban landscape has a diverse, multifaceted relationship with the country’s overall social development patterns. Understanding the practice of Finnish architects in China must be based on an analysis of the political, social, and economic rationale underlying urban construction in China. China’s architectural boom has been driven by a combination of top-down official policies and the public’s growing needs for culture, education, and environmental sustainability. These iconic buildings in China are often the guideposts of comprehensive regional development plans and competition between cities. Also, China’s growing middle class has an increasing demand for cultural consumption.
These demands have led to official policies to build cultural venues, including opera houses, concert halls, art galleries, and museums. Cultural events in Chinese society, supported by public and private capital (e.g., the World Expo and art exhibitions), have contributed to the diversity of architects' works.

By reviewing the development of Finnish architects in China, this dissertation points out that their achievements and design approaches in China are consistent with their international practice traditions and design philosophies. Finnish architects maintain their original architectural philosophies and design methods while creating new works in China, showcasing their design thinking as an alternative to homogenized internationalist architectural strategies. This thinking is inherently universal and adaptive, inspiring new designs that are shaped by different cultural contexts and urban scales.

Furthermore, Finnish architects maintain coherence in their China-based projects, evident across various aspects, including urban strategies, material considerations, and tectonic details. In their small-scale projects in China, Finnish architects try to convey their concept of the abstractness of nature and the subtle connection between architecture and a landscape. Similarly, Finnish architects focus on people as the end users of their designs, thus embodying an urbanist, user-centered attempt to expand the public realm by connecting buildings to a cityscape and minimizing barriers. These design principles are reflected in the diverse work of Finnish architects in Finland and in other parts of the world.

As a result, Finnish architects' design ideas and operational approaches are not closed structures. Notably, among the implications of Finnish architects' Chinese projects is their outsized role in facilitating comprehension of the dialectical relationship between the universal and the regional in Finnish contemporary architectural design. Finnish architects, as a legacy of their Finnish design heritage, have devoted much energy to studying China as an external environment, and they have consciously attempted to create cultural dialogue via their designs. Their perspectives are global in scope but reconciled in practice with China's urban scales, functional needs, cultural contexts, and social structures. Finnish architects' projects in China are essentially a process of constant exchange, communication, and negotiation with the local culture and society. For Finnish architects, China has become a heuristic space for exploring the possibilities of new designs.

On the level of design practice, Finnish architects used a material substitution approach in their designs in China, replacing building materials they commonly use in their domestic projects in Finland with China's local, culturally symbolic materials. My study shows the correspondence between building materials that represent Finland and those that represent China. Building materials have been used as a cultural mediator and a way for Finnish architects to express their knowledge of China. Under this concept, bamboo has become a Chinese substitute for the iconic wood of Finnish architecture in several of the cases I studied, ranging from artistic installations to grand theaters. This cross-cultural dialogical relationship
CHAPTER 8

is likewise articulated primarily by the symbolic meanings of building materials. Finnish architects, via the symbolic language of building materials, experiment with new design concepts within a unified design strategy. Finnish architects are, by nature, believers in modernist architecture. However, their practices have established locally differentiated individuals under the principle of modernism rather than homogeneous paradigms, which has become one of the most significant characteristics distinguishing Finnish architects from other international architects.

On the level of design discourse, Finnish architects’ discourses in China form a comprehensive and diverse corpus, serving as a way of responding to local design needs and cultural differences. Finnish architects adopt a rational narrative discourse, stating the urban strategies and pragmatic visions they employ in their designs. Additionally, Finnish architects introduce their works with a naturalistic, symbolic, and interpretive discourse while combining abstract architecture with specific images. Finnish architects may borrow specific images from Chinese culture and history to illustrate the origins of their designs. The dichotomy between the two discursive systems remains a mutually shaping and dynamic development process. The images in these discourses convey an affinity that provides a possible path for local people to feel a design. These figurative discourses give their designs a media-communicative edge and moderately relate their designs to local histories and cultural contexts. By embedding their architectural designs into China’s historical reconstructions and the symbolic systems stored in Chinese society, Finnish architects can secure culturally localized identities for their designs.

Nevertheless, these discourses are constructed, offering an imaginative possibility and interpretive connections, and they do not fully reflect the intuitive and improvisational elements of an architect’s design process. Researchers who study architects’ design motives can hardly base their understanding of these designs on the picturesque articulated in architects’ discourses. Finnish architects interpret their design choices through their discourses, further cementing the connections between their designs and the Chinese contexts in which they are situated. The construction of architects’ discourse reflects the trajectories of knowledge mobility and its relationship to power structures in the globalized world. As architects from developed countries export their expertise to other places, they retain the power to set agendas in their discourses.

Finnish architects are also constrained by local design production methods and social organizations from China. Finnish architects work in China via a collaborative network that includes Chinese LDIs, consultants, contractors, and clients and such a network has intervened and influenced Finnish architects’ designs in China. This design partnership allows Finnish and Chinese design teams to leverage their strengths through collaboration, combining Finnish design’s reputation and media image (i.e., how architects’ reputations are portrayed in the media) with the delivery and guarantee capabilities of a sizable Chinese design group and creating
an advantage in managing projects. This collaboration creates a rational division of upstream and downstream processes, which allows Finnish architects to focus on the design and control of a large project with a small team. This can help Finnish architects with time-consuming and labor-intensive design documentation, deepening construction, and coordinating their projects in China. Additionally, Finnish architects’ proven experience and operational procedures in controlling critical spatial-detail quality have been of great educational and exemplary value to LDIs in China.

The collaborative model between Chinese LDIs and international architects, while offering advantages in managing projects, may also have drawbacks that impact design innovation in China. The economic roots and contractual obligations can limit the scope of collaboration and constrain the exploration of new ideas and materials by Finnish architects. The focus on stable income sources for LDIs in charge of construction design might lead to a preference for familiar and conservative solutions, hindering the development of original designs. Striking a balance between practicality and innovation in such partnerships remains a challenge for Finnish architects working in China.

8.2 Discussions

Compared to the extant literature, this research provides updated insights and contributes to our understanding of three areas through the study of Finnish architects’ discourses and practices in China. First, it offers a fresh perspective on the discourse surrounding Finnish architectural design itself. In his article, Frampton explored the concept of “critical regionalism” to analyze the architectural works of several architects, including Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, whom he believed embodied qualities capable of resisting the cold and homogeneous nature of internationalism. Frampton argues that Aalto exhibits a localized tradition while maintaining an openness to outside influences. While Frampton’s analysis was primarily concerned with Finnish domestic contexts, this study delves into the practices of Finnish architects in China, illustrating that the openness observed in Finnish architectural thought extends beyond Finland’s own boundary and can be realized in diverse cultural settings. Additionally, both Griffiths and Connah have discussed the concept of “Finnishness” in Finnish architectural design. However, my research offers an alternative perspective contributing to a broader understanding of Finnish design. By examining Finnish architects’ design projects in China, this study provides insights into the enduring principles that influence their work, offering a nuanced perspective on the essence of Finnish design.

Second, in studies exploring the global practice of international architects, researchers such as Ibelings, McNeill, and Sklair have viewed these transnational architectural practices, taking place in various parts of the world, as a category

951 Frampton, 1983.
952 ibid.
of comparable and homogeneous activities.\(^{954}\) However, my study of the practice of Finnish architects as an identifiable collective in China demonstrates that architects with international experience may retain their distinct cultural identities, discursive construction patterns, and design approaches. This research presents new cases that contribute to our understanding of global cultural exchange, challenging the notion that international architectural practices merely manifest the diffusion of global culture or are driven solely by economic factors.

Third, this study contributes to the research on collaborative practices between design firms. Building on his findings, Tombesi argues that globalized design firms can leverage resources across regions to undertake different types of work at different labor costs.\(^{955}\) Through my analysis of the collaboration between Finnish architects and Chinese LDIs, it becomes evident that seemingly repetitive tasks such as design documentation are challenging to transfer to other places due to the intricate local norms and knowledge. In contrast to the extant research on the unrestricted flow of knowledge, talent, and technology in a globalized landscape, my research highlights the influence of cultural practices, building codes, and work habits in Chinese society that constrain Finnish architects’ practices and discourses. While McNeill’s study distinguishes between designer-led firms and large corporate design firms\(^{956}\), my research contributes to understanding the multifaceted relationship between these two types of firms, where collaboration and tension exist simultaneously. The collaboration between Finnish architects and LDIs reveals a symbiotic relationship where the two types of firms complement each other’s strengths and collaborate to fulfill project requirements.

In the foreseeable future, the Chinese architectural design market will continue to be an essential part of many internationalized architectural firms’ global strategies. Simultaneously, China is undergoing continuous development, with ongoing industrial upgrading and a transition from a growth model driven solely by low labor costs and large-scale fixed-asset investments to one fueled by innovative technologies. Moreover, China is gradually moving away from its phase of brutal urban sprawl and the proliferation of landmark buildings. The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new variables to the international system, impacting the traditional notion of a globalized division and the universal mobility of people, skills, and capital. Within this context, Finnish architects, while continuing their work in China, face both opportunities and challenges.

First, the external conditions of public opinion in which Western architects practice in China remain variable. As argued at the beginning of Chapter Three, adopting a pan-political view with a dichotomy in the Western mass media hardly allows for a comprehensive understanding of the details and multifaceted nature of globalized architects’ transnational projects. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that the evolution of the world’s political climate has varied the practices of

Western architects in China. The competitive geopolitical environment between China and the West has spilled over into the field of architectural design. Such confrontations with multiple narratives can pose a dilemma for Finnish architects practicing in China, thus motivating them to construct discourses around their designs in China carefully.

Finnish architects often represent their work as inspired by pictorial symbols, trying to give Chinese and Western audiences the impression that their architecture is a depoliticized work of art. However, it remains to be seen how the current and future geopolitical situation will affect Western architects’ practices in China as the East—West relationship gradually shifts from the original export—receive model to one of competition. External geopolitical dynamics may remain a factor affecting the community of Western architects working in China.

Second, Finnish architects have pursued a wise strategy, exploring opportunities and cultivating long-term cooperation with stable, reliable clients. They strategically utilize their benchmark projects as “entry tickets” to important architectural competitions in China, as discussed in Chapter Four. Specific building types have shown cyclical popularity in China’s construction wave, ranging from the hotel building boom of the 1980s to the proliferation of museums and large theaters in the new century. This targeted approach brings potential projects to Finnish architects while positioning them within the spectrum of building types.

As iconic projects have become scarcer in China, creating conditions for a sustainable model poses new challenges for architectural firms. The history of Finnish architectural exports indicates that Finnish architects once concentrated their practices in North America, the Middle East, and North Africa. However, none of these earlier cases have established a stable development path that continues to this day. In contrast, Finnish architectural firms, represented by PES, have adopted a long-term strategy, establishing an office in Shanghai and accumulating a significant amount of knowledge, skills, and discourses through several projects in China. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether other young Finnish architectural firms will be able to achieve the same level of development as PES has in China.

At the end of my research, besides the ICON Tower in Chengdu and the ongoing construction of the SFC in Nanjing, PES’s significant works in China primarily consisted of large theaters. From a business perspective, expanding the types of projects undertaken in China becomes a rational choice for architectural firms seeking growth. Finnish architects need to carefully consider how to develop and corporatize while maintaining a spirit of experimentation and ingenuity. Meanwhile, as mentioned in Chapter Two (Section 2.3), the fragmentation of design forces limits Finnish architects from securing high-profile opportunities in China’s building design market. The size of an architectural firm, whether it has a branch in China, and the size of its China-based team are all factors that Chinese clients look at when considering design candidates.
As China’s economic recovery falters in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant architectural projects are likely to be increasingly concentrated in larger design firms with broader social connections. These firms may have the financial resources and established networks to weather economic uncertainties and secure high-profile projects from influential clients. They can efficiently allocate resources and tasks across offices in different parts of the world, making them better equipped to deal with challenges and more resilient to risks. Moreover, in China, architects are increasingly expected to provide complete, comprehensive solutions, especially for challenging landmarks, encompassing architectural expression, ecological solutions, construction methods, and operational consulting.

While some Finnish architectural firms can sustain steady profits based on their extensive and stable domestic operations, allowing them to practice internationally, a successful internationalization strategy can lead to an increase in the size and reputation of the architectural firm. The high design caliber of Finnish architects and the relatively limited domestic market for architectural design in Finland make the pursuit of exporting Finnish architectural designs an inescapable and long-standing concern in Finnish society. However, Finnish architectural firms, which are generally small and medium-sized, may face challenges in competing for such projects due to their limited scale and potentially restricted access to key decision-makers. As the competition intensifies and the architectural market in China becomes more demanding, the prospects for Finnish architectural firms to establish a foothold and grow in China are not promising.

As China’s architecture industry continues to improve, Finnish architects may encounter changes on several fronts. On the one hand, they might face increasing competition from local Chinese design firms, which are becoming more prominent players in the collaborative design model. In China, different firms often handle various phases of a project, and original design work is not exclusively the domain of international architects. Young Chinese architects are establishing their offices and forming collaborations with renowned design institutes. Additionally, LDIs are gradually enhancing their design capacity and getting involved in early design stages. This trend can facilitate smoother working relationships between international architects and LDIs. In the case studies of WGT and SCAC, the Finnish design teams devoted significant time and effort to ensure the quality of details in critical spaces. Assuming that Chinese architects can further develop their skills by collaborating with Finnish architects, there is potential for a higher level of local Chinese design competence. This, in turn, could effectively reduce the need for extensive input from Finnish architects, as Chinese firms become more capable of handling critical design aspects themselves.

On the other hand, as China gradually moves away from a crude growth model, the value of architectural design has come to the forefront of Chinese society. Urbanist designs that carefully respond to specific sites are progressively replacing the Tabula
Rasa planning strategies that international architects have encountered in the past. The Finnish architectural design thinking, with its concern for and satisfaction with the simple needs of everyday life, resonates with the spiritual values of the new generation in China. In a way, the simplicity and purity of Finnish design compensates for the anxieties of stressful, fast-paced life in modern Chinese cities. As China’s construction wave recedes and the tipping point of demographic growth approaches, the attitude of the Chinese public and clients toward the works of international architects is gradually becoming more rational and practical. People’s perceptions of iconic buildings and their conceptual origins may be undergoing a process of demystification. This shift indicates that the Chinese audience is becoming more discerning and focused on the functional and contextual aspects of architectural designs, appreciating thoughtful responses to their evolving needs and aspirations.

The discourses of architects in leading cities in China, such as Shenzhen and Shanghai, have become more abstract. As social progress continues and debates persist, Chinese architectural criticism has the potential to set its own agendas and critically examine architects’ discourses. Architectural criticism in China may eventually break free from the passive stance of unconditionally accepting the subjective words of foreign architects. Therefore, the design spirits and philosophies of Finnish design need to become better articulated and more widely understood. Finnish architects must gradually adapt their pictorial metaphors to align with the modern transformation of Chinese society. They should systematize their contemporary architectural thinking and be aware of the limitations of relying solely on a naturalistic, imitative discourse. Reflecting on the needs and dilemmas of Finnish architects’ international communication, we gain insight into the reality that architectural design, as a cultural product, must be supported by research and theories that remain relevant to contemporary times. When architectural practices evolve into cultural exchanges, a comprehensive understanding of cultural contexts and a proactive engagement with the ongoing discourse become crucial for successful collaborations and meaningful contributions to the Chinese architectural landscape.

8.3 Implications for Practice

The aim in this study was to address the lack of research evidence on Finnish architects’ practices in China and how the design philosophy of Finnish architecture itself is perpetuated in the Chinese context. Accordingly, the first practical contribution of the current research is that it provides empirical insights to the Finnish architectural community and researchers and sheds light on how Finnish architects have tackled challenges and responded to cultural differences through their design strategies and discourses in China. Finnish architects planning to participate in Chinese architectural projects can gain valuable empirical knowledge from this study, including understanding Chinese preferences for different design
strategies, the use of design discourse, and the benefits and possible tensions of collaborating with LDIs in China.

Moreover, my research offers Chinese architects insights into Finnish architectural tradition and design thinking, presented through the analysis of individual cases and design processes. Chapter five specifically analyzed the design proposals of the SFC competition and highlighted common misunderstandings between Chinese clients and Finnish architects. Chinese clients often fail to fully recognize the distinct “Finnish characteristics” of Finnish architects. While Nordic design, including Finnish design, enjoys popularity in Chinese society, it is often based on media promotion and fluid images rather than a deep understanding of design principles. Therefore, my research can provide valuable external experience for Chinese decision-makers, guiding them in looking more rationally and deeply at design traditions from other parts of the world, and how such traditions can be integrated within China's own context.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the Chinese architectural design market is becoming increasingly competitive, raising barriers for Finnish architectural firms seeking to enter China. Nevertheless, the examination of Finnish architects’ experiences in China and the theoretical and empirical lessons derived from it hold instructive value for Finnish architects practicing elsewhere in the world, particularly in other countries in Asia and the developing economies of the Global South. By recognizing the implications of Finnish architects’ experiences in China, this research contributes to global architectural knowledge and encourages the exchange of ideas, practices, and collaboration. It promotes a nuanced and contextually informed approach to understanding international architectural practices, fostering mutual learning among architects from diverse backgrounds. Ultimately, this collaborative approach can lead to the enrichment of architectural practices and the creation of innovative and culturally sensitive designs worldwide.

### 8.4 Directions for Future Research

My study offers a wealth of empirical evidence that suggests several opportunities for future research in theory development and concept validation. There is potential for further expansion of this research in both depth and breadth. First, by delving deeper into certain aspects or subtopics, a more comprehensive understanding can be achieved. For instance, as mentioned in Chapter Five, further work could explore the commonalities of Finnish architects’ discourses in different types of Chinese architectural projects from the perspective of everyday communication, rather than solely based on formal presentations and design documents, as done in this study. Future research could explore whether there is still something Finnish about Finnish architects’ discourses in their daily exchanges that focus on specific design topics. Such research, which could and should explore the more generalized patterns in the construction of Finnish architects’ discourses, and
could focus on the continuity of Finnish architects’ discursive logic in domestic and Chinese contexts.

