

## Reviews of Xing Ruan's Books

### ***Confucius' Courtyard*, Bloomsbury, 2021**

What can I say? This is a truly magnificent work of scholarship for the understanding of China, one that I have been waiting for—China as a civilization at the center of which is the courtyard, an architectural feature that embodies the doctrine of the mean set in a material world compact enough to be readily accessible to reason and lived with due deference to the social rites and rules, under Heaven's benign patronage, a world that modern society has vigorously transgressed in recent decades, leading us to wonder, what follows? Unlike many scholarly books Xing Ruan's comes to life, almost jumps off the page, because it draws not only on traditional sources in history and philosophy, but also on charming narratives of how the Chinese people actually lived. It is a book for the scholar's study and for the hammock by the seashore. It is a triumph that I envy! – *Yi-Fu Tuan, J.K. Wright and Vilas Professor Emeritus of Geography, University of Wisconsin*

An enchanting story paradoxically woven round a void - the courtyard - it offers a fresh account of the transformations of the Chinese city. – *Joseph Rykwert, Paul Philippe Cret Professor of Architecture Emeritus, University of Pennsylvania*

This humane and intelligent study compares courtyard buildings of widely different ages and geographies. Deep insight into architectural world-building is the result. Apparently empty, the courtyard is full of potential, actualized historically in ways that still make sense, even today. – *David Leatherbarrow, Professor of Architecture, University of Pennsylvania*

Xing Ruan grasps a fundamental architectural element as an insightful window for understanding broader issues of society and history. Ruan's elegant prose soars as he weaves nuanced observations, classical Chinese writings, and buildings throughout the world into a cohesive narrative.” —*Ronald G. Knapp, SUNY Distinguished Professor Emeritus, State University of New York New Paltz*

### ***Allegorical Architecture*, The University of Hawai'i Press, 2007**

“[Ruan's] recognition of the limitations of the text metaphor – that texts have their own special conventions and do not embrace practical or symbolic action as architecture does – is long overdue. [...] By helping to demonstrate that meaning in architecture was traditionally carried as much by the ritual resonance of its spaces as by its objects, and again no less in the circumstances of its construction, Xing Ruan has done us all a service.” – *Peter Blundell Jones, The Architectural Review (UK, May 2008)*

“This is a rich, multi-layered, and provoking book, and one which displays a huge heart. The clarion call is that ‘meaningful engagement of the inhabitants with their built world requires conscious efforts from the designers as well as from the inhabitants themselves. And indeed there is artifice on both sides that needs to be

learned' (p.x). How both groups of participants are to re-educate themselves in developing this 'artifice' remains the challenge that this relevant, impassioned work lays before us." – *Christopher Cowell, Journal of Oriental Studies (Vol. 17, 2007, Stanford University and University of Hong Kong)*

"This is the first book I have seen in the English language that provides a detailed and sophisticated study of architecture as imaged and lived by minority groups in South China. [...The author] argues for a lived, allegorical, and bodily understanding of architecture as opposed to simply a textual one. [...] This book, though not without flaws, succeeds admirably."

"I very much like the way he introduces several sections of the book by telling the reader a story or anecdote from Western architectural history. It is a compelling approach as it highlights the difficulties of looking at heretofore understudied groups in Chinese society. It also highlights the fact that a focus on a vernacular architecture is fast becoming an essential way of going beyond a textual understanding of human beings and the structures they build to define themselves." – *Michael J. Walsh, China Review International (Vol. 14, No. 2, Fall 2007, University of Hawaii Press)*

"Starting again with a modernist reference – to Le Corbusier's famous *pilotis* – the author delves into the wider distribution, prehistory and history of the type in what is for this reviewer a fascinating exploration. He constantly keeps in mind his theme that 'A type of dwelling, after all, is only materialized in its making and becomes legible in its inhabiting'. This is as true in its way of Le Corbusier's *pilotis* as of the Dong pile house."

