



# Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China

*Peter G. Rowe, Seng Kuan*

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Built around snatches of discussion overheard in a Beijing design studio, this book explores attitudes toward architecture in China since the opening of the Treaty Ports in the 1840s. Central to the discussion are the concepts of *ti* and *yong*, or "essence" and "form," Chinese characters that are used to define the proper arrangement of what should be considered modern and essentially Chinese. *Ti* and *yong* have gone through various transformations -- for example, from "Chinese learning for essential principles and Western learning for practical application" to "socialist essence and cultural form" and an almost complete reversal to "modern essence and Chinese form." The book opens with a discussion of cultural developments in China in response to the forced opening to the West in the mid-nineteenth century, efforts to reform the Qing dynasty, and the Nationalist and Communist regimes. It then considers the return of overseas-educated Chinese architects and foreign influences on Chinese architecture, four architectural orientations toward tradition and modernity in the 1920s and 1930s, and the controversy over the use of "big roofs" and other sinicizing aspects of Chinese architecture in the 1950s. The book then moves to the hard economic conditions of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, when architecture was almost abandoned, and the beginning of reform and opening up to the outside world in the late 1970s and 1980s. Finally, it looks at the present socialist market economy and Chinese architecture during the still incomplete process of modernization. It closes with a prognosis for the future.

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