From the perspective of design practice, one possible research direction is to explore further the impact of commercial contracts on the design tactics of Finnish architects. While the current research has analyzed the experiences of Finnish architects working with their Chinese counterparts and identified instances of cooperation and tension, there is limited insight into the effects of different design contract frameworks on the behavioral patterns of Finnish architects in China. Contractual arrangements between Finnish architects, Chinese LDIs, and clients can vary, with joint or separate contracts. The chosen contractual framework has implications for communication and design management. Further exploration of these different contractual models can provide valuable insights into the dynamics and effectiveness of collaboration between Finnish architects and their Chinese collaborators.

Moreover, the term ‘Finnishness’ and the self-image of Finns used in this dissertation are based on concepts from earlier literature, resulting in a relatively homogenized interpretation. While this view of Finnishness persists in Finnish society, younger Finnish architects in today’s multipolar world hold a more diverse perception of tradition. As a result, exploring the dynamic relationship between traditional images of Finland and contemporary Finnish architectural design within the context of today’s evolving Finnish society presents a promising area for future research. This dynamic perspective is equally relevant to Chinese society, which is poised for evolving perceptions of Scandinavian design, including Finnish design, as it continues to engage with the global community.

Additionally, broadening the scope of the research to include additional case studies, contexts, or comparative analyses can provide a more comprehensive perspective on the topic. While the present study discusses the characteristics of Finnish architects and their design traditions in the Chinese context, it mainly centers on Finnish architects themselves and their connection to the history of Finnish architecture. Therefore, future research could expand to encompass comparative studies with other Western architectural communities, offering insights into the specificities of Finnish architecture within a broader context. Furthermore, considering potential challenges or limitations for European architects, including those from Finland, in the Chinese architectural design market, future research could explore opportunities and market access conditions in other regions that share similarities with China. Analyzing these alternative regions can provide valuable guidance for architects seeking new avenues for their professional practice. These avenues of future research can contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Finnish architects’ practices in China and their broader implications for architectural theory and cross-cultural design collaborations.
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Appendix 1

Interviewee: Chen Zongrui (陈宗瑞)

Interviewee's Position and Affiliation: then project manager of the Strait Culture and Art Center (SCAC), China Construction Engineering Design Group Corporation (CCEDGC) in Beijing

Date: 07.01.2022

Place: This is an interview conducted through an online meeting between Beijing and Helsinki.
Yizhou: As far as you know, how did the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC) approach the SCAC project at that time?
Zongrui: Here’s the story. The CSCEC Fuzhou branch institute joined PES to participate in the SCAC competition, and the consortium won the bid. The client approached the Fuzhou branch institute for the SCAC project. However, the Fuzhou branch institute had not previously undertaken theater projects of this scale, so they reached out to CSCEC’s headquarters (China Construction Engineering Design Group Corporation, CCEDGC) in Beijing. Coincidentally, we had experience with projects like the Tangshan Grand Theater and several other theaters at that time. Consequently, an immediate agreement was reached, and we took over the SCAC project. Following that, the Fuzhou branch institute was responsible for local planning, approval, and part of the construction site cooperation work, while the CCEDGC was accountable for the construction drawing design and related coordination work.

Yizhou: I later consulted some official documents from Fuzhou, where they wanted to invite “foreign masters” to participate in designing important buildings.
Zongrui: This project was a tender, and PES went to tender with several other companies. The client felt the need to get a master team, and it was later a consortium of CCEDGC and PES that did this project together.

Yizhou: What were the main tasks undertaken by CCEDGC during the competition phase? Was there any advice on the PES proposal?
Zongrui: CCEDGC was not involved in too much of the competition phase. It may have prepared business bid documents, such as collecting and collating its past performance. But the rest of the work, such as the technical bid documents, was done unilaterally by PES.

Yizhou: What was the main focus of CCEDGC’s work on this project? How did the division of responsibilities and design scope proceed with PES?
Zongrui: I understand that PES mainly handled the design, and what CCEDGC was doing in this project was primarily the implementation of the construction drawings and some construction site cooperation. CCEDGC also communicated with the client about the construction site problems and coordinated with the partner companies, such as the interior design company. But the critical coordination was still with the PES side.

Yizhou: I noticed that at the time, there was a dividing line on the PES drawings that separated the public areas from the non-public areas. Are you clear on how this line was set at the time?
Zongrui: Is it a design scope line?
Yizhou: Yes, it is a line that draws the respective scopes of work for PES and CCEDGC.
Zongrui: That would be the division of the design development stage. Because from the schematic design stage, the design was all done by PES. Later, the CCEDGC was responsible for all the areas at the construction design stage. This line should be the dividing line during the design development stage.

Yizhou: You were posted to the Helsinki office of PES; how would you describe the experience? Was that in 2013?
Yizhou: Oh, yes.
Zongrui: It was quite an unforgettable experience in my career because, after all, I was sent abroad and stayed there for three months to experience the atmosphere of a foreign design team. I've dealt with some international design teams before, but not so directly that I could work in a Finnish architectural office. I could feel, for example, the working methods of Finnish designers and the attitude of foreign designers.
Yizhou: How do you see the work of Finnish architecture firms? What are the biggest challenges of working with Finnish architects?
Zongrui: The biggest challenge, I think, is the consideration of design pursuits. Foreign designers are looking for design quality, often only from the perspective of design. But Chinese designers have a lot to balance; they need to consider the client's intentions and consider all aspects, including cost, so they have to think about more practical issues. But Pekka is always thinking about how he can get the design right, and of course, he also considers the cost, but he focuses more on the design itself.
Yizhou: Communicating directly with foreign architects in English is still difficult for many local Chinese architects; how do you see the language issue in your work?
Zongrui: It was okay. Even if you can't explain it in language, you can still describe it clearly through drawing, it just takes more time, so I don't think language is a significant barrier. For example, Martin is brilliant and has done a lot of Chinese projects, so he should understand a lot of Chinese designers' ideas. I think Pekka is the same, and there are Chinese architects like Li Wei at PES, so language is not a big problem in the communication process.
Yizhou: In PES and CCEDGC, some specific people act as a kind of contact person; how can their work be evaluated?
Zongrui: I think their work is still essential. Foreigners and Chinese people think differently about building codes and they have different ideologies. There is a need for a contact person to lubricate, bridge, or translate practical issues. The role of this contact person is to harmonize the views of both sides, neutralize them, and ultimately make an evaluation that is most beneficial to the project or steer it in a promising direction. The contact person may not always make decisions, but it is crucial.
Yizhou: Foreign architects often do not understand Chinese building codes; how did you help solve or improve this problem?
Zongrui: I remember that only the English version of the fire code was available. After translation, some of the explanations in the English version could not be fully understood by foreign architects. We drew a lot of diagrams to explain to PES why the regulations worked the way they did, which was a big part of the workload. There were also cases where there was no English version of the regulations, which may have required translation, and frankly, it needed a diagrammatic exercise to explain the code.
Yizhou: How do you see the differences between Chinese and foreign working habits? Are the working methods of foreign architects informative for Chinese design firms?
Zongrui: What I feel more strongly about is that PES hardly works overtime. But they are still meeting the needs of the original plan for each phase, and
each step is solid, and they are completing each stage while maintaining quality. They don’t have a situation where, for example, I’ve finished this phase, and then I go back and spend time making up for the previous stage. But on the Chinese side, the client demands a fast pace, but there are a lot of problems that need to be solved by constantly pulling out drawers and going back to the old documents. I think this is something that Chinese design companies need to learn. But this is also related to the fast-developing environment in China.

Yizhou: Indeed, I agree that the two societies are at different stages of development.

Zongrui: There is also the fact that foreign designers attach great importance to hand-made models, from the initial block models to later layered models and even to partial detail models. Several international design companies I have worked with pay more attention to the models, including the architectural details. On the other hand, the Chinese design companies have not done so much modeling, except for critical projects. But I think the overall situation is getting better and better, and the Chinese companies will also go for models of various scales. We used to do these hand-made models at school, but we didn’t do them as much in practice. So, I think this is an area that Chinese design companies need to pay attention to.

Yizhou: What do you think is the significance of participating in a complex project for Chinese design firms?

Zongrui: I think modern architecture originated in Europe, and buildings with complex functions such as theaters and commercial complexes did not exist in China. These building types are all foreign. Foreign designers have a lot of experience in this area of design, and we can learn from their design philosophy and methods by working with them. After working on a few projects, you’ll feel more or less the same if you do what you’ve done. Of course, it will take time to reach the same level.

Yizhou: How do you view the design model of cooperation between foreign architects and local Chinese design institutes? How do you evaluate the division between foreign and Chinese collaborators?

Zongrui: It is challenging for foreign designers to realize their designs directly in China because they are unfamiliar with Chinese regulations and do not qualify to produce construction drawings. So it is practically impossible for a foreign architectural design office to get rid of a local Chinese design institute to design alone. Moreover, architects have to face construction companies. Foreign architects cannot coordinate with Chinese construction companies, which still do not have high quality and refined construction conditions as their Western counterparts. Therefore, foreign architects’ designs must collaborate with local design institutes. The good thing about PES is that they have done most of the preliminary design work, including the interior design. The drawings are relatively detailed, including some of the architectural joints which PES has drawn in detail. At the later stage of selecting the material samples, PES was deeply involved, which I think was the only way to ensure the successful completion of the project. Nothing good will come from a simple division and separate work between the two parties. If the foreign design company doesn’t care, for example, we assume that both parties agree to five site visits and make just those five visits, then the project will not turn out well either, and the project is not controllable. I think Pekka may...
have been less cost-conscious on this project in Fuzhou. Pekka and Martin traveled to Fuzhou many times, and Lai Linli from the PES Shanghai office also traveled to Fuzhou many times. I remember when I traveled to Fuzhou particularly intensively in a period of half a month or a whole month. One time, I remember particularly well that I had just flown back to Beijing from Fuzhou. When I had just landed, I got another call from Fuzhou asking me to return. So I was over in Fuzhou all that time. At the same time, both PES and Lai Linli from PES Shanghai put a lot of effort into it, and I think that this input ensured the final result of the building.

Yizhou: What were the main things you coordinated in Fuzhou so intensively?
Zongrui: I was mainly involved in solving various technical problems. Because this is a shaped form building, it is very complex from the structure to the curtain wall. This led to a lot of issues on the construction site. The architects needed to go through various on-site errors. At the same time, the different material samples sent to the construction site by the contractors were also required to be verified and coordinated. In addition, these large and complex projects have fire protection issues that go beyond the existing codes, and architects need to know how to communicate with the local fire approval authorities.

Yizhou: The design institute is in an overall responsible role; what kind of expertise and knowledge is required for this position? What are the main challenges?
Zongrui: I had worked on one or two theater projects before I did the SCAC. So when it comes to having expertise or competence, it’s hard to say that I have very senior experience. Suppose we are talking about the design of the performance building alone. In that case, PES is more experienced, and PES can also employ a variety of consultants or advisory companies. I think my position requires more communication and coordination skills, where the difficulty lies. Pekka was very committed to his proposal for this project, but the client was very concerned about the cost. At the same time, the client had set a tight deadline to deliver the drawings, which left very little time to produce the construction designs for us. So I need to find the most favorable or achievable solution that all parties can allow and coordinate and communicate with all parties. This process is quite demanding for me.

Yizhou: How do you see the process of working with different disciplines from an internal design institute perspective? How do you evaluate the work of other professions? What are the main challenges?
Zongrui: In itself, CCEDGC is not fully adequate in equipment design and structural design expertise. In my opinion, architects are far more competent than other professions in the current Chinese construction industry. Architects are more established than other professions regarding international exchange or pre-existing design achievements. In other professions, such as structural and equipment design, their designers still follow traditional thinking to a large extent. Their relationship with Chinese architects is different from the relationship of Party A and B in many other countries, bound by commercial terms. In that sense, the architect may be the client of these engineers, and all the engineers need to cooperate and realize the architect’s proposal. In Chinese design institutes, however, the relationship between the various fields is more of a collaborative one, with each profession often considering the project
from its own perspective. So there are situations where, for example, the requirements for the plant room are more extensive, and the layout of the pipework is more arbitrary; they aim to be more comfortable with their design process. The difficulty for us architects is how to convince them that it is a more complicated way to solve the problem, but the result will be better for the whole space and the whole project. This is the more difficult part.

Yizhou: In addition to PES and CCEDGC, several other design firms in the project of SCAC, including curtain wall consultants and interior designers. How were these firms selected? How to evaluate their roles? Did they go through a tendering process for the other design firms eventually decided?

Zongrui: These companies are not determined by tender, and the client selected the general design contractor through a tender process. To put it bluntly, once the client has decided on CCEDGC and PES, CCEDGC and PES can screen and advise the client on the specific sub-design companies. Because Pekka had a strong position and voice in the client's mind, PES recommended these design consultants to the client, and basically, the client approved them all. These companies did not go through a bidding process. For example, the curtain wall design company was Schmidlin, who might have worked with PES before. Others, such as the interior design company and acoustic consultants, were primarily based on Pekka's ideas.

Yizhou: What kind of relationship do you see between CCEDGC and the client in the Fuzhou project? How do you see the role of the client from the CCEDGC's perspective?

Zongrui: CCEDGC mainly acted as a bridge between the client and PES. For example, CCEDGC would help PES persuade the client to obtain a more generous timetable, allow as much time as possible for drawings and design, and invest more in the design. At the same time, CCEDGC also would help the client communicate with PES and support the foreign designers to understand the client's various requirements and the government, etc. So the CCEDGC acted as a lubricant in the process. Then, in terms of my current work, I think the role of the client is significant, including the project in Fuzhou as well. Without the support of the client, no matter how good foreign architects' design ability is, they cannot come out with good work. The client is not just throwing money at the project but coordinating the resources of all parties. For example, how can you justify the fire design of a very complex building that breaks existing codes? It all relies on the client's coordination, which is why a good client is essential to a project's ultimate success.

Yizhou: What is the difference between the client's perspective on a project and the design firm's perspective? What is the difference in focus between these two?

Zongrui: The client will be concerned with many more dimensions. Position may not be the most appropriate term to describe the situation, but there are many aspects that the client needs to consider and coordinate. For example, at the time, Fuzhou SCAC was a government project and needed to be completed before a public event. Still, the client also had to consider that the project's quality could be better, and the costs could not be exceeded. In the SCAC, the client had to solve some technical problems,
such as flood prevention, because the project was close to the river. Designers, especially in China, often only think about design solutions, but not as much as the client.

Yizhou: How do you view the design fees and the allocation of design fees in this project? Will CCEDGC make a profit in SCAC, a project collaborated with a foreign design firm?

Zongrui: As for the design fees, whenever a foreign design company is involved in a project, the foreign architect takes the lion’s share of the design fees for that project. I agree with this point. The schematic design is an essential part of the project; it is the most valuable part and the one with the most creative input. So the schematic designer takes a large part of the design fee, and I agree with this from the designer’s point of view. From the point of view of the Chinese architects, if you can produce such a design, you can also get the share of the design fee, but at present, you are not able to do so, or not as good as the foreign architects, and that is the reason why foreign architects are hired to do it. I agree with this allocation. But on the other hand, indeed, CCEDGC does not get a high design fee. But I don’t think this can be measured purely in the angle of money. This project is also a process of learning from the outside world. I believe it is essential that we don’t lose money financially, but more importantly, we know something through this project. I think this is more important. Whether or not it is profitable, I think it is slightly beneficial. It is a break-even situation.

Yizhou: How would you rate the place of the SCAC project in your career?

Zongrui: From a designer’s point of view, this project is arguably the most important project of my career in terms of complexity, scale, and importance. This project has won many awards, including the Luban Award. Of all the projects I have worked on, about three have won the Luban Award. But this project is the most complex because it involves five venues and various factors such as river flood control. The performance building itself is a relatively complex type, and probably the only one that can be compared to it is a hospital. This kind of building is indeed very complicated. The most significant impact it has had on me is that it has improved my ability to think about and solve complex problems. This has led me to work on other projects without too many challenges after the SCAC. At least in terms of functional solutions, I felt that all subsequent projects were easy. And in terms of coordination and communication skills, theater architecture requires a lot of coordination. And the things I encountered later on, for example, I’m now in a developer company, I meet projects where the workload is much less than what I experienced before and would feel very relaxed. For a long time, as a designer, I wasn’t exposed to more challenging projects, which led me to seek new challenges, so I worked for a developer.
Appendix 2

Interviewee    Fang Hai (方海)

Interviewee’s Position and Affiliation    professor at Guangdong University of Technology, China

Date    24.11.2021

Place    Fang Hai responded to the questions via email.
Yizhou: Chinese clients often serve as a key part of the design network. How would you comment on the client’s role in the overall design process?

Hai: There are three types of clients in China: government, private firms, and developers with a government background (but half privately owned). Generally, all Chinese clients are the key element for any design project. However, there are still some differences among the above types of clients. In the case of government clients, the positive point is that they might pay in time generally when they agree with the contract. At the same time, the negative side is that the responsible leaders of the local government might be changed. Then the former agreement could be “not realistic” somehow. Another negative side is that Chinese government leaders might have “bad knowledge of architecture and design and foreign design culture.” Thus it would need extra time and power to talk and discuss with them to convince them to choose the best options of design entries and solutions. Sometimes certain China government leaders might keep strange ideas combined with their own “business” behind. Thus it might be even troublesome to communicate with them. In the case of private firms, the positive point is that generally, the client would cherish good design ideas from architect offices. Thus it will be more accessible for them to reach relatively ideal options. However, the negative side with a private client is that the design fee might be reduced or discussed repeatedly. Moreover, the payment process might be problematic and would take time to solve for architectural offices.

Yizhou: According to the existing records, the project schedule in China is uncertain and unpredictable; how do you see the possibility of long pauses and sudden starts in Chinese projects?

Hai: Generally, the chief reason is that China is still developing by learning from the Western nations while China is also thinking seriously of its particular and complicated situations. China keeps its central government controlling system, which means all leaders of different cities and provinces might be changed or arrested anytime. Their leaders might be ousted or arrested suddenly for governmental and private clients because of corruption and political reasons. Thus, the situation might further influence the related building projects in progress. Concerning so many private clients in China, they are also heavily affected by the governmental system, leading to their financial running problems. Because mostly their money primarily comes from China’s state-owned banks and is thus firmly controlled by the Chinese government.

Yizhou: What do you think are the challenges posed by the design briefs or programs in Chinese projects?

