

Architecture for "Other". China's eclectic pragmatism in developing countries within the framework of the Belt and Road initiative

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Abstract

This dissertation explores China's architectural aid in less developed countries as a form of development cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Beijing-backed BRI aims to enhance cross-border trade, infrastructure development and economic cooperation. It was initiated in the context of China striving to take up a new global leadership role and make its development models internationally competitive. China presents an architecture of austerity that is culture specific and environmentally efficient and is characterized by rapid hi-tech constructions, reduced investment and more beneficial prospects. BRI depicts an innovative, organized institutional framework for construction projects to enhance collaborative architecture in which different donors and their counterparts on the receiving side engage at various stages, cooperate, exchange knowledge and demonstrate an exciting mechanism through which architecture and knowledge flow.

In the present work, I critically examine the cross-cultural architecture exchanges under BRI as a development aid discourse: How architecture models from China appropriated, diffused and translated in the local context (receiving side) in a "contact zone" between two cultures or countries, and how Chinese Architects have negotiated their professional practice to follow the guidelines of the Chinese State Authorities (NDRC & MOFCOM) as well as the guidelines, expectations and suggestions of the local state authorities. The Chinese architecture aid projects are detached from the dominant architecture ideologies, finding a path in architecture production that can integrate the local context with Chinese expertise and facilitate rational cross-cultural knowledge exchanges with native technical experts. The architecture projects are characterized by the teamwork of architects and the role of complex professionals or other actors at different levels, from project designing and decision making to execution. They exemplify a new, eclectic but pragmatic architectural approach not only to satisfy domestic requirements but also to comply with the prerequisites of international architecture discipline.

The dissertation consists of two case studies one is Gwadar city of Pakistan located in South Asia and other is Djibouti city of Djibouti located at Horn of Africa both are positioned at

critical node of BRI. The Gwadar city case study consists of four architecture projects while the Djibouti city case study consists of two architecture projects. In every case, a particular feature is explored to highlight cross-cultural issues and negotiations.

This study underlines the complex and intensely collaborative work mechanisms, architecture specificities and performative and pragmatic architecture projects in the context of national and international architecture debates. The research follows a peculiar scientific inquiry, intending to shed new light on the effects of globalization as well as the transcultural processes within specific sociocultural and political processes.