"[The readers] will surely be richly rewarded by consideration of both the documentation of Dong architecture and the subtle and multi-faceted methodological approach to the study of vernacular architecture." – *Philip Denwood, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies (2008, 71:385-386, Issue 2, Cambridge University Press)*

"By providing a 'thick description' of the Dong's physical and social spaces and comparing them with the dwellings of other ethnic groups in China and Southeast Asia, Ruan presents some refreshing and provocative arguments." – *Samuel Liang, The Journal of Asian Studies (67:01, 2008, Cambridge University Press)*

"A fascinating book, illustrated by equally fascinating black and white photos and line drawings, mainly by Xing Ruan himself." – *Paul McGillick, Indesign (Vol. 30, 2007)*

"A beautiful and interesting exploration of the architecture of southern China steeped as it is in its cultural context. Ideas of public space and the contribution that buildings make to civic interactions in these cultures give much food for thought." – *Virginia Kirton, Architect Victoria (Summer, 2007)*

“[T]he author’s original arguments and insights, and the very attractive illustrations with which he accompanies them, should equally entertain and instruct readers curious about China’s fascinating building traditions.” – *César Guillén-Nuñez, Chinese Cross Currents (No.1 Vol.7, January 2010)*

“*Allegorical Architecture* is a truly remarkable achievement in that it is both a detailed ethno-architectural study of a small minority group, the Dong, in China, and also a work of far broader scope, one that boldly and subtly addresses major issues in built form and life, such as the importance of architecture as conveyor of meaning in the absence of written texts, the impact of majority culture on minority culture and vice versa, change within tradition, tradition as change, and the implications of these findings and concepts for modern architecture and the modern world.” – *Yi-Fu Tuan, J.K. Wright and Vilas Professor Emeritus of Geography, University of Wisconsin*

“This may seem a specialized study of a minority group in South-East China – whose partially transcribed language that he learnt while studying their buildings – yet Xing Ruan has used this marvellous miniature to illuminate the complex relation between many other societies, their daily life, their rituals and ceremonies, and their buildings. But the book is much more. Xing Ruan extrapolates from his miniature a timely and very important reminder of how building and behaviour interweave and how essential some understanding of that complex and vital relation must be for the future of the built environment.” – *Joseph Rykwert, Paul Philippe Cret Professor of Architecture Emeritus, University of Pennsylvania*

### ***New China Architecture, Periplus/Tuttle, 2006***

“Xing Ruan unpacks the conceptual and historical complexities that are entangled within modern Chinese architectural and discusses the lack of attention it has received from the West.” – *Architecture Australia (May/June 2006)*

“[Xing Ruan writes] succinctly, but with sufficient passion and detail to enable the reader to appreciate the architecture in the book without losing sight of the broader picture, including the historical dimension. [...] The critical tone of Xing Ruan’s introduction is continued in the project descriptions which are exemplary – extensive, personalised and critical. [...] This is a fine book.” – *Indesign (May 2006)*

“The West has largely ignored Chinese architecture for almost a century. Xing Ruan’s *New China Architecture* shows why it now demands a discourse of its own.” – *Business Times Singapore (21 July 2006)*

“*New China Architecture* is the most professional one of all.” – *The Nation (Thailand, 13 May 2008)*

Reviews of *New China Architecture* have also appeared in: *Silkroad*, Hong Kong Dragon Air inflight magazine, June, 2006; *Library Journal*, Vol. 131 Issue 13, 2006; *Space*, Singapore, Issue 2, 2006; *Bangkok Post (The Magazine)*, 11 May, 2006;

*Today*, 2 Feb. 2006; *Condé Nast Traveller*, UK, Feb. 2006; *The Peak*, Malaysia, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2006; *Lifestyle + Travel*, Thailand, Vol. 12, March/April, 2006; *Her World*, Singapore, April 2006; *Blueprint Asia*, October 2007; *Travel + Leisure Australia*, November, 2007; interview with ABC Radio National *Artworks* Program, New Chinese Architecture, 22 April 2007  
(<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/artworks/stories/2007/1902807.htm>)

***Topophilia and Topophobia: Reflections on Twentieth-century Human Habitat*,  
Routledge, 2007**

“This book’s somewhat daunting title belies the fascinating essays contained in it – indeed, the subject itself is fascinating. [...] But basically it is about whether you like or loathe where you are at, the role of the environment in nomos-building (that is, a sense of self or identity) or its role in alienating us. [...] All up this is a very stimulating survey of how our environment shapes us who we are, how it effects our well-being, and indeed our creativity.” – *Indesign* (Vol. 35, November 2008)

***Blich Voller Nield, China Architecture and Building Press, 2005***

“From what is shown here BVN has worked hard at context and region. This sense of effort is bolstered in the two essays, which are direct and engagingly personal – particularly in Xing’s, where he makes a good argument for a sense of care in the firm’s buildings and response to circumstance.” – *Conrad Hamann, Architectural Review Australia* (Vol. 96, 2006)