Hai: There are many different kinds of design briefs in China. Some of them are general “copies” from the West. Or the people who made the design briefs were once studied or worked in Europe or the USA. However, the design briefs might include many local Chinese characters, which might cause extra trouble for foreign architect offices working in China. In such cases, architect offices must contact the clients, usually chief leaders, directly and straightforwardly talking about all the key points.

Yizhou: How do you see the schedules in Chinese projects once the project
Hai: In most cases, China projects issue very tight schedules of all design phases because all China leaders hope to see the design results during their leadership period. For both government and private firms, the leaders should have limited terms of responsibilities. All foreign architect offices need to discuss with the clients all schedule details very carefully and try their best to get longer phases for each project. However, facing highly competitive situations, some foreign architect offices need to promise more flexible schedules to get or keep the projects in their hands. That also means much extra work is required.

Yizhou: At present, design fees in China are still low. Business manners in China are also different from Western countries. How do you see the dilemma of balancing design responsibility and sustainable business development in the Chinese market?

Hai: This is a big problem in China even though we have developed a lot during the past years. So many foreign architect offices are working in China and teaching Chinese architects and clients concerning modern design philosophies, management systems, and related know-how. However, it is a big task and thus needs a very long time to get better. Generally, the low design fee means low quality in design and construction. Still, China is such a big nation. Some selected regions, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, have made significant progress with more substantial financial and exceptional policy support from the central government. That is why most international offices have to stay in big cities. Little by little, other cities started to develop and need good designs from foreign offices and thus open new stages.

Yizhou: Who is the local design institute (LDI) for the project? How was this LDI chosen?

Hai: For this church project in Chengdu, the LDI is CSWADI (China Southwest Architectural Design and Research Institute). The project was from entirely personal contact. One of my former academic colleagues, Mr. Qian (currently one of the chief architects in CSWADI), knew one leader of Chengdu (like the vice mayor) who decided to build a “pure Western-style church” for the foreign experts working and living in Chengdu. Then, they decided further that they needed a Nordic-style church with lighting design as a critical element. While my friend, Finnish architect Vesa Honkonen (who worked with PES-Architects in the 1980s), was giving lectures in Chengdu and was naturally introduced to the client. And the LDI was naturally CSWADI.

Yizhou: How were the design phases and responsibilities divided in this project?

Hai: In the first period of China’s development in the 1990s, the general pattern of design cooperation was that foreign architect offices made ideas and schematic designs. Chinese local architectural institutes took over during the following phases, including working drawings. In the second development period during the first decade of the 21st century, foreign offices started to enter design development stages and partially participate in technical design fields. Further, they would like to say more on working drawings as well. Then during the so-called third phase, some foreign offices established China offices (like PES-Architects’ Shanghai office) and thus took care of more parts of the design phases. Anyway,
each design project might raise different problems, and the architect office should carefully check each case and make a particular contract for each project.

Yizhou: What has it been like for you to work with the LDI? What is the biggest challenge for you?

Hai: In my case, it is a bit special. In the beginning, for most contacts I made for PES-Architects, I have used my connections (such as schoolmates, academic colleagues, and relatives) to reach the clients. Then the situation became more official and institutionalized in operation, while PES might act more professionally. The critical challenge might be that LDI might change ideas without telling PES, including their contacts with clients and so on. Sometimes there might appear copyright problems when some LDIs want to win something more.

Yizhou: How would you comment on the work of LDI regarding their architects as well as their engineering departments?

Hai: These LDI architects have developed a lot in China during the past 30 years. They used to be very “primitive and closed.” But when China started to open up to the world and invite foreign architects to work in China, LDI architects started to learn fast and grew a lot. Professional Chinese architects are working hard and learning hard. But they still have a lot to learn.

Yizhou: How do you see the work of the Finnish architectural office after the preliminary design phase? What measures do you think you need to take to control the final building quality and details?

Hai: Several Finnish architect offices once entered the Chinese design market in the 1990s, but only PES developed in China with several realized projects in Wuxi, Fuzhou, and Shanghai areas. PES is very professional, working hard, and very positive in every design phase in each project. Concerning the final quality result, the client and architects need to join forces to create good architecture. China’s clients are more important in many cases because the architects could not do anything if the client refused to accept any positive design result.

Yizhou: How do you see the model of international architects designing in collaboration with Chinese LDIs? Do the benefits outweigh the negatives or vice versa?

Hai: It is undoubtedly very positive for both Chinese architectural design institutes and foreign architects’ offices. China needs good design and architecture to respond to new developments and changes in the political and economic spheres. Still, currently, Chinese architects cannot create enough modern designs with original and innovative ideas for many complicated reasons. With both professional skills and outstanding design ideas, foreign architects can realize their design concepts whenever and wherever they get possibilities.

Yizhou: What are the ways of communication between Finland and the clients and design collaborators during the project’s progress?

Hai: As the representative office of Finnish architects in China, PES-Architects understood the Chinese design market step by step. They have gradually developed their pattern of cooperation with Chinese clients, architects, and partners. Before establishing their own branch office in Shanghai, they must frequently travel for numerous competitions and possible design commissions. Meanwhile, they need to use email, telefax, and phone calling as daily contact methods. As a further step, when they
found suitable Chinese architectural partners, such as UDG (United Design Group) in Shanghai and SADI (Shenzhen Architectural Design Institute) in Shenzhen, they joined forces with the partners. They built kinds of local offices inside UDG and SADI for the time being with the competitions and projects in the process. Then, with the signing of their first big project contract (Wuxi Grand Theater, a significant project from international design competition to project commissioning and construction process), they decided to officially establish a branch office in Shanghai with the particular help of UDG, one of the local design partners for the Wuxi Grand Theater project. PES can contact local clients and partners quickly and daily with this regional office.

Yizhou: English is a foreign language for Finns and Chinese, and the design teams may include architects from multiple countries. How do you see the language issue as a challenge for the Chinese projects?

Hai: The only way for almost all foreign architects’ offices is to use English. Some foreign architects started to learn some Chinese but mainly not enough for professional working conditions. But, it is always good for them to speak some Chinese to convince Chinese clients relatively quickly.

Yizhou: How would you evaluate the work of the architects or managers who are responsible for communication?

Hai: It depends... Indeed, the role of the project architects is significant, especially for the final realization of the design projects.

Yizhou: How do you see the differences in working habits or conventions between Finland and China?

Hai: Chinese architects are learning all the time effectively. Still, there is a lot to learn for them. Please see my article in the book “Wuxi Grand Theater.” Meanwhile, all foreign architects need to know Chinese culture generally, and thus it would be much easier for them to contact and communicate with any Chinese clients and friends.

Yizhou: How do you see the time difference between Finland and China? How does the time difference affect the design and coordination?

Hai: Actually, there is no problem with the time difference, as the difference between China and Finland is only 5 or 6 hours. The communication and operation need to be polite. Both sides might be careful with it, and people need to mind the deadline issue for competitions and professional meetings, especially the appointed meetings with local leaders.

Yizhou: Mobile applications have been integrated into the daily life of Chinese people and have also become an indispensable tool in China to communicate at work. What changes have these tools brought to you and the overall design process? What is your opinion about these tools?

Hai: Yes, China is somehow on the same pace as the world concerning mobile applications, and it makes all design processes more accessible and more effective. Daily contacts and professional communications get more convenient as well. It would have a “modern” and “advanced” feeling using the handy or sophisticated tools and facilities for any foreign architect... Chinese clients, in most cases, would think it normal. Otherwise, they may sometimes lose some confidence if foreign architects do not communicate with them in the way they are used to.
Appendix 3

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<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Li Wei (李伟)</th>
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<td>Interviewee's Position and Affiliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>12.5.2022</td>
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<td>Place</td>
<td>PES-Architects' Office, Kalasatama, Helsinki</td>
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Yizhou: How did the cooperation with CCEDGC progress? What were the main methods of communication used by both parties?

Wei: We still use the same communication methods we usually use in our work, such as WeChat, QQ, and email. At that time, CCEDGC’s people came to Helsinki twice and stayed for three months each time. These workshops solved the general cooperation framework, the complicated issues, and the technically tricky areas. After we settled these basic things, we and CCEDGC would communicate with each other mainly by email and the Internet, including continuous communication of drawings and mutual confirmation of each other’s design.

Yizhou: How many times did these workshops take place? How did the face-to-face communication with CCEDGC take place?

Wei: The first group included Chen Zongrui and Xu Yajing, and the second group included Zhang Zheng, Zhao Yang, and Wang Zhiming. Chen Zongrui, Xu Yajing, and Zhang Zheng were architects, Zhao Yang was an HVAC engineer, and Wang Zhiming was a structural engineer. Later on, a group of interior architects came, but CCEDGC’s interior department did not make the final interior construction drawings. The client later handed over the interior construction drawings to Gold Mantis. At that time, the interior team of CCEDGC came for a short time, and I remember they stayed in Helsinki for a short period. It was mainly the first two workshops that settled the essential things.

Yizhou: How did people from both companies work in the same office?

Wei: They did theirs, and we did ours. On our side, we mainly advanced our design, and we would revise many parts of the design all the time, and we would ask them questions. And it was easier for them to communicate with their departments in Beijing. If they had questions, they would ask their respective department leaders. The process was speedy and efficient. I think it was easier for them to communicate internally. Sometimes this might happen. But their internal communication was much more efficient. In the early stage, the first group of people sent to Helsinki did a lot of coordination and communication work. When they returned to Beijing, they continued their coordination on the Chinese side, making the job much more efficient. It was also easier to communicate and coordinate with them after becoming more familiar with them through face-to-face contact. The same is true for the people who came later, including Zhang Zheng, Zhao Yang, and Wang Zhiming. After they arrived, our communication with them would be remarkably convenient; for example, we quickly determined the positioning of our HVAC air supply opening positions and other technical issues.

Yizhou: Did both parties focus on addressing some basic technical principles during the workshops?

Wei: Yes, because they were in the office, they could look at the drawings, and we went face-to-face with them to quickly understand the problems. After they go back to Beijing, they can find those solutions targeted.

Yizhou: PES is divided into a Helsinki office and a Shanghai office; how did the two teams divide their work during this project?
Wei: During that time, I didn’t have a profound understanding of the collaboration between the two offices from my perspective. I felt that the Shanghai office was doing primarily commercial, contractual, and coordination work with the client in the early stages. Since there was no time difference between them and the client, making phone calls was easier. The Shanghai office would directly pass any design or contractual issues to Pekka, and we would do the preliminary design in Helsinki. After the DD phase and after our central design part was completed, in the CD phase, Shanghai would coordinate with the cooperating design institute, that is, CCEDGC. But this project in Fuzhou is also a little bit special, and it’s not the same as the projects I have worked on since then. As I said earlier, because CCEDGC had many architects and engineers sent over, we would coordinate and communicate directly with CCEDGC in Helsinki after becoming familiar with each other. So there was no problem with the coordination between Helsinki and Beijing. Later on, during the construction phase, Lai and Xiaojing from the Shanghai office communicated more with the client and the construction site. It was easier for them to speak because they were in China. Another aspect is interior design. For this project in Fuzhou, the Helsinki office did the main design work, and Pekka and Martin led the design team. They solved all the complicated design issues in Helsinki, and the communication via QQ and WeChat was very convenient. But in general, because I wasn’t in the Shanghai office, I didn’t know many details very well.

Yizhou: Have you ever been to a meeting at CCEDGC in Beijing?

Wei: I did not go to the meetings with CCEDGC in Beijing for the Fuzhou project. Pekka, Martin, and the colleagues from the Shanghai office were the ones who might participate in the discussions in Beijing. So I don’t know much about this.

Yizhou: How did the PES team review the construction drawings from CCEDGC?

Wei: In Fuzhou, we reviewed all these drawings in a detailed manner. In the project, each building was assigned to a dedicated architect. The CCEDGC drawings were given to each responsible architect when we received them. Each architect would be familiar with the part they were responsible for, so they would conduct a careful inspection. Generally, they would check the structure, the HVAC ducts, whether the HVAC vents were in the right place, etc. Our architects need to carefully check some crucial spaces, such as the auditoriums, curved galleries, and curtain walls. Pekka and Martin would see the problems personally. We reviewed the drawings more carefully.

Yizhou: According to the letter sent by PES to CCEDGC, there were deviations in the structural design of the opera house and the concert hall auditoriums. How were these problems identified, and how were they resolved?

Wei: There were some problems with the structural design of CCEDGC at that time. I can’t necessarily recall all of them now. For example, we found the issues with the double-column structures where the Curved Galleries meet the Cultural Concourse. Both sides coordinated the position of this double-column for a long time. As for how to find these problems, we would overlay their structural drawings with our architectural drawings. For example, if the position of this column conflicted with the architectural boundary we set, we would quickly find this problem. Maybe the
difficulty is that these structures are inclined in space. Especially inside
the auditoriums, the architectural designs have a lot of curved shapes. I
can’t remember now how we found all these things. We could see some
problems by cross-checking drawings, and we might encounter some
other issues during the construction. We also found some problems after
the structures were completed. The client found an interior construction
company, Shenzhen ZandF, and then they used LIDAR (Light Detection
and Ranging) to do a 3D scan on-site to form a model, and then we com-
pared our Rhino model with this on-site scan model to find some small
problems with the surface.

Yizhou: Were these structural design mistakes found at the time a very urgent
problem?
Wei: Right. Because many drawings needed to be revised. At the same time,
foundation construction had already begun on the site. We needed to
control the effect of the design, and we also should coordinate other
areas, such as the landscape design. There were issues such as whether
to add columns under the spiral ‘eye ramp.’ We wanted to know how many
columns to add. Many things needed to be refined and modified while
construction was going on. In the location of the ‘eye ramp,’ we once
wanted to use fair-faced concrete. Still, we were worried that the quality
of the final construction would not be as good as we thought, so we
ended up using fiber concrete. There was another thing I was working on,
Martin called the structure ‘Li Wei X.’ It was the problem of the X-shaped
diagonal bracing on the entrance of the Cultural Concourse.

Yizhou: How was this problem discovered?
Wei: This was a problem from the beginning. CCEDGC structural department
told us that there was no way to eliminate the diagonal bracing in this
area. We asked them many times to cancel this structure, but their struc-
ture just could not be calculated. They said the structure had to be there,
so they kept it in the end. We negotiated this matter for a long time, but
we did not resolve it in the end. We can also see this kind of thing in
European buildings in terms of structural design.

Yizhou: Apart from CCEDGC, which partner companies did PES need to com-
communicate with in landscape and interior design? How did the PES design
team solve the difficulties in collaboration?
Wei: The landscape situation was relatively simple, and the landscape design
team was also from CCEDGC, but it was a different department of
CCEDGC. After we decided on the landscape initially, the number of
changes was not too big. It was probably the ‘petal’ part that we changed
more because the ‘petal’ design involved the square, the riverbank, and
so on. At that time, we had to find a lot of exact information about the
design, such as the water level of the Liangcuo River and other data
related to flood control and the flood gate. It took us a long time to coor-
dinate these things. There were also roads, ramps to the roof, hills, the
relationship between the energy center under the hills and the landscape,
and so on. All of that went pretty well. I think we decided on the landscape
relatively early on. We’ve maintained the original design. The landscape
petal side is a bit more complicated because, in addition to the flood gate,
the client also requires a cafe, the technical equipment room for the flood
gate, etc., and the technical conditions I just mentioned. It would take us a
long time to communicate these things. In addition to landscape design,
we also needed to talk with the local municipal departments in charge of water facilities. When these municipal departments were involved, we often could not get in touch with them directly, so we would contact the CCEDGC landscape department and ask them to help us negotiate with the Fuzhou municipal department and get the information we needed for the design. Sometimes we did not have first-hand knowledge, and we did not know if the information they got back was confirmed, so CCEDGC would play a role in helping us make contact. So, overall, the landscape was a little bit easier. As for the interior, we had the interior design plan from the beginning, especially the Curved Galleries, the Cultural Concourse, and the auditoriums. After we finished the design, the interior design and construction drawings were done by Gold Mantis. But now, I cannot remember when Gold Mantis was involved.

Yizhou: What is the role of local experts' comments in landscape design?
Wei: This one is hard for me to answer. Do you know why? Because I did not follow up on the experts' opinions. After the experts' reviews were sent, I probably did not even translate them. The procedure was to give the translated comments to Pekka and Martin and Gretel Hemgård, the landscape consultant. Even some things were not necessarily apparent to Martin. So we followed some of these experts' opinions, and some didn't. I don't know what the situation was.

Yizhou: What parties did the landscape need to be coordinated with at that time?
Wei: We mainly discussed the landscape with municipalities and road departments. There is a major road around the site connected to the landscape. And there is a bridge on this side of the Liangcuo River, and the road surface is sloped. We needed to know the bridge's height and whether people could cross it. So this part of the landscape would be more coordinated with the water conservancy and municipalities. At that time, there was also a traffic meeting, mainly involving the parking lots. We set up significant entrances and exits on both sides of the site. We needed to determine whether the traffic flow at this entrance was sufficient, so we communicated with the local traffic department.

Yizhou: Did many municipal water facilities and landscape structures overlap?
Wei: Yes, because the site is in the new town area of Fuzhou. There is also a metro station under construction. And the design of many municipal facilities is constantly under revision. We encountered many such situations at that time. For example, the Liangcuo River, which did not exist, was designed in the city plan. So we needed to determine what was confirmed and what was not.
Appendix 4

Interviewee  
Martin Lukasczyk

Interviewee's Position and Affiliation  
design director, PES-Architects

Date  
24.11.2021 - 25.11.2021

Place  
PES-Architects' Office, Kalasatama, Helsinki
Yizhou: Chinese clients often serve as a key part of the design network. How would you comment on the client’s role in the overall design process?

Martin: The difference between Chinese and European clients is that they are sometimes more powerful but often less educated. So, they have to be, for example, they must learn to listen to the professionals. So, what is their role? Of course, their role is the final decision-maker. But they often have problems making decisions because they do not always know what they need.

Yizhou: According to the existing records, the project schedule in China is uncertain and unpredictable; how do you see the possibility of long pauses and sudden starts in Chinese projects?

Martin: It would help if you had strong companies. For example, many projects are going on in large architectural offices simultaneously. And small companies are also typical worldwide. There are difficulties for international small architectural offices trying to do business with Chinese companies if the Chinese market is similarly open for smaller companies. Interruptions in the project schedule can become a bigger problem for them, significantly when payments are delayed. Of course, this problem comes later with disruption in design progress.

Yizhou: What do you think are the challenges posed by the design briefs or programs in Chinese projects?

Martin: I’ve seen different design briefs, and I’ve seen excellent ones and terrible ones. The good ones contain a lot of information and the proper guidelines, and you can see that they have done it right. There may be only one A4 sheet of paper for the bad ones, and the architects have to design their briefs. This has happened, for example, in the competition phase of Wuxi Grand Theater. It’s often a challenge, but I think they are getting better and better. For instance, we saw a very good design brief when we did the Shenzhen Performing Arts Center design. Then it wasn’t a challenge for us because we could follow the brief.

Yizhou: How do you see the schedules in Chinese projects once the project starts?

Martin: Of course, the answer should usually be that they progress very fast. But if you ask me, I think we’ve learned how to handle that pace. So, I don’t think it’s a big issue. For companies with offices in China, it’s even an advantage in cost-effectiveness. Based on our schedules in some of our European projects, it seems like the projects will go on forever. Therefore, we even ask about the possibility of a shorter timetable. This is better because we don’t necessarily spend much time on one project, and things can be handled faster. Another problem in China is that although the schedule is fast, the payments are always behind. So, the approval process is much slower than the project process. In Finnish projects, I think architects usually wait until some decisions are made before continuing. But in China, everything is very mixed up. So, how do I see this problem? It can be a challenge, but you can get used to it. There is also a question about trust. Of course, in China, government clients are usually more trustworthy than private clients.

Yizhou: At present, design fees in China are still low. Business manners in China
are also different from Western countries. How do you see the dilemma of balancing design responsibility and sustainable business development in the Chinese market?

Martin: I’m not that much into money and business issues, and I think it’s a difficult balance, but if you do it with the right attitude and correct Western design strategies, you can still profit in China.

Yizhou: How about the architectural honor issue in China?

Martin: I think this is because architects are not in the boss’s position in the firm. They do what the boss says, and architects have to do their job even though they know they’re doing something ugly. But they need to make a profit, and the structure of their firm is such that they are in the third tier of power. And here, you have the biggest boss, who is an architect.

Yizhou: There is also a bonus system in China, which means that the more projects you are involved in, the more money you get.

Martin: Yes, but that is not about this question. The question here is about how to make a profit. I think it is possible to profit in China, but we did not profit from Wuxi and Fuzhou. The next question is about who the project’s local design institute is. So, this is for Nanchang?

Yizhou: Yes, we can mainly talk about the Nanchang project here.

Martin: Then it is BIAD.

Yizhou: How were they selected?

Martin: Bidding. But there is also some “guanxi.” I think we’ve been working with BIAD since the competition phase.

Yizhou: How were the design phases and responsibilities divided in this project?

Martin: I don’t exactly know, and I am not usually the one handling the contract. We typically have 80 percent in SD, 70 percent in DD, and 10 or 20 percent in CD, and it’s smaller and smaller towards the end.

Yizhou: What has it been like for you to work with the LDI? What is the biggest challenge for you?

Martin: In the case of Nanchang, they always send some demanding Chinese schedules. You never know which is the last drawing or what they have changed. So, the communication during the process is not perfect, which is always the case. When you receive documents from LDI, for example, a DWG drawing, they usually don’t indicate what they have changed. So we need to check and assess according to our experience what that means for the project. Or it’s just something they need to send because the client told them to send it as soon as possible. In that case, it doesn’t mean anything, or it’s a strategy for them to save money, or it’s the last time you’ll get drawings from them. So, you’re always trying to understand what it means.

Yizhou: How would you comment on the work of LDI regarding their architects as well as their engineering departments?

Martin: They haven’t shown that they are high-level architects and engineers, but they are high-level offices. So, in China, if they start... The engineers who designed the steel structure still understand the project well enough in the Nanchang project, but they are not yet top-level. But I don’t know about their contract, or it was never a good one.

Yizhou: How do you see the work of the Finnish architectural office after the preliminary design phase? What measures do you need to take to control the final building quality and details?
Martin: I think the most important thing is always to gain the trust of our clients, but things have changed a bit. Sometimes we have to do some extra work. Of course, clients like architects can do something for free. Now, we try to make ourselves a little more efficient. Still, our interest is in making good architecture, not just making money.

Yizhou: How do you see the model of international architects designing in collaboration with Chinese LDIs? Do the benefits outweigh the negatives or vice versa?

Martin: As I said earlier, it’s an honor to work on these projects. You don’t usually get many opportunities to design this kind of high-level cultural architecture. That’s already a significant advantage over many architects here, and most of us enjoy that. While I know it is also inevitably commercially motivated, I am glad to progress this far in China. Though you often have a tight schedule, architects can make a degree of experimentation. Unlike here, it’s not the international architects who have the ultimate responsibility for projects in China. Of course, the other side of doing this has the disadvantage that many things are not of very high quality.

Yizhou: What are the ways of communication between Finland and the clients and design collaborators during the project’s progress?

Martin: The communication is mainly through our local project and general managers at different levels. Lai usually communicates with high-level clients and contract-related issues and tries to be friendly all the time or tough when money is involved. Jing is our project manager for the Nanchang project. She keeps track of all the technical details, tries to understand the most critical issues, and tries to be in all meetings as much as possible to meet with as many people as possible. She is also the translator of the problems. We need to know through her how different aspects feel. Especially now that it’s COVID time, she is everything there. Maybe we could have direct communication with Tuomas and Lai and the clients at the next level. At the email level, we could have formal emails to specific contacts. When we use email communication, the interval between such transmissions is longer. After each design phase, there is usually an expert review. On specific issues related to the project, we now have daily communication in WeChat, almost one-to-one. This communication also works well with automatic translation. I can type in English, and they can type in Chinese. This helps a lot because it cuts a lot of corners.

Yizhou: English is a foreign language for Finns, German, and Chinese, and the design teams may include architects from multiple countries. How do you see the language issue as a challenge for the Chinese projects?

Martin: Language is not an issue in communication, but culture sometimes is. For example, if someone says something in German and is translated into English, it may not make cultural sense. People may say things out of politeness in England, but they might not mean that. The same is true in China, and China is huge. I think it’s more about the culture that you need to understand people. People in China also come from different places, and they may have different cultures.

Yizhou: How would you evaluate the work of the architects or managers who are responsible for communication?

Martin: Now, it’s mostly Jing, and I think all of us would speak highly of her work. She works long hours. Communication in WeChat also makes our work
Yizhou: How do you see the time difference between Finland and China? How does the time difference affect the design and coordination?

Martin: Finnish architects consider them the most essential part of a project, sometimes more important than the client.

Yizhou: Do you think Finnish architects think that way?

Martin: Finnish clients usually treat architects with more respect, and Chinese clients see architectural design as more of a service. I would add that this is also related to the relatively slow advancement of the European project. In Europe, people think that they can make the building last longer when they build something. People believe they are building something in China, but they will create something else in five years. We believe we’re building for the future, even if the current client doesn’t use the building anymore. While the client may have some opinions, the end-users are more important.

Yizhou: How do you see the time difference between Finland and China? How does the time difference affect the design and coordination?

Martin: It mainly affects Jing’s sleeping time because she tries to be awake while we are still working. It is bad for her family situation. It also could be an advantage because we have one office in China, we can use the time difference. It does not affect the coordination very much; for example, in Nanchang, the clients want to meet and discuss so much, but the overlapping “intersection” time for both sides is minimal. They can only do that when it is 8 pm in China. But it is already 3 pm in Helsinki, which makes me nervous because I want to go home at 5 pm because I need to take care of the kids and my family. It is difficult, but it has advantages and disadvantages.

Yizhou: Mobile applications have been integrated into the daily life of Chinese people and have also become an indispensable tool in China to communicate at work. What changes have these tools brought to you and the overall design process? What is your opinion about these tools?

Martin: This is both a blessing and a curse for us simultaneously. I like WeChat because it creates a very efficient workflow. But at a time like this, when clients are getting braver in WeChat and people are mixing in different groups, things can get a little out of order. We should have a WeChat manager.

Yizhou: How has the pandemic influenced your work and Chinese projects?

Martin: The issue does affect our work to some extent, but not that much. Travel to China has been blocked, and a trip to China was necessary. Still, we have somehow managed to complete the project in its current state. Perhaps the most important thing is that it would be great to be in China, see for yourself how the project is being done there, and meet real people, which is entirely different from communicating through a screen.

Yizhou: I think this may be the first time for PES to encounter a project that has progressed so much, but the chief designer has not actually met with the client.

Martin: They may not trust us as much as we used to, where we can get there
at the right time to talk to the client in a friendly smile and have a drink with them at the right time at dinner. This face-to-face communication is somehow more efficient. Although now we don’t need to go every month like we used to. But someone should be there every six months. Maybe the architect can be there a little longer to get things taken care of. Some things get stuck before you go, and in-person visits tend to push projects further and faster.

Yizhou: Now it takes a lot of time to go to China because of the quarantine measures in China.

Martin: How could we put Tuomas in a quarantine hotel for three weeks? He is needed here every second hour. Maybe some else can do it, but it needs to be planned well. All right, thank you!

Yizhou: Thank you.
Appendix 5

Interviewee: Pekka Salminen

Interviewee's Position and Affiliation: partner in PES-Architects

Date: 06.11.2021

Place: PES-Architects' Studio, Marjaniemi, Helsinki
Interview Transcript

Yizhou: Chinese clients often serve as a key part of the design network. How would you comment on the client’s role in the overall design process?

Pekka: Architectural competitions in China are the key to the whole story and are the fundamental way we get projects. International architects go to China mainly for high-level competitions, like our office. We keep participating in them, and it has been the same situation for almost 20 years since we started to work in China in 2003.

Nowadays, the jury members in Chinese competitions are generally professional. They are often university professors, or they can even be Chinese academicians in architectural fields. There is nothing to complain about the jury itself. But the final decision about who will be the competition’s winner always depends on high-level clients. Whether the professional jury has the right to decide on the winner is a significant difference between the Finnish and Chinese systems. In China, the jury always chooses three of the best proposals. But, the high-level client, who is usually one person, will make the final decision about the winner. It’s one of the problems in the Chinese system. A few years ago, I remembered a senior Chinese government leader mentioning that politicians’ opinions should not carry too much weight in design selection. But, in reality, I don’t think it has changed too much. So, in this sense, as you asked in the question, clients serve as a critical part.

Although in Finland, the role of the client is also important, it runs differently. A Finnish jury selects the first, second, and third prize-winning proposals and suggests implementing the first prize design to the client. Of course, the client will ultimately decide whether or not to realize the winning project, but the client cannot change the winners! The client can choose not to build or arrange another competition.

Also, clients should trust professionals. In Finland and many other Western international competitions, people with different professional backgrounds compose the competition jury. So far, the jury of the Chinese high-level competition is still mainly composed of professors or architects from major Chinese cities, like Beijing or Shanghai. Although in terms of the architectural field, they might be professional enough. But in a Finnish library competition, for example, the jury may include the director of the library, planning department, construction expert, other specialists, etc. The Finnish jury may cover a broader range of professionals than China. And I suppose this may also be one of the reasons why Chinese clients cannot fully trust their jury.

These are my main comments on clients’ roles. I can tell you more about the client’s problem in the context of your other questions, and the competition issue can be a start. In a way, this competition system is the first package of knowledge and experiences of our Chinese practice. The second is about signing a contract; the third is about how to realize the design. The client serves as a critical part in all these issues, but it is easier to win the competition than to win a good contract!

Yizhou: According to the existing records, the project schedule in China is uncertain and unpredictable; how do you see the possibility of long pauses and sudden starts in Chinese projects?
Pekka: Generally, everything goes theoretically very fast in China. But I used to say that finally, there is often about a similar amount of time left in both Finnish and Chinese projects because there are many pauses and sudden starts in China. This situation is mainly due to unclear decision-making but is also related to the client’s inability to coordinate and manage the project schedule effectively. Since international architects cannot have overall responsibility in China, projects often last longer than expected. It is primarily a problem of money for architectural offices. Like we noticed in Nanjing, the Sino-Finnish Center has been delayed two years. The delay of a large project means we have to keep architects in their positions and even the leading roles like mine. Every year, the delay costs us about 10 percent of the overall contract amount. Even though we only have roughly 50 percent of the design responsibility and work compared to what we usually have in Finland. Large projects involve large amounts of money. Otherwise, the sudden pauses would not affect so much.

Another thing is that I have never had the client’s clear schedule of design and construction process for the whole project. Because when a project is initiated, we often have to start right after winning the competition. And we are told that construction will begin soon and that we need to complete the project in two years. If the project is large, I imagine the client will relax this time frame to merely about three years. For example, in Wuxi Grand Theater, I once shook hands with the then-mayor of Wuxi. They agreed to process this project right after, and we could start the design immediately. But in reality, it took half a year before we signed the contract. And the construction started one year later after shaking our hands.

The client’s original schedule was to finish the project in two years. After two and a half years, the client exerted intense pressure to have this project completed. Then a group of the client’s principal project managers came to our office in Helsinki, and we visited Oslo Opera as a study trip together. We discussed the Wuxi project schedule at the Oslo airport cafeteria. Everybody agreed that it was impossible to finish the building soon; the project would take at least another half year. The group leader told me that he could not suggest to the then-mayor of Wuxi that the project be extended. He meant that I had to inform the mayor the schedule needed to be postponed to three years, and no one else could do it! At that time, China was building its vast high-speed rail network rapidly. However, just around the time of our trip to Oslo, that terrible accident happened. When I returned to Finland, I wrote a letter to the mayor to explain the status quo, our demands, and the necessity to change the schedule. I told him that we should put the security of the workers and many others involved in this project before the schedule. This was a relatively brave way to express the architect’s opinion in the Chinese system, even in a somewhat non-direct method, like a letter. His response to me was, “Mr. Salminen, thank you for your letter; we put security first.” So, we understood that we could extend the project’s time frame to the spring of the following year, and we were given three years of finalizing and construction. No one wrote this schedule revision down anywhere, but everyone knew a new schedule was possible.

Yizhou: What do you think are the challenges posed by the design briefs or
programs in Chinese projects?

Pekka: The main challenge has always been the short design time, which is sometimes incomprehensible. The challenge also comes from very rough space programs. But I must say that nowadays, design briefs in Chinese competitions are much more detailed than 10 or 15 years ago. So, we have been able to see significant progress in this sense. The jury members are high quality, and space programs are better specified. In the competitions in main cities like Shenzhen recently, the design briefs often have been translated into English already. In contrast, the competition program of Wuxi Grand Theater, for example, was very rough and only talked about the functional demands and the total square meters and the main parts of the building. There was no detailed space program, and we developed it with the help of the Finnish National Opera technical director. After Wuxi, the design brief for the Strait Culture and Art Center in Fuzhou became much more specific. In Fuzhou, the client even asked in the competition that architects should give design suggestions and management ideas on how to make the building profitable. In my opinion, one major problem in China is not about how to build but how to use the venue. After Wuxi, I have been invited to give several lectures, such as the Beijing Design Week, to talk about the same issue. We have noticed that the competition program in big cultural building competitions in China are somewhat similar. It means the program formula might come from a higher government guideline.

Yizhou: How do you see the schedules in Chinese projects once the project starts?

Pekka: OK, I think I have answered this question. We go very fast now!

Yizhou: At present, design fees in China are still low. Business manners in China are also different from Western countries. How do you see the dilemma of balancing design responsibility and sustainable business development in the Chinese market?

Pekka: Look, it is almost impossible to solve this dilemma. In China, all significant public buildings must be decided through competition. According to the Chinese rules, there should be at least one international architect team in each important public building competition. Recently, there have been more and more international architects in China. But there is also a tendency for the Chinese design institutes to get better and better and take a more influential part in competitions. Competition is how architects get projects. But competitions can hardly get enough compensation for the costs. Therefore, competition implies risk and can never be the business itself.

In China, international architects cannot sign contracts like the project I did, for example, the Marienkirche Concert Hall in Germany. Although I am a foreigner who won an international competition in Germany, I can sign all the drawings. The client even wanted me to sign a comprehensive high-level contract in Germany, which means it is about the responsibility of architectural design and additional duties in all the other disciplines. In short, in this case, it is also my responsibility to build this design out ultimately. But in China, international architects’ possibilities stop at the schematic design phase according to the regulation. All the influential international architects, let us say, what Zaha Hadid, Norman Foster, Jean Nouvel can do in maximum, are the same as what PES-Architects has
done, for example, in Wuxi and Fuzhou. According to our experiences, international architects usually get 80 to 100 percent in the Schematic Design phase, 25 to 75 percent in the Design Development phase, 5 to 10 percent in the Construction Design phase, and 2 percent to 5 percent in the Construction Administration phase. Roughly, this is how we organize our work to realize challenging public buildings and follow the construction process.

In my opinion, for sustainable business development, you have to work more. For example, when we signed such a contract in Wuxi, we started designing. Then we realized that we could not simply leave the work to others, and we had to follow the design closely. Because Wuxi was, and even now is, a critical project for us. We have to take responsibility and keep working. After accounting, we used twice as many working hours as we had estimated at the beginning. This excessive input also caused us considerable economic losses. Finally, according to our contract, we had collected all the evidence, such as emails, minutes, documents, etc., which can prove our amount of work and put it in four large moving boxes, what we call ‘muuttolaatikko’ in Finnish. After delivering the documents to the client, we had a long wait of four years. In the end, we were only compensated for about a quarter of our additional input.

Yizhou: Who is the local design institute (LDI) for the project? How was this LDI chosen?

Pekka: In Wuxi Grand Theatre, we had a local institute partner United Design Group (UDG), in the competition, but the client did not trust them. And the client directly suggested to me the Shanghai Institute of Architectural Design and Research (SIADR) as the LDI. The LDI was the China Construction Engineering Design Group (CCEDGC) in Fuzhou Culture Center, which invited us to participate in the competition. The organizer asked five prominent institutes at the beginning, and each of them should have a high-level international architect partner who has experience in theater design. Our LDI visited Wuxi Grand Theatre, and after that, they invited us directly. So, that’s it.

Yizhou: How were the design phases and responsibilities divided in this project?

Pekka: I think we have talked about the question earlier.

Yizhou: What has it been like for you to work with the LDI? What is the biggest challenge for you?

Pekka: We were working with demanding projects that needed high-level structural engineers, HVAC engineers, acoustics and theater technology specialists, and even sustainable specialists. But the design institutes in China are often lacking these. This might be the first challenge. For example, like in the airport or any other public place in the West, you usually do not have many visible ventilation openings in the ceilings for supplying air. You typically have a round plinth covered by perforated metal mesh standing on the floor in the airport, and the air comes slowly from there. But the HVAC engineers in the design institutes working in Fuzhou did not even know the displacement diffusing ventilation. When we won our first Chinese competition in Wuhan years ago, a Chinese architect from our partner office did a six-month training in Helsinki. At that time, it was customary for us to get Chinese architects working here. One day, when he saw one of our architects was designing and drawing
something, he asked: ‘What are you drawing?’ Our architect answered: ‘I’m studying the facade.’ And the Chinese architect said: ‘Hasn’t the facade been done in the competition phase?’ At that time, he could not understand that design needed to be repeatedly studied. It seems that the problem has to do with the fact that we have different education and backgrounds.

Yizhou: How would you comment on the work of LDI regarding their architects as well as their engineering departments?

Pekka: I think I have answered this question as well. Then, we can go to question number ten.

Yizhou: How do you see the work of the Finnish architectural office after the preliminary design phase? What measures do you think you need to take to control the final building quality and details?

Pekka: Well, this is an important question. Look, the answer is, you need to take the same measures as in Finland. My point was always the same at the beginning of our China story. When some of my colleagues told me that I had to start thinking like a Chinese person, I told them that if Chinese clients and architects want to achieve the same quality as we did, they must change their ways of thinking and working, not me. It does not help if I change mine. This is my point. Well, I’m not obsessed enough to sell my house and office to get money to achieve the quality and details in the design. This is not only true for Chinese projects but also projects in Germany. But while the client from the German project can pay for the work, China doesn’t have enough design fees to support me to perfect every detail. You have to balance; it is up to you. For example, in the Fuzhou project, we had a lot of communication with the curtain wall consultant. We designed the facade, and the curtain wall company was in a role of helping, and we had complete control of the final design. Of course, you can leave this work to the curtain wall company, but that would be a different result.

Yizhou: How do you see the model of international architects designing in collaboration with Chinese LDIs? Do the benefits outweigh the negatives or vice versa?

Pekka: This question is clear. It is a must to work with LDIs, and there are many things we cannot complete without LDIs. It is advantageous for architects in the EU system because I can sign all the papers in certain European countries. For example, in Germany. I have the stamp, and I am a member of the Architects Association of Berlin. Other European architects can also do that in Finland. But in China, all international architects, even the most well-known internationally, need to work with a Chinese LDI. In my German Marienkirche Concert Hall project, there were more than 20 sub-consultants, and half of them were from Germany. You cannot imagine working in a foreign country without local partners. Except you are so established and get the nationally licensed architect stamp to sign drawings. But this rarely happens.

Yizhou: What are the ways of communication between Finland and the clients and design collaborators during the project’s progress?

Pekka: First, with Chinese clients, they are always some high-level government people. You seldom have opportunities to talk with them directly. Even through translation, this is not the same as direct communication. Second, concerning the design collaborators, it depends on the project. In
some cases, we can talk in English directly with the LDI if the corresponding person can speak English. LDI’s leaders do not speak English in some projects, but this does not prevent us from cooperating well with them. However, I would like to say that the ways of communication in China are radically different from what we adopt in Finland because of the political system, cultural differences, or language itself. It isn’t easy to develop and use similar communication systems like we usually do. According to my experience, you must work with Chinese architects who know China and the Chinese construction system in many ways and find a suitable person who can communicate with clients, collaborators, and influential individuals. Additionally, like all the constructions in the West and China, you must develop good collaborations with the client. It is the key to success. But to do that, the client should trust your professional experience.

Yizhou: English is a foreign language for Finns and Chinese, and the design teams may include architects from multiple countries. How do you see the language issue as a challenge for the Chinese projects?

Pekka: Among the projects I have experienced, I don’t see any problems in technical issues. I think I can solve them. I do not see any human problems, and I think those can also be solved. I see the only real problem is language. Like in the Marienkirche Concert Hall project, I spoke German, the design team spoke German, and the working language had to be German. But I do not speak Chinese. That is the real problem to be solved.

Yizhou: How would you evaluate the work of the architects or managers who are responsible for communication?

Pekka: I have a genuinely competent and experienced project architect Martin, and the responsible communication managers should be Chinese. They are important. We have project managers like Lai and Jing in our Shanghai office. We also establish direct personal connections with China here in Helsinki. I noticed in the Fuzhou project that our Helsinki office needed to have more proper communication with the contractors on the construction site directly. So, we had Li Wei, who had a direct connection with the contractors. Another Chinese architect Yan has many years of experience working in Chinese design institutes in Chengdu and Beijing before coming to our office. Here, especially during the construction process, it was crucial to have them.

Yizhou: How do you see the differences in working habits or conventions between Finland and China?

Pekka: I’ve touched on many aspects of this issue in our previous conversations. I will add just two points here.

First, the building permit process in China is very different from Finland. Although the situation varies from province to province in China, the general principle is that the urban planning department will review the design and grant permission during the schematic design phase. For example, in the Nanjing Sino-Finnish Center project we are currently working on, they believe that the buildings’ entire exterior dimensions and positioning have been fixed as the city planning bureau has approved the schematic design. However, in the Wuxi and Fuzhou projects, architects could still adjust many aspects of the architectural design until the later stages of construction. For architects working in China, if we can
continue the design for the unbuilt part during the construction period, most things can be changed and get the opportunity to refine. This is especially important for Chinese projects that are already short on design time. Now that the basement is finished in the Nanjing project, which has been delayed for two years, it is no longer accessible for us to change some of the design. This constraint from urban planning permission is one of the new features shown in the Nanjing project. In a sense, this is closer to the Finnish system, which requires a higher degree of design completion.

Second, in China, expert meetings are like part of that building permission in Finland. At these expert meetings, the client invites experts from all technical disciplines, including architecture, curtain wall, and landscape, to review the progress of the design. As the chief designer, I will get feedback from the experts in written form. The role and impact of these comments will vary from project to project. In some projects, the experts’ opinions were only like guidelines, and I could pretty much give the final opinion since I have the expertise and power, even as a foreign chief designer. However, some projects might be different. It seems that the views of the invited experts can largely influence and guide the client’s decision. The client’s project manager may lack sufficient expertise and cannot analyze the problem from their situations, thus relying too much on the opinions of others. In this case, this would be unfavorable to the architect’s work.

Let’s look at the next question.

Yizhou: How do you see the time difference between Finland and China? How does the time difference affect the design and coordination?

Pekka: This is a very important question. This would be the same situation with all the international projects. For example, if you have a project in America and your office is in Finland, the time difference is always an issue. Sometimes, I wake up in the middle of the night, and I can check my emails. But for architects in this work mode, in my view, the minimum requirement is to check things first when you wake up in the morning. You will likely have a list of emergent questions that you need to answer within two hours or at least today. Also, you need to realize that the China office is ready to leave at 12 noon Helsinki time, which is 5 or 6 pm local time. Chinese clients can call our project managers in Shanghai at any time, such as 11 pm or on Saturdays and Sundays. In China, there are as many total holidays as we have in Finland. However, our main holiday is the summer holiday which is in July. Then, the Helsinki office is closed, and people are on their summer holiday. Personally, I canceled my summer holidays for the last ten years. Once there was a group of Chinese clients from Shanghai Pudong about three years ago. They visited several Finnish architectural offices and discussed the potential projects. They told us that one problem they saw in Finland was that Finnish architects did not work in July. “You are not working enough!” they said when they were leaving.

Yizhou: Mobile applications have been integrated into the daily life of Chinese people and have also become an indispensable tool in China to communicate at work. What changes have these tools brought to you as Finnish architects and the overall design process? What is your opinion about these tools?
Pekka: In the last two years, I realized that once we got the first contact with the client, people then established the WeChat groups for communication. The client was also in the groups, and everything went there. The communication method is good in some ways because it is effective. Though the language problem is still there, our project managers can be in these groups, and the program can immediately do the Chinese-English translation.

However, during construction time, architects can’t make important construction decisions in such groups. We cannot imagine that important discussions, questions, and answers are made in several seconds. And people need to check afterward what has been discussed. I can say that I have never been in any Wechat group. I have been worrying that serious things can happen in this way. I can tell you an example about the curtain wall design in the Sino-Finnish Center in Nanjing, a part that I have been actively following recently. After our curtain wall consultant gave the final DD design to the client, their director probably noticed that some large HVAC shafts on the facade are not in the same places as shown in ECADI’s (LDI) drawings. Or ECADI’s are different from ours. So, I became nervous since we have worked for a long time with ECADI, so why do we still have discrepancies in our drawings? Did we check them earlier? Finally, I got the answer that our project team had discussed this issue with ECADI during the SD phase and once told them to change. For me, this is not a very smart way to work. We should officially send our dated drawings to ECADI and get their formal reply. ECADI has to make it clear whether they will change it or not.

So, the actual technical coordination and construction are full of these questions. How to control the quality of very complicated buildings? This issue relates to all the particular disciplines. Most of the architectural problems connect with structural issues, HVAC, or accessible design regulations, etc. In such a complex cultural project, it is impossible, in my view, to manage it merely via Wechat groups. Or, if you do it, the chief designers should be in those WeChat groups, or the project leader should be in those WeChat groups, who is responsible or on behalf of the chief designer.

Yizhou: How has the pandemic influenced your work and Chinese projects?

Pekka: We are fortunate to be able to keep working constantly. The pandemic didn’t stop us from entering competitions at all. It did prevent chief designers like me from going to the meetings and presentations in China. Since Chinese people cannot travel and other countries cannot travel to China, these kick-off meetings, middle presentations, and final presentations are arranged by our Chinese partners or via video meetings. So, in that sense, it did not affect our business too much during the pandemic. However, my situation has changed completely. It means more video meetings, zero flights, and no more personal contact with Chinese clients. We finished the Fuzhou project in 2018, and we had a very headache year in 2019, which had a series of international competitions. There was no need to meet any client. So, we did not encounter too many problems. But it means I couldn’t go to China to solve significant issues in the ongoing project, which has a big impact. For example, if there were no pandemics, I would have visited Nanjing several times. Before the pandemic, I usually traveled five to seven times per year to
China, and each time one to two weeks. Roughly every second month, I was in China. So, in this sense, personal contacts are still crucial in building a large project.
Appendix 6

Interviewees
Matti Sanaksenaho, Pirjo Sanaksenaho

Interviewee's Position and Affiliation
partners in Sanaksenaho-Architects

Date
19.11.2021

Place
Sanaksenaho-Architects' home and office, Espoo
Yizhou: As far as I know, the site assigned to each design team was decided by lottery. Can you recall how you felt when you saw the site? Were you satisfied with the site?

Prijo: In the beginning, we got plot 20, but that was not a very good location at the end of the whole area. After we left China, the Canadian company redesigned the master plan of the scenery park. They moved Site No.20 to the beginning.

Matti: Yes, we got the first plot on the lakeside.

Prijo: There are four public buildings, including one designed by Steven Holl, one by Arata Isozaki, one by Ettore Sottsass, and one by Chinese architect Liu Jiakun.

Matti: Our site is the first one after the public buildings. It is a tiny peninsula, and the plot turns towards the lake and touches the hills. So, it was very inspiring for us to get to that site. The client pointed out that it was such a good place, and it was the first plot for the architectural cluster. They decided to use the building at that location as a VIP villa. So, it was a unique situation.

Prijo: The room program was 600 square meters in the beginning. When it became a VIP villa, the client changed it to 800 square meters.

Matti: Yes, I think so. The building became a little bit bigger. It was also Arata Isozaki’s strategy. He wanted to have different types of architecture from other parts of the world to bring the maximum impact of the international architectural field to the site.

Prijo: Once, we lived in a hotel. All of us attending architects had the opportunity to sign together.

Matti: You know the whole exhibition. At that time, a lot of international architectural influences came into China. This exhibition was part of the wave of global architectural trends that China wanted to acquire. Although today it is a bit different.

Yizhou: Can you tell me about your main design concept?

Matti: One of our big ideas concerns people from the forest touching the water in architecture in our villa. Another thing is that when we visited the site with other architects, we were first inspired by the landscape and nature. And we saw an eagle flying there. We thought it would be wonderful to have a platform to look at wildlife and birds. So, that was the idea. And the site was a slope to get the roof terrace. And there was another idea coming in when we were in Nanjing in the evening in a restaurant. There we saw Chinese lanterns, which have beautiful frames. So, we thought that if the building was on the lakeside, it could be like a giant Chinese lantern. In our design, the glass façade facing the lake is also similar to the concept of a lantern.

Prijo: The shape was also a bit like a boat.

Matti: It is good to connect to the site and local culture. In our case, the client saw our building, and they named it a boat villa themselves. In that way, our design is a Scandinavian building done to the Chinese site.

Yizhou: Several different materials are used in the project, including green copper panels on the facade, interior wood panels, and stone for the outdoor terrace. Can you please recall how these materials were decided?
Matti: The outside copper appeared quite early in our minds. When we saw the site, it was a green hill. And everywhere was a green landscape. The architecture could be part of the scenery. At that time, the Turku Chapel was also in the process. In the Turku Chapel, we first experimented with the copper cladding to the building. Also, for the same reason, in Turku, the site was a green and natural environment, and we wanted to adapt the design to the local landscape. The other reason for choosing copper is that it is a long-lasting material; it can last hundreds of years.

Pirjo: It is a care-free material that does not require effort to maintain.

Matti: Yes, care-free and long-lasting solution. We wanted the interior to resemble a cigar box somehow, with the entire interior being made of wood. In Nanjing, we found you have a lot of cherry trees. And we found the material for the floor, walls, and ceilings on the local building market in Nanjing.

Yizhou: What was the client’s perspective on the design at the time?

Pirjo: They gave us pretty much free hands.

Matti: Yes, they were very open-minded.

Pirjo: Although there was a discussion that copper was quite expensive, someone suggested whether it was possible to use steel or to paint a texture similar to copper.

Matti: There was another discussion about the copper material. Our copper in Nanjing is pre-patinated and is already green before installation. The client once asked if we could use regular copper, and then the material got naturally patinated by time. But my answer to the client was that if we choose non-patinated, it would be difficult for us to achieve the desired effect because the exterior walls are tilted. It would be difficult for rainwater to wash the outer walls thoroughly. I told the client that if you wanted a black building, we could use regular copper, and it would not get green so quickly via the natural method. The villa is somewhat different from the situation in Turku, where the roof of the Turku Chapel is narrowed upwards. But even in Turku Chapel, the façade is still black.

Pirjo: Yes, the patinated areas occur in some low parts. Maybe some dogs peed there. So, it turns green there.

Matti: From that experience, we wanted a pre-painted copper, and the client accepted that façade material. Then, the client organized a bidding process including several suppliers for the façade. A Finnish company, Luvata, won the bidding. So, the façade material is actually from Finland. That was not our initial purpose, but it just happened.

Pirjo: We used reddish cherry wood to contrast the exterior green copper for the interior wood. We chose this kind of wood in Nanjing. At that time, it was probably already in the construction phase, so we visited a local building material market that provided various building claddings.

Matti: There was a lot of variety in the building market. It was a vast hall with thousands of materials. It was like a child stepping into a candy store specially prepared for architects to choose. We found a very beautiful handrail in the market, which has a beautiful shape. That was what we brought to the villa. When we went back to Finland, we found the delivery service for the same product. We also used it in the Turku Chapel and the Student Health Care Center. After seeing it in China, we have used the handrail in all our buildings. That is the result of visiting an architect’s candy shop.
Pirjo: But it was long between the design and construction phases. I assume it was around 2010 when we visited the building material market.

Matti: Yes, that was quite a late phase which was already during the construction period. Suddenly the communication broke down, and we didn’t get any information, so we tried to contact the client and ask them. The pause took many years. And one day, we got the fax or email, there was only a short sentence saying that now we are starting the construction work. It was a happy moment for us.

Yizhou: I’m guessing you finished the design around 2004?

Pirjo: Yes, around 2004. 2003 was the site visiting.

Matti: We finished the design between about 2004 and 2005. Then the project was suspended for a few years and finally started again.

Pirjo: 2012 was the year of its inauguration and opening.

Yizhou: Did this opening mean that the entire campus was open at that time?

Pirjo: Yes.

Matti: When we visited the construction site, there was a surprising moment. We found that the concrete structure was there, but the lake was no longer there.

Pirjo: Yes, the water had disappeared by that time.

Matti: It was an artificial lake. We were very sad because our main idea was about people coming to the forest and touching the lake. It is about the process of how you come to the water. That was our idea. The copper cladding had covered the building when we next visited the place, and the lake was back. We were delighted. May that was the construction thinking they could build the villa better because they could operate from the lakeside.

Yizhou: How do you see this project in your career? When you look back on this experience in Nanjing, how would you comment on it?

Pirjo: It was unique. We were happy that we got this commission. In 2008, the Ordos 100 project in Inner Mongolia was a bit similar, and the client never realized that project.

Matti: The Ordos project became nothing. So, it is also why we are happier about the villa in Nanjing. Because the project became a real thing, it was a wonderful experience for us. We felt it was very privileged for us to be there.

Pirjo: The first time we visited China was in 2003. China has changed a lot after that. This project is our first experience as Western architects doing design in China.

Yizhou: Chinese clients often serve as a key part of the design network. How would you comment on the client’s role in the overall design process?

Matti: In our case, Mr. Lu was the director coordinating the whole process. As architects, we got the free hand and a lot of air to make our design. So, that was the most significant output from the client for the project. So, they are open-minded to architects, which leads to an excellent architectural solution.

Pirjo: Yes, the client and the curator, Isozaki, trusted us. Several parties were involved in this project, including the client, the curator, and the Canadian landscape architecture firm. I think Mr. Lu trusted the curator and the architects very much.

Matti: The client’s input was excellent. We felt we got a good client in this case. Because usually, when you do projects like a villa, the client has a lot of
Yizhou: According to the existing records, the project schedule in China is uncertain and unpredictable; how do you see the possibility of long pauses and sudden starts in Chinese projects?

Matti: Not so much. Because we designed this in 2004 and have developed the design into a detailed level. We completed the entire design in one phase at the beginning. And we made a thick book of drawings including all the materials. So, that was our statement to the client as a result of our design. Then, we just needed to wait for the construction. In that way, this situation did not influence our design.

Pirjo: The design for the project was mainly in 2004. The design phase for the tendering drawings was small. But it seems in 2005 there was a groundbreaking ceremony. And then it stopped for many years.

Matti: Yes, I think so. Now, I remember the sentence the client sent to us a couple of years later: “Now we start to do the foundations.” There were some years between the groundbreaking and the ceremony.

Yizhou: Did the more specific room program in the project present a challenge to you?

Matti: Quite a limited requirement. So, it was about the site and the size of the building. In that sense, we got a free hand to do it. The primary demand for us was designing a VIP villa.

Yizhou: You divided the specific rooms based on your design and experience?

Matti: Yes.

Yizhou: How do you see the schedules in Chinese projects once the project starts? Did you have enough time to do the design at that time?

Matti: Yes, I think we had enough time to design for this project.

Pirjo: But for the Ordus project, another villa, we were in a hurry and the design time was limited.

Yizhou: Did you receive the design fee you were supposed to have? Did you get paid?

Pirjo: The fee altogether was something like 28,000 US dollars. It was like the design fee for a small or medium-size family house in Finland. A client can use this amount to pay for designing a smaller project in Finland. Anyway, we got the payment for our work. And the project got a lot of publicity. We were excited to do it, and there were several famous architects in the same group.

Matti: I understood that in 2003, the sum was like big money in China and little money in Finland. Now, it might be different. But at that time, we understood that the fee was limited. You could not compare it to domestic prices because the two were in different economic situations at the time.

Pirjo: But it was in all our experiences in China, and you always got money in cash, and you got the envelope with cash.

Matti: Now, I remember that the first telefax from Isozaki wrote that he invited us to this partial exhibition and partial design event to this group. I think he mentioned how much the architect would get, and he wrote, “of course, you can say yes or no.” It was so wonderful to group with other interna-
tional architects and Chinese architects. So, it was an excellent time to spend in Nanjing. The atmosphere in the group was very high, and it was very nice to see our colleagues.

Yizhou: I remember seeing a picture of you with Steven Holl once. You also recently invited him to give an online lecture at Aalto.

Pirjo: We got to know Steven Holl when he was designing Kiasma, and he was like an old friend that we met again in China.

Matti: There were also Chinese architects, like Zhang Lei and Ai Weiwei.

Pirjo: Was Ai Weiwei also there at the time?

Matti: Yes, he was there. He designed a villa, and he was also on the site visit.

Pirjo: Oh, that is true.

Yizhou: Who is the local design institute (LDI) for the project? How was this LDI chosen?

Pirjo: They introduced us to several options, and they told us that we could choose.

Matti: We could pick up one of them. I remember we were very puzzled about whom we should choose. In the beginning, we chose one, which was a very business-oriented large company. When we called the responsible architect, she said she had to talk to her boss and the client about the arrangement. Then, it took us some time to wait. After that, the client informed us that they had picked the co-architect, namely Southeast University Architectural Design and Research Institute. So, the client finally made the decision.

Yizhou: How were the design phases and responsibilities divided in this project?

Pirjo: We have produced all the working drawings.

Matti: Yes, we had the ready design book and all the drawings. When the co-architects came to this project, they took our book and started to study. And they did the Chinese version of the drawing set. They translated the design into Chinese. But when they sent us the Chinese version of the drawing set, we rechecked them and found they strictly followed ours. The architects we worked with only performed inspections based on local Chinese building regulations and translated the drawings. But the design was the same.

Pirjo: We did the drawings in A3 size. And they sent to us the drawing package like this, which we had checked, they were done exactly as we designed.

Matti: The only change from the negotiation with the local architects happened because the client changed our design earlier. We had the swimming pool on the villa’s roof terrace. The client wanted to have it inside because of Chinese culture. So, that was the change we made. That was from the client’s side. While for the local architects and engineers, the difference was that we had the elevator, which was initially going to the roof terrace. But the client wanted to have a lobby in front of the elevator. So, we changed to make the elevator only run inside the building and not go up the roof terrace. That was the only change. The project ran very smoothly because a structural engineer in Finland could check and advise us on the structure during the design phase. He proposed cast concrete as the primary structural type. And he made the preliminary structural wall. We did not have to change that much because we had already studied it so well during our early design phase.

Yizhou: What was the biggest challenge for you during the project?

Pirjo: Maybe the communication sometimes just ended suddenly. We did not
know what was happening in China and the building site. And they did not inform us, and they stopped the construction for some reason. And we did not receive any emails about this situation. After some months or years, some messages came again.

Matti: Maybe it’s also because of the cultural differences. At that time, we needed to adapt to that way of communication. So, it took us some time to understand that.

Yizhou: What has it been like for you to work with the LDI? Did the two sides work well with each other at that time?

Pirjo: I think it went well.

Matti: Yes, it went well. The co-architects sent us now and then the snapshot of the building site pictures so that we could follow the construction work.

Pirjo: At that time, there was no this kind of Teams or Zoom for remote connections. Although there was software like Skype, this communication just went through emails mainly.

Yizhou: What measures do you think you need to take to control the final building quality and details?

Pirjo: We got the possibility to do the design quite independently. In Helsinki, we made all the drawings and specifications in our office.

Matti: We made about 200 drawings.

Pirjo: Yes, we draw all the details by ourselves.

Matti: The fee was not very high, but we wanted to invest in the design because we knew the project would get publicity.

Yizhou: Did you have any problems communicating these detailed drawings to LDI?

Pirjo: I don’t think we faced any problem at that time.

Matti: The quality of the work is very high.

Pirjo: The only thing that might be difficult was choosing specific building products. We can select products from websites or catalogs when we design buildings in the Finnish context. But in this case, the products we wanted might not be in the Chinese market. That was also one reason we were in that building material market because we needed to replace the things in our drawing.

Yizhou: How do you see the model of international architects designing in collaboration with Chinese LDIs? Do you think this collaboration is necessary?

Matti and Pirjo: Yes, it is necessary.

Pirjo: The local architects know the language, and the communication with the construction site is important.

Matti: Also, it was a way to know the Chinese building regulations. For example, we once considered the issue that the villa touches the water. You cannot build like that in Finland since the building is so close to the water. At that time, we asked our Chinese partner, and they said there is no rule in China to prevent that. So, we got the courage to build near the water. And for the roof terrace, the elevator does not need to reach the roof, which is different from the Finnish handicap regulations. So, these were the things we got advice from China, and they were helpful.

Yizhou: What are the ways of communication between Finland and the clients and design collaborators during the project’s progress?

Pirjo: It was via email.

Matti: Yes, emails and pictures.
Pirjo: We also visited the site a few times at our own expense.
Yizhou: I found photos of the building taken by a professional photographer.
Pirjo: Yes, we also paid for the photographer's travel.
Yizhou: English is a foreign language for Finns and Chinese. How do you see the language issue as a challenge for the Chinese projects?
Pirjo: We had a translator from the client-side who was good in English in the meetings. Of course, it might happen that you were not sure about some specific words or terms. But after all, it was not a big problem for us.
Matti: I did not recognize it was a problem either.
Pirjo: Yes, because there was somebody who could translate for us.
Yizhou: Did you have any coordination person in your team?
Pirjo: No, because our office was relatively small, we had a project architect, but we did not have a communication and coordination position.
Matti: We coordinated things by ourselves as partners.
Yizhou: How do you see the differences in working habits or conventions between Finland and China?
Pirjo: I have to say that when I travel to China and design in China, I realize that the construction issues are the same everywhere. And the professions in the architecture industry are the same. I am inclined to think that architects' work is the same everywhere.
Matti: This approach reveals the common issue of how to build a building. When I talked to a Chinese engineer, I recognized that he just talked like a structural engineer in Finland. So, language might not be the issue here, and people in the same profession are so similar.
Yizhou: Have you had face-to-face meetings with the engineers?
Matti: We had a couple of times in China with the engineers.
Yizhou: Do you remember when these meetings took place?
Pirjo: It was 2004. In 2003, we went there with all the other architects at the same time. The second time we visited there to check the design process which was going on, and the others were not there. Each architectural team visited there on their own time.
Matti: Yes, we met the local engineers and co-architects at that time. The engineering teams included air conditioning, electricity, and structure. I think they were all from the local design institute.
Yizhou: Were there any challenges or difficulties in working with them at that time?
Pirjo: The project was suspended for several years. When it restarted, they made some interior furnishing decisions, for example, the choice of the lights. We were not involved in that process, and we would choose some other lamps if we had the possibilities. So, somehow, there were some issues of not-communicated choices about products finally.
Yizhou: There is a need to maintain communication between the two sides for many projects between Finland and China. How do you see the time difference between Finland and China?
Pirjo: We communicate mainly through email. If the client or the co-architects send emails in the evening, we can read them in the morning. So the issue is less serious for us.
Matti: I think the communication in our project may not be such a headache like the large culture projects, for example, in PES. The pace in our case was slower. So, it was not that headache. It went very well.
Yizhou: I want to know Finnish architects' opinions about the latest communica-
Siften tools, like WeChat. Did you use a similar device at the time?
Pirjo: I have WeChat, and I have used it with my Chinese contacts in the university's teaching, for example, organizing the courses and workshops with Tsinghua University. So, I communicate via WeChat with them. But at that time, we did not use WeChat.
Matti: I remember that we were in Nanjing during the last Chinese competition. The local Chinese people and architects asked me: “Are you on WeChat? Let’s make a connection!”
Yizhou: Do you have any other projects in China? How do you see the future development in China?
Pirjo: We were in the Ordos 100 project, which involved many international architects. We participated in the Sino-Finnish Center competition in Nanjing. Let's see if there will come more. We are not so active as we are now both professors in universities, we are not searching for new projects.
Appendix 7

Interviewee: Tuomas Silvennoinen

Interviewee's Position and Affiliation: partner in PES-Architects

Date: 21.12.2021

Place: PES-Architects’ Office, Kalasatama, Helsinki
Yizhou: Chinese clients often serve as a key part of the design network. How would you comment on the client’s role in the overall design process?
Tuomas: In my opinion, it varies. At the moment, when we are working on the Nanchang project, the client is super active and micro-managing all the details. There was hardly any discussion with the client in the ICON Tower project because everything was filtered through the local design institute, SWCDI. And the client was, somehow, quite distanced to us in every way. There were only two things in the ICON project where the client firmly guided the project. One was that they suddenly decided to do a concert hall underground; the other was they wanted to do a new entrance area to the building. Besides, there were no other strict comments or guidance.
Yizhou: Did the client provide you with sufficient reasons for these changes?
Tuomas: Which project?
Yizhou: The ICON project.
Tuomas: Yes, if the reason was, we wanted a concert hall. But it was a good client in many ways.
Yizhou: According to the existing records, the project schedule in China is uncertain and unpredictable; how do you see the possibility of long pauses and sudden starts in Chinese projects?
Tuomas: They are something that we have to live with all the time. The schedule is not very clear; it’s unpredictable. There can be long pauses also in Finnish projects. But when projects are starting, they are better organized.
Yizhou: What do you think are the challenges posed by the design briefs or programs in Chinese projects?
Tuomas: Now, the programs in Chinese projects are very good. There is no problem with that. In previous times, they were short and undetailed. At first, this was a problem because we were used to following a given program. And when you don’t have a program, you do everything yourself. It feels strange, but now the programs are usually well made.
Yizhou: How do you see the schedules in Chinese projects once the project starts?
Tuomas: Schedules are always very optimistic, and then the real problem is that timelines are postponed because we have learned to cope with tight schedules. And we have learned how to do essential things instead of unnecessary things to follow the schedules. But the real problem is how they are postponing. We had spent lots of resources to get to the target, and the target was moved. That’s the problem.
Yizhou: At present, design fees in China are still low. Business manners in China are also different from Western countries. How do you see the dilemma of balancing design responsibility and sustainable business development in the Chinese market?
Tuomas: I see that we have a chance to do a project to be economically sustainable. The fees are not that low, and the whole thing is about how fluently it can go on because our task is smaller than in Finland. So I see if the schedules and projects could be more predictable, the fees could be acceptable.
Yizhou: Who is the local design institute (LDI) for the ICON Tower? How was this LDI chosen?
Tuomas: That was SWCDI in Chengdu, and it was chosen by the client. It was a competition for three Nordic architectural offices, and the client decided that SWCDI would be the local design institute before the competition, and SWCDI helped every competitor.

Yizhou: Was the competition in 2009?
Tuomas: Yes, it was 2009.

Yizhou: How were the design phases and responsibilities divided in this project?
Tuomas: We divided the project with SWCDI right at the beginning, and we agreed on one percentage for each phase. And we follow that quite well.

Yizhou: What has it been like for you to work with the LDI? What is the biggest challenge for you?
Tuomas: It was the best cooperation in China ever. We worked with SWCDI. And it was only because of the personal connections and language skills of the contact persons. They were like perfect partners. There were two young architects who were working with me. It lasted from 2009 to 2017, which means I got to know these guys quite well. And we are still in contact.

Yizhou: In other articles about you, I read that you saw several Chinese architects growing up. Are you referring to them?
Tuomas: Yes, these are the guys.

Yizhou: How would you comment on the work of LDI regarding their architects as well as their engineering departments?
Tuomas: Now, is it about the general situation, not only the ICON project?
Yizhou: Yes.
Tuomas: It depends a lot. But basically, I would say that our connection to their engineers is always very thin, and it can be deeper for their architects. Compared to working in Finland, we cooperate with engineers in-depth, which is not the case in China. I don’t know how it is nowadays, and it can be in different circumstances and projects. But in general, I think the connection between engineers and architects in China is not that deep. They are more working like architects have done their work, and then engineers come. They work on different layers in a project. In Finland, we are integrated.

Yizhou: How do you see the work of the Finnish architectural office after the preliminary design phase? What measures do you need to take to control the final building quality and details?
Tuomas: I think that, first, we have to do more work in the DD phase than would be necessary for regular Chinese projects. Because we would not have a chance to go to that level of detailing, it can come later in construction drawings in China. In the DD phase, we have to create the language of materials and details as the guideline for further design. This is very important. And after that, I think the key is how good a connection you have with the local design institute in the end. Keeping with the quality we expect will create extra work for us.

Yizhou: How do you see the model of international architects designing in collaboration with Chinese LDIs? Do the benefits outweigh the negatives or vice versa?
Tuomas: Well, I think the only way for us to work in China is to partner with LDIs.
Otherwise, we cannot work in China. It is impossible. And the interesting thing is how long we are needed. Because we are working in China, it is not only about business but also about cultural exchange. It is like creating understanding, which is really important. And this kind of design work is a good way for that.

Yizhou: It is common for different companies to cooperate in the current architecture industry. In Finland, how do you see this cooperation?

Tuomas: You mean working in China or general?

Yizhou: I mean, what is the difference between this cooperation in Finland compared to China?

Tuomas: The difference is that we do not have architectural partners in Finland. It’s very seldom that we work with other architectural offices. Like the Helsinki Garden, a very large project is divided into two companies, which is OK. But the reason is different. In Finland, we work side by side. Not so that first we are doing, then a local design institute continues to work after us and let’s say, somehow translating our work. If we work, for example, in France, then we might need the same structure. We would need a local company working with us. Or if somebody is coming to Finland and might need a local partner to work in the Finnish market.

Yizhou: What are the ways of communication between Finland and the clients and design collaborators during the project’s progress?

Tuomas: Well, I think the first way is to have meetings which can be informal, and we can talk like this. Second, our Shanghai office represents us. The third way is more or less official letters where we are asking or complaining about something. Or whatever is the reason. I think these are the main things. We don’t, for instance, send emails to clients because we need Jing or somebody else to translate.

Yizhou: English is a foreign language for Finns and Chinese, and the design teams may include architects from multiple countries. How do you see the language issue as a challenge for the Chinese projects?

Tuomas: It’s definitely a challenge. But I think it’s less challenging for us because we have people like you who know Chinese working in the office, and it becomes a bigger problem for those who start to work in China.

Yizhou: How would you evaluate the work of the architects or managers who are responsible for communication?

Tuomas: Maybe this is something important when you are working abroad. You have local people who do know the language and the culture. And they are not like consultants of the office, but they are part of the team. I know Lai is Chinese, or Jing is Chinese, but first of all, they are part of our team members.

Yizhou: How do you see the differences in working habits or conventions between Finland and China?

Tuomas: They are big. But I think the differences are getting more even. The main thing is that we work less in Finland, and people may work more in China. It might be as simple as that. But that is an interesting question, a topic for several master theses. Another study that I’m not so sure about is, is it better to work or study a lot than to work or study a little less? Which is finally better? Which makes you a better architect, or better professional, or better father, or a better person in general? What are the skills that people need to develop? What kind of time is necessary to make a good design? Is it just about work, or is it a holistic approach to
your life in general? I do lots of work, but I try not to work on weekends because I think if I do not work on weekends, the subconscious work anyway, and I am a better architect on Monday if I have done something else on Sunday and Saturday. But that’s the most significant difference.

Yizhou: As someone who has studied and worked in Finland, I also had to think about explaining such a difference to the Chinese.

Tuomas: People would think you are just lazy. And people are lazy. It is a big problem for the whole Western world. You should push yourself and do a lot of things. But it would be best if you did them for the right reasons, not because of your mother or father saying that, like you have to do this and that. You should have your personal ambition.

Yizhou: How do you see the time difference between Finland and China? How does the time difference affect the design and coordination?

Tuomas: Yes, in a way, it affects. But I am a very positive person. I think that it can bring beneficial things, for example, we can have two shifts. When we finish our work, we can send our materials to China. And the office in Shanghai can work in the morning which is still evening to us. I think this is something you can use.

Yizhou: Mobile applications have been integrated into the daily life of Chinese people and have also become an indispensable tool in China to communicate at work. What changes have these tools brought to you and the overall design process? What is your opinion about these tools?

Tuomas: First of all, my opinion does not matter because the world is changing, and the point is how you can get the best of it. Like, I wouldn’t say I like it when it rains, but it will rain anyway. So, I need to have an umbrella or stay inside. It is the same with WeChat. It is always good to have new ways of direct communication; it is a perfect thing. Let me see my WeChat. Ok, only 26 messages come from the last half hour. So, I don’t read them, which means there is probably a kind of inflation in the communication. You don’t care anymore. If you get one message a day, it is very valuable. If you get 250 messages a day, they are not helpful anymore. There can be some information in the flow which may be substantial. But I cannot follow them. I am sure that the people responsible for the projects will follow these messages carefully. Those are like conversations in a new way, and those have to be accepted.

Yizhou: How has the pandemic influenced your work and Chinese projects?

Tuomas: For China, it doesn’t affect so much, and it makes it also easier since we could have had all the same channels and ways of work before the pandemic, as we have now, but we didn’t use them.

Yizhou: Are you saying the pandemic has also brought some positive aspects to the work of architects?

Tuomas: It’s a positive way in that sense which has taught us new tracks to work with a vast distance and time difference. Without the pandemic, we wouldn’t have any remote meetings with our Chinese clients. I was supposed to take 10 to 15 trips to China this year, spending a lot of time, expending energy on travel, and increasing my carbon footprint. And that didn’t happen. Then, impressively, we have more direct contact with our Shanghai office and clients than we did before the pandemic. Otherwise, it is very irritating and causes a lot of harm all the time. But there is a positive aspect in this sense. It is like a psychological thing, that when you have the only possibility to use remote tools, you use them. If there are other ways, then you would not use them.
Appendix 8

Interviewee: Markus Wikar

Interviewee's Position and Affiliation: partner in Geometria

Date: 10.11.2021

Place: Geometria's office, Helsinki
Yizhou: Can you tell me a little bit about the background of the Moganshan project? How did you get this project?
Markus: Let’s see if we have some pictures of the Moganshan project. The Moganshan project primarily came from my Chinese friend Jing. I used to work with her in the Finnish Pavilion Kirnu in 2010 at the Shanghai Expo.
Yizhou: I’ve heard of Jiang Jing. She came to TaiK before me to study industrial design. But I have never met her. I heard that now she has her own design consulting company.
Markus: She is now doing e-commerce and is also involved in the import business as well. In this Moganshan project, I also paid her consulting fee. We met in the city of Zhongshan in southern China. I took the flight to Hong Kong and took a ferry to Zhongshan. She is my good friend, and one year Jing brought her friends to Finland. I took them to my holiday home in Lapland. At that time, we went to Tallinn, and we continued traveling to Stockholm. A friend of Jing’s came to Stockholm to have lunch with us. He worked for a Danish design company and was on his way back to Shanghai. He and I took the same flight back to Helsinki. Then we got to know each other a bit, and I showed him our projects. A few months later, a friend of his, a woman looking for a resort project, was looking for an architect for her friend who owned the Moganshan project. We had never met each other. So Jing’s friend put me in touch with his friend, who eventually connected us for the Moganshan project. The area we were working on was only a part of this complex. If we expand the map, it could go all the way up to here. By the time we got to the site, some buildings were already built. We were given a total of 25,000 square meters. In the first phase, we sketched out a circular structure that we call the Super Villa. There were some smaller buildings. At first, they wanted us to do the project for free. We told them we could do it, but we couldn’t do it for free. After negotiating a design fee of about 30,000 euros, we did the first draft of the design. After that, we went there to present. We signed a contract for the whole area for 460,000 euros.
Yizhou: You don’t have to tell me the exact number.
Markus: But it is not a secret either. Because it seems you are concerned that Finnish architects might not be paid enough in China. You can always negotiate. The exact number might not be so interesting, but it’s about a half-million euro project. It is not a lot of money compared with the construction budget.
Yizhou: OK.
Markus: We have learned it from Jing or other Chinese friends. You always meet a middle manager trying to be challenging. According to my experience, they are always trying to be tough for negotiation. This is just a game, which is different from what Finns are used to. One day in the meeting room in China, we met a minor boss and negotiated the design fee. They said: “200,000 euros! We got a British architect who is more famous than you, and he is cheaper.” And we said: “500,000 euros!” We put access to what we have done to the screen, and we told them we have five different
building types. So, we told them 200,000 would not be realistic because it would not cover our cost. We could not do this project with this sum, and we would lose money. The price was based on our calculation, and we had about ten people working on this project. So, in my experience, as Jing told us, the middle managers who were bargaining needed to get a slight price reduction. Then, they are happy. Of course, your design has to be realistic and cannot have some outrageous design fee.

Yizhou: Were there two companies on the project at the time?
Markus: Yes. An architect and an interior designer run another firm. I used to know the architect, so I asked them if we could do this together.

Yizhou: So, you invited them.
Markus: Yes. The contacts were through me. We had two separate contracts, completely the same contents in both contracts. I took care of the invoice. I always have two invoices, one for our company and one for the partner company. So, that was how this project started. As you probably know, in China, one of my Chinese friends once said that developers in China like to use architects as their slaves. So, it is inhuman how you have to work. The workload is very intense.

Yizhou: In a way, it is.
Markus: In my opinion, there is so much money circulating in China, and they need to find a way to invest in projects. In our case, it is a lovely area and hilly landscape. I think the local government requires those who want to develop must meet all the criteria. For example, it must be a tourist project, and it should have a special architectural quality.

Yizhou: That was the demand from the local government.
Markus: I think so. Before us, there was one German company that had done some sketches for this area. They were like preliminarily sketches, no design, more like quick concepts. I think that investors, in this way, buy ideas to try to convince local governments and ask them, “Is this good enough?” It is only the tool that they need to obtain the land. Because here, we also did not see the building in the end. We got paid according to our contract. Though the last payment, which was about 15,000 euros, we did not get. The client company sold itself to another investment company during our design phase.

Yizhou: You mean the land?
Markus: Yes, everything. Well, you can’t buy land in China. But you can buy projects. So, it’s just business. Maybe with our design, they can increase the value of the project. They started construction before we finished our design part. The foundations for the steel structure were already coming up on the hill. We were in contact with them at the time, and then we suddenly didn’t hear anything. When we tried to contact them, they said.” Ah, we’ve been bought out.”

Yizhou: So, your client was sold?
Markus: Yes, to another company. When we were still designing, they were sold to a group that mainly did medical business. When we were ready to do the construction, they were sold to a prominent Chinese developer who did a lot of skyscrapers in Shanghai. I cannot recall the name.

Yizhou: Was that a construction company?
Markus: It was a developer.
Yizhou: The large company became your client.
Markus: They bought everything.
Yizhou: Did they change everything?
Markus: No, they couldn’t change everything then because construction had already begun. The location of each building was already locked on the plan.
Yizhou: I heard that some of the buildings have been realized.
Markus: Yes, these six buildings. Let’s see if we can find some photos. For example, there’s no traffic going through here. This is the highest point, and you can see the view. So, we put the most luxurious villa here, in a hilltop park.
Yizhou: This is what you called Super Villa.
Markus: Yes, they are 500 square meters each. Because we were given a square, and it would be very dark in the core area. So, we decided to do an atrium in the middle, and you could arrive from the hill. These were the first round designs for which they paid us 30,000 euros. These are a bit like hotel rooms. They are either split into two or four apartments. When you ask me here what the central concept is. The main idea is to provide space for people from Shanghai, where there is air pollution. But the place is like a summer night in Finland, and there is no noise.
Yizhou: I understand this location in Zhejiang province is a nice place.
Markus: Yes, the views are what they sell. Because you need to have a view while enjoying a hot bath, each building has a bathtub. You have restaurants and activities in the area, such as horseback riding, swimming, etc. The exterior walls are made of bamboo-molded fiber concrete. We think it would be good to enter from here when you cross the bridge because it is a hilly landscape and you see the hills already here. Let’s say if you have two families driving together, you can combine the living rooms. That’s what we came up with. Initially, we came up with more roof shapes. But the client wanted them to be flat. This has been built according to our design.
Yizhou: Did they use wood for the structure?
Markus: No, it turned into concrete. Let’s see some photos. It’s interesting to see them using our handrail design. I don’t know how much they have changed the building. In China, it’s often annoying that you can’t see your design when it’s finished. Otherwise, we can use it to show the actual thing as a reference case. We spent a lot of work time, lasting several years, doing this. That’s the challenge in China. At least you have to be aware that you will get paid because you never know if the client will finish your project. I have heard this from all my colleagues and architects who have projects in China, not just from my experience. This is the main challenge of working in China.

We want the design to have some mixed characteristics. Some aspects could be Chinese, while others could be, let’s say, Finnish or Nordic. And the client said you have to do Nordic architecture. At one point, we wanted to look at traditional Chinese wood construction and tried to find some elements. But the client was not interested. When we design a building, we try to create a human and pleasant environment. We think this is the language of architecture in a universal sense. For the interior design, the client wanted it to be Scandinavian. We have a Finnish sauna here, Finnish and Danish furniture. We wanted to use natural materials, stone, and wood. And you can see the natural colors of the materials here. For the facade, it might be more challenging because of the sun. We are open to using any material, such as precast concrete slabs, because it
has to withstand the sun. The idea is to make something out of wood carefully. If you do it carefully, you don't have to make it complicated. The landscape is very imposing so that the building can be relatively simple. The client also wanted wood, and as always, they were thinking about the cost.

I think I have answered your question about commercial reality.

Yizhou: Yes, I think this part is more than clear.

Markus: The next question is about the client's role. I think doing architecture is always about finding a good client. Like Rainer Mahlamäki, he was the head of many international competitions. World-famous architects came to him with their proposals, Norman Foster, Bjarke Ingels, etc. He often says we also have world-famous architects in Finland because they always get a good client and do something together. So, when you ask the client's role, it's crucial. If you do not have a good client, you never have a good project. In China, I think we have a common goal with our customers to work towards. Before we came to this project, they had already sold many square meters of buildings, locations, etc. So, it was not an open brief. We know how to make the architecture, the site layout, the aesthetics and the choice of materials, etc.

Schedules in China are demanding because things always happen so fast. Although, in the end, I don't think construction will happen so fast. Investors tend to be in a hurry, which is also the case in Finland. For example, investors have been thinking about a project in Lapland for several years, and once they are financially ready, they ask, “Can we get the drawings now?” When it comes to construction, clients are inexperienced. They say that now we have many customers coming, let’s build something fast. Also, this happened at Moganshan. The building didn’t go as quickly as initially planned. A few years later, when we had left, they finished the project. So, the rush at the beginning usually doesn’t benefit anyone. I don’t know where it comes from. And it’s not just my experience, you can hear about it from everywhere. Things usually happen in this way.

Yizhou: I understand that. I've been involved in projects where there was a similar situation.

Markus: China is also changing because so much has been built, and they can focus more on things that can last longer. I think we’re going to see more fine architecture in China because the pace of construction has slowed down a bit.

Yizhou: I think in China, the building quality is different from project to project. For example, if you check I.M.Pei’s Suzhou Museum, the quality is really high. But it often depends on the input of architects.

Markus: It seems that many Chinese are benefiting from rapid growth and real estate speculation. My friend Jing is essential. We trust each other completely. It is easy for us to understand each other. As a person, she is unambiguous and precise. She can tell us what our clients might be thinking, get that information for us, and help us review contracts. So if you’re thinking of going to China, you probably already know what I’m about to tell you, namely that it helps if you have a good local partner. In our case, the partner was Jing. She didn’t ask us for anything, but we paid her a good consulting fee.

Yizhou: Did Jing also help you in daily communication with the client?
Markus: No, not in this case. We had Hao to do that. Before Hao, we had Yihan. It is fun to have a mixed team. One time, I was in Zhongshan. Then Jing spent a week with me and the client, the lock manufacturer Ming Men.

Yizhou: That was the exhibition that you have done. I saw this work on your website.

Markus: Yes, we have done more exhibition design work than what we show on our website. Let’s see here.

Yizhou: Were these exhibition design projects also through Jing’s connections?

Markus: Yes, she knows these clients in that case. Before we had Geometria, we started working on those. She went on these trips with me. Then she started her own business. She had her design consulting firm and had several designers in her own office. She does user interface design for car manufacturers and graphic design. Then she completely transformed to do e-commerce. Once Jing told me that she won a Chinese design competition. There was a coaching process for the young designers and entrepreneurs. During one of these coaching events, I was also there. One prominent Chinese e-commerce company leader told Jing to forget the design consultancy idea since that business model can never grow big. This leader suggested that Jing could start producing goods, copying some of the European designers’ work, and once her company became more established, she could make some of her designs. But Jing is not interested in copying anyone’s work. China is a vast market. Even if you produce only one small niche product, there will still be many people who need it.

Yizhou: Do you think the design fee in China is low?

Markus: Maybe, but we had a relatively good contract. So, there is nothing to complain about our project.

Yizhou: Oh, you have a different situation.

Markus: It may be true. We told them if they wanted us to work on this project. We need you to pay according to the Finnish standard. Because otherwise, we would go out of business. Sometimes, architects sell their works too cheap. It is also about negotiating a price. Of course, you are not forced to do anything you do not want.

Yizhou: There may be times when architects can only work longer for a better design.

Markus: Yeah, Yeah. But in Finland, we have fixed design fees for specific design phases. And then, we have prices for additional work, which is billed by hours. But in China, the situation usually will not happen. The client often tells us that you already have your money; why are you asking more? We somehow knew this situation could happen in China, so we prepared for it when we made the initial contract and ensured it would cover our cost through many phases. When we approach the end of a contract, we can negotiate a new contract for the following steps. So, the contract phase is crucial.

The contract also stated that if a dispute arose between the parties, it would be settled in the local court in Shanghai. Of course, we are not going to let that happen. Our client is a prominent medical group. We don’t have the financial resources to support a lawsuit, and we have no chance to win. So, it’s all about having a good connection with the client and getting money from them. The design fee is often divided into five payments, with the very first one being the largest. You may have to let
most of the design fee be paid in the early stages because you will likely lose your latest payment. They don’t need anything from you anymore. Therefore, we see the last payment as a bonus. If you don’t get it, then the money you’ve already got covers your costs.

Yizhou: I understand that can happen in China.

Markus: It’s very annoying to get money from them. When you send them invoices, they always reply: “Yes, yes, it’s no problem. We will need a stamp from a middle manager or something like that.” But you still cannot get anything soon. So, you need to hire one person to do this. Once there was a 10,000 euros invoice we sent to them, which was already a one-month delayed payment for us, and we were going to run out of budget. They need to pay us because several people are working on this project and we need to pay them salaries. We had no delays in paying wages, but soon we needed to see money coming in. We told them that if they did not pay, then we would stop the work now. On the same day, we got the payment. We had never been paid that quickly before. After that, I heard they called Jing and said that the Finns were rude; how could they speak to us like that? I think Jing replied that they needed to cover their costs, and it was normal. This is strange because this is a small amount of money for them. They were developing a vast resort project. We never understood where this need came from, someone holding onto their money. They knew they had to pay. We were in the process of designing a resort. They did not complain that we had not delivered anything because the design fee is always connected with the progress of the design phases.

Yizhou: I understand that. Like when the schematic design is over, you will get a payment.

Markus: Yes. The question about the local design institute’s work. Well, we did not have a local design institute.

Yizhou: Really?

Markus: No, we had a construction company. We could have a good collaborator, which is called Crownhomes. They design wooden buildings. But they had been used as a consultant, and they did not get the project. It’s annoying because the boss or the guy running the Moganshan project had a childhood friend who had a construction company, and he wanted to give this project to his friend. They had such terrible engineers. I suppose they did not even look at our drawings. For example, we made a curved staircase out of thin metal, and we sent them the details. But on the construction drawings, it turned out to be a straight staircase. We had a sheet metal roof, but in their drawings, it became a brick roof. Their drawings had nothing to do with our design. So, it was very annoying.

Yizhou: So, what did you do?

Markus: We had to send the drawings back and ask them: “Have you ever seen the project we’re working on? Where did you get your drawings from?” Maybe they just used some catalog products. Somebody doesn’t care about your proposal. The next question is about the design phase. Well, in our case, it was based on the typical design phase moving forward. And then, the question is about how the responsibility is divided. We were working with Crownhomes. They were good consultants, and they made some construction-type suggestions and so forth. But I don’t think Crownhomes got the contract from the client, so we didn’t have a chance
to start the project. But I visited Crownhomes afterward, and it's a competent company, and they ordered some designs from us. We hope to work with them in the future.

Yizhou: They did a lot of wooden constructions.

Markus: Yes, they are probably the only company in China currently doing wood construction on a large scale. Well, number 13, what measures do you need to take to control the building quality. Well, you just need to be active in communication. It depends on the client. I cannot answer the next question. Generally, I haven't won a large project in China. I cannot answer question number 14 either. It always depends on the people who you are working with. You need to have a common goal then everything starts to work. You agree on what you want to achieve and then you have a target for working together. Then it is simple to have a good outcome.

The next question is about the way of communication. Well, the communication is through WeChat. It's also annoying because we are talking instead of sitting down and thinking about what you want to say, like writing an email. We get the information one sentence by one sentence. So, it ruins your morning work time. Because you'll spend all your time answering tiny questions, it will help if you hire someone to do the chatting. Otherwise, you can only design in the afternoon, which in China is the evening. This will take a lot of time. It would help me if I knew Chinese. If you don't speak Chinese, then you should have Chinese people in your team. If you work in a technology company with some young people, the situation may be different. But in the construction field, your clients are likely to be older people who usually don’t speak English.

The next question is how you evaluate the people who do the communication. In business, it's good to be strategic, not just agreeable. It would be better if you also had a higher perspective on the big picture. Well, I am not sure about question number 18. We may have good quality in our construction business in Finland, but it also depends on the developer’s requirements. But in China, there are many variations. Some quality is good, and some are very poor. It’s hard to generalize.

The next question is about the time difference. Yes, there is a time difference. But it is not a big difference. It is not like Steven Holl, who is in New York and has a twelve-hour time difference. You need to hire two people, one is for chatting, and the other is in charge of asking for money. Yes, it isn’t delightful being constantly online. It is not only a Chinese problem but a global one. It makes us unable to think. They are designed to be additive. I don’t have anything in progress regarding future plans, but I’m working on getting new projects right now.

Why do I like working in China? Besides the fact that there are a lot of challenges, I consider myself to be a curious person. It’s not so much from a business perspective, but it’s the possibility to interact with people from different cultures that enriches your life. It’s not limited to China either, which makes my life more enjoyable. Even though I say there are a lot of challenges there, on the level of human interaction, for example, in China, we go to restaurants, and I find that the people there are very nice.

Yizhou: When was the last time you were in China?

Markus: It was about three years ago. It was a studying trip, and we went not only to China but also to Korea.
Appendix 9

Interviewee  Wu Hao (吴淏)

Interviewee's Position and Affiliation  then architect in Geometria

Date  31.10.2021

Place  Wu Hao responded to the questions via WeChat.
Interview Transcript

Yizhou: Chinese clients often serve as a key part of the design network. How would you comment on the client’s role in the overall design process?
Hao: The clients had a video conference with us almost every two weeks, mainly to check the completion status of each project phase. In a way, the clients played the role of supervision and monitoring. While we were on the construction site, the client played a role in establishing contacts by helping us primarily with the hotel management company, construction contractor, and material suppliers.

Yizhou: According to the existing records, the project schedule in China is uncertain and unpredictable; how do you see the possibility of long pauses and sudden starts in Chinese projects?
Hao: Some Finnish architectural offices might not be sensitive enough to initiate Chinese projects, planning approvals, building permits, regulations, and fire codes. These companies might not communicate with their clients frequently enough, so they may need a supporting design office in China to help them process planning approval documents, track the client’s building approval application documents, and play a bridging role.

Yizhou: What do you think are the challenges posed by the design briefs or programs in Chinese projects?
Hao: Our project contract was relatively clear about the requirements for submitting documents for each phase specified in the design brief. The challenge for us was that there was a lot of rework on the design tasks, such as the building lot not being approved, and then there was the replacement of the site; the increased workload on the interior design part (materials and furniture selection, additional number of renderings). The client did not mention these additions in the design brief and the contract. The problem may appear in the late stages of the project.

Yizhou: How do you see the schedules in Chinese projects once the project starts?
Hao: The Chinese collaboration team is very committed to the schedule, and we have been following the progress requirements. However, there will be a lack of adaptation to the Chinese working model in the design and construction coordination phase. Sometimes, the Finnish team cannot respond quickly enough to the Chinese side’s modification requirements, which may even affect the later cooperation and create some misunderstandings between the two sides. The Finnish team needs to ensure the quality of the submitted documents, so there will not be a strict time commitment. The Chinese collaboration team, on the contrary, usually has lower requirements for detailed designs. And most importantly, the Chinese partner expects that there should be a quick response from the Finnish side.

Yizhou: At present, design fees in China are still low. Business manners in China are also different from Western countries. How do you see the dilemma of balancing design responsibility and sustainable business development in the Chinese market?
Hao: When the Finnish team enters the Chinese market, they need to have the Chinese design team assist in preparing the design documentation, the building applications, and the coordination work, so it is difficult for me to
say that I have specific feelings about the responsibility. As for the issue of sustainable business development, I think Finnish architects need to understand and prepare design contracts and building applications in advance. At the same time, Finnish architects need to be more sensitive to schedule during the construction phase, especially for small and medium-sized Finnish firms.

Yizhou: Who is the local design institute (LDI) for the project? How was this LDI chosen?

Hao: The corresponding cooperating design institute, namely Suzhou Crownhomes (苏州昆仑绿建), was decided by the client. Before I entered this project, the Finnish office cooperated with another LDI. But the cooperation was not very smooth as far as I know. As to why this new LDI was chosen, I am not particularly sure about the details.

Yizhou: How were the design phases and responsibilities divided in this project?

Hao: Geometria was responsible for the planning, architectural design, landscape design, interior design, furniture selection, and coordination with Chinese structural and construction teams for the 64 villas in the Moganshan Scenic Area. The Chinese partner company was responsible for applying planning and building permits, producing structural design, architectural working drawings, etc.

Yizhou: What has it been like for you to work with the LDI? What is the biggest challenge for you?

Hao: The biggest challenge should be the alteration of the design details and joints in their construction drawings. We have good cooperation with the structural design team. Still, the Finnish designers were annoyed by the unauthorized changes to the original design details in many construction drawings regarding construction coordination.

Yizhou: How would you comment on the work of LDI regarding their architects as well as their engineering departments?

Hao: The primary cooperation is structural. We had a very good relationship with Suzhou Crownhomes, where the feedback from their architects and structural engineers respected our original design ideas. I suppose their boss himself was working on structural projects in France before; he understood the demands of the architectural team. The ideas presented in the structural optimization session were also good, and we did not encounter any problems.

Yizhou: How do you see the work of the Finnish architectural office after the preliminary design phase? What measures do you think you need to take to control the final building quality and details?

Hao: Because we are a small office, we are flexible in the design development phase, and the teamwork is well divided. We worked with Viiri-Ylinenpää Architects, who were responsible for part of the first phase of the high-rise resort apartments and the interior design work. And Geometria, who were responsible for the single-family villas, including architecture, landscape, and interiors. The design development phase was also very efficient. The client liked our proposal for the timber frame architecture. As I mentioned earlier, as a Finnish architectural office, it would be important to understand and prepare design contracts and planning approval documents if anything is needed. And Finnish architects need to be more sensitive to the cooperation of all parties in the later stages of
construction, especially for small and medium-sized Finnish firms.

Yizhou: How do you see the model of international architects designing in collaboration with Chinese LDIs? Do the benefits outweigh the negatives or vice versa?

Hao: It’s not easy to say; each has its own needs. The Finnish office needs to enter the Chinese market, and the Chinese client needs some marketing effect from Nordic design. This is only for the Moganshan project.

Yizhou: What are the ways of communication between Finland and the clients and design collaborators during the project’s progress?

Hao: We would then conduct bi-weekly remote meetings via Zoom and contact from time to time via WeChat. The contract provided two visits to the construction site, and the client paid the cost of each visit. I was involved in the second visit, mainly coordinating the construction documents and material selections. We were there for eight days, discussing drawings and documents in a temporary office on-site and visiting the construction site. The foundation had already been laid at that time. We also talked about the next possible project, revising the construction drawings, and making adjustments. Geometria went with three people, two partners and me; two partners from Viiri-Ylinenpää Architects were also on that trip.

Yizhou: English is a foreign language for Finns and Chinese, and the design teams may include architects from multiple countries. How do you see the language issue as a challenge for the Chinese projects?

Hao: Both Geometria partners speak good English and have no problems with English. When it came to the Chinese side, I needed to translate and take over the communication between the Finnish team and the structural and construction teams. The Chinese side may have been a bit irresponsible and did not bother to hire their own translator, so they let me translate for them.

Yizhou: How would you evaluate the work of the architects or managers who are responsible for communication?

Hao: I mainly coordinated with one person in charge of the client’s operation department and one engineer from the structural design department. The person in charge of the client’s operation team pushed very hard and put a lot of pressure on us. The preliminary tasks of the project were still done according to the design brief. They did not exceed the original scope, mainly because many drawing updates and modifications in the later construction stage would be beyond the scope of the original design brief. The engineer of the structural department was very cooperative, and we had no problems during the design coordination.

Yizhou: How do you see the differences in working habits or conventions between Finland and China?

Hao: I think it’s the tolerance of the design. After the design development stage, if the construction contractor modified some design of the construction drawings without permission, several architects in Finland are zero tolerance. The client’s demand was the speed of construction, which would tolerate some minor defects, and even some facade materials could be changed. In the beginning, we chose to use Accoya Woods on the facade, but because the price was too high, all were replaced later.

Yizhou: How do you see the time difference between Finland and China? How does the time difference affect the design and coordination?
Hao: These Finnish architects know China very well. They are basically on call 24 hours a day during the project and will deal with any problems as soon as they wake up. The time difference does not affect us, but we will negotiate with the client on the timing of the design submission.

Yizhou: Mobile applications have been integrated into the daily life of Chinese people and have also become an indispensable tool in China to communicate at work. What changes have these tools brought to you as Finnish architects and the overall design process? What is your opinion about these tools?

Hao: Tencent Meeting or using Wechat for video conferencing is very convenient. Before, we used WeChat video to communicate or Zoom, when it is still available in China. Communication becomes more convenient, and it may provide more opportunities for Chinese clients to express their opinions. The two Finnish architects would answer their questions very actively. Yet, I suppose the pressure on Finnish architects may also increase.
Appendix 10

Interviewee Xu Zongwu (徐宗武)

Interviewee's Position and Affiliation then the chief architect of China Construction Engineering Design Group Corporation (CCEDGC) in the Strait Culture and Art Center (SCAC), the executive general manager in CCEDGC

Date 23.2.2022

Place Xu Zongwu responded to the questions via text.
Yizhou: How do you see the difference between Chinese and foreign working habits? Do the working methods of international architects have implications for Chinese design firms?

Zongwu: Generally speaking, there are still some differences between the two sides in terms of work, which are manifested in many aspects, such as the rhythm of work, depth of design, understanding of regulations, methods of expression of drawings, control of work time, etc. However, after nearly 30 years of experience in Sino-foreign cooperation, CSCEC, as the world’s largest general contracting company, has a lot of experience in communicating with international companies, and PES is also a very global company and has done a lot of implementation projects in China, so this difference is easier to handle than expected. PES is one of the best architectural firms in Finland, and the way PES works is a good reference for us to improve and develop. I think my team and I have also learned a lot. In particular, my team and I have been to Finland several times for short periods to work face to face with our colleagues at PES in-depth, which has had a very positive impact on improving our integration.

Yizhou: What is the biggest challenge of working with Finnish architects?

Zongwu: The first one should be the language and the way of thinking. After all, most young architects and engineers are good at English. PES has arranged Chinese staff with professional technical backgrounds to communicate with us, such as Ms. Lai Linli from PES Shanghai and Mr. Li Wei from Finland, who both have played a perfect role. In addition, we are all technical people, so the communication is very smooth. Second, there is a time difference problem due to geographical reasons, which makes the time lag in technical communication often. Still, of course, as our work is carried out, we have found many ways to solve this problem. Then, PES’s perception of some technical measures and related laws and regulations in China is somewhat different from ours. However, with a high degree of mutual trust between the two sides and Prof. Salminen’s confidence in me, we solved all these problems very well. Of course, the biggest challenge we faced together was how to bring out the best of our respective strengths to bring out this beautiful, perfect, and highly complex work. Well, I think the most incredible experience in completing this work with such a high degree of completion is the solidarity and mutual trust between the Chinese and foreign sides. I can say without exaggeration that this cooperation of ours should become one of the excellent examples of Sino-foreign cooperation.

Yizhou: How do you see the design model of international architects working with local Chinese design institutes? How to evaluate the division of design scope between global and Chinese parties?

Zongwu: In fact, from the beginning of the National Center for the Performing Arts, international architects and local Chinese design institutes began to cooperate. There are many models, the vast majority of foreign parties to do the conceptual designs, schematic designs, or even design developments, and then the local design institute to deepen the design. This time, our collaboration is also different from the traditional Chinese
and foreign collaboration. I am very grateful to Prof. Salminen for his trust in me personally and for defining the scope of work by contractual agreement. My design team and I could participate in the design very early. At the same time, it also stimulated the enthusiasm of the Chinese architects, and I think it is inseparable from this operational mode that the design work can be landed and handed over so smoothly in the later stage. Many Sino-foreign collaborative projects end up with poorly finished results; the situation is closely related to the overly strict division of working scopes and the inability to integrate. Therefore, I have a very positive attitude towards this kind of in-depth cooperation in the whole process and procedure of the Strait Culture and Art Center.

Yizhou: The Chinese design institute is in a role to ensure the completion of the project, while the international design team attempts to perfect the design. What were your main challenges?

Zongwu: In my view, the essential feature of this cooperation is that the design institute is no longer just a simple role in guaranteeing the completion of the project. At the beginning of the design, there was a deep, harmonious, and friendly cooperation between the Chinese and international partners. As the Chinese chief architect of this project, our original intention is to make the work perfect, as the same goal will, of course, bring the ideal result. I must state that in this cooperation, we always insist on maintaining the professionalism of Prof. Salminen as the chief architect and his right of one negative vote, and we also thank Prof. Salminen for his respect and trust in me as the Chinese chief architect, which allows me to have enough say in the design and construction site. As the chief architect of the Chinese side, I need the professional and technical ability to be recognized by Prof. Salminen and to be able to communicate with him to help him deepen his architectural works. At the same time, we need to control the technical depth and feasibility of each specialty of the project according to the schedule of the project, as well as the communication and cooperation with the client, the contractors, the material suppliers, various government departments, external design examiners, and the local fire department. The biggest challenge I faced was facing the client's numerous requirements, dealing with the different technical situations that arose on-site, and, as the project manager and registered architect, assuming the primary legal responsibility for all safety.

Yizhou: How do you see the process of working with different disciplines from the internal perspective of a Chinese design institute? How do you evaluate the work of other fields (e.g., structure, HVAC, etc.)? What are your main challenges as the architect leading the project?

Zongwu: Since the Chinese team is the same technical team that I used to do Tangshan Grand Theater and Tangshan South Lake International Convention and Exhibition Center, the cooperation of all professionals is very smooth during the whole design process, mainly based on a mature working team, everyone's working habits have been very harmonious, and there is also the trust of all project managers and disciplines to me. I am delighted with the work of the other fields in my team, which is not a false statement but based on the evaluation of the use after completion and the awards in the last two years. In addition to the architectural design awards that Prof. Salminen and I have declared in China and abroad, respectively, structural design, supply and drainage, air condi-
tioning, electrical engineering, and the BIM and intelligent design teams have won first and second prizes at all levels of evaluation in the Chinese architecture industry, Beijing city, and CSCEC Group.

As the lead architect for this project, the challenges I faced should be divided into multiple tests of internal and external, technical and non-technical. Internally it is how to make everyone work without the burden and outside influence. Externally I need to make each partner have enough trust in our team and the team’s work. On the technical level, I, as an architect, have to form a deep mutual trust and severe cooperation with Prof. Salminen. I need to contribute the maximum technical support to present a perfect work together. The non-technical side focuses on dealing with people, multiple government departments, laws and regulations, and funding and materials. It is more complicated than the technical side and tests one’s ability.

Yizhou: In the Strait Culture and Art Center, what do you think is the relationship between CCEDGC and the client? How do you see the role of the client from CCEDGC’s perspective?

Zongwu: This also has to be said from two aspects; as the project’s general contractor, the CSCEC consortium is in a cooperative relationship with the client, which we often call the PPP model. For China Construction Design Group, our relationship with the client is somewhat different from the traditional A-B party relationship. We are working with CSCEC Strait as a consortium with the owner regarding the working model. However, in terms of work content, we are a general design contractor, not just a simple construction drawing design company, so we have more responsibility. From our point of view, the client this time should be a relatively good one, both for Prof. Salminen and for me personally, with enough respect and, technically, enough expertise to be able to guarantee us a good result this time.

Yizhou: Is there any difference in the client’s attitude when dealing with international and Chinese architects?

Zongwu: As a senior architect in China, I believe that in China, it is a common problem in the industry to treat foreign architects differently from domestic architects, which is reflected in the bottomless and blind trust of foreign architects and the innate skepticism towards Chinese architects. For our project, at the beginning of the design, the client often said: “We have a lot of trust in Mr. Xu’s personal skills,” which I interpreted as a distrust of my team, including me, the whole Chinese team. To reverse this mistrust, I would like to give my most tremendous thanks to Prof. Salminen, who expressed his trust and support to me many times on different occasions and clearly expressed his recognition of my working ability and the rights of supervising the site. Of course, as the project proceeded, the client saw my team’s working capacity and working attitude, and finally, the client and the architects became good friends and colleagues. This high level of trust also ensures a high degree of completion of the work.

Yizhou: How do you view the design fees and the allocation of design fees in this project? Will CCEDGC achieve profitability in this project with international design firms?

Zongwu: We should view this issue from two aspects. First, as far as the allocation of design fees, CCEDGC has made maximum concessions to PES to protect the enthusiasm and focus of the international partner. Second,
when my team went to Finland to work, I saw the financial investment, personnel investment, attitude investment, consultant investment, and the work content of PES on this project. I think that the design fee of PES is a more reasonable demand. For CCEDGC, due to the tremendous support from our group’s leaders, a lot of overheads were waived, and it seems that the project should be able to break even. For my studio, we have done the calculation; there should be a deficit of 3~5 million RMB, which is mainly manifested in a large amount of travel and post-production, as well as the additional expenses of other design companies, such as curtain wall deepening design, interior construction design, etc., all of which exceeded our initial budget. All of these excesses were supplemented by other projects in my studio.

Yizhou: What do you think is the significance of participating in such a complex project for Chinese design firms?

Zongwu: As the world’s largest infrastructure country and the country with the highest concentration of the most complex projects in the world today, China’s architectural companies and contractors are already far ahead of the world in terms of technical capabilities. Still, as knowledge-intensive design companies, their current position in the world is not very high. Whether as a Chinese company or a Chinese architect, building our country and actively constructing and implementing complex buildings is inevitable. It is also an unavoidable requirement for us to improve our technical capabilities. As far as the CSCEC enterprise itself, participation in such a complex project is essential to build our team’s technical expertise, train our high-level technical staff, and enhance the influence of the enterprise in the whole Chinese construction industry.

Yizhou: How would you rate the position of the Channel project in your career?

Zongwu: I have been in the business for nearly 30 years, and I have lost count of the number of projects I have done, both big and small, with some failures and successes. Still, for various reasons, the achievements are generally less than the failures, but each project is my heart and soul, and they all occupy an important place in my career. The Strait Culture and Art Center would be the number one project of all my projects and the one I am most proud of, significantly impacting my career. So I am grateful to Professor Salminen and all my colleagues in China and abroad.
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This doctoral dissertation focuses on Finnish architects’ practices and discourses in China amidst the rapid urbanization. It illustrates the intricate relationship between Finnish architectural design and elements encompassing China’s urban scale, social fabric, and cultural context. This study extends the exploration of Finnish architecture and enriches aspects of design thinking, cultural exchanges, and organizational structures within modern transnational architectural practices.

For architectural researchers, this dissertation provides detailed insights into transnational architectural practices, a rarity in many studies. Its uniqueness stems from the author’s firsthand involvement, offering a comprehensive view of these practices. For architects engaged in such practices, this dissertation offers a broader perspective, enabling reflection and critique of the purpose-driven, intuitive decisions inherent in design processes.

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