An Interview with People’s Architecture Office

We very much need to integrate technology and urban construction to ensure the city’s resilience. We must work to integrate technology and social impact to ensure the city’s resilience.

“We are still in urgent need of a flexible urban construction way, like the prefabricated system.”

Photography: Zhou Rui

PIPO/People’s Industrial Design Office (PIDO) was founded by He Zhu, James Shen and Zeng Feng in 2010. With the belief that “design is for the masses”, the studio focuses on social impact through design. PIDO/People’s Industrial Design Office (PIDO) is China’s first architecture practice in Asia certified as a B Corporation and serves as a model for social entrepreneurship. The studio’s works have been honored with multiple Architectural As Awards and Red Dot Awards and the World Architecture Festival Award.
360°“預製系統”會適合南方那些多雨潮濕的地區嗎？是否會受到天氣的影響？

答—北方考慮的東西更多，如防雨、防腐、防潮、防寒、雪災還差等不利的環境，所以相對來說南方就容易一點，比如預製系統推廣的架空，目的是讓城市生活更流暢，讓自然環境或建築物的原有的形象都能夠延續，新的人能夠更往上，用上空來發展。這種情況在北京都很難，因為北方本來採取架空的方法，有漏水、防風，比較難搞這種過於流化的社會。

360°—近幾十年來，城市化使得舊文化，古建築一直面臨著種種的現象，面對新興文化衝擊，舊城改造、更新等話題，如何通過設計更好地融入新興文化，讓城市更和諧發展？

答—不能否認現在存在著的社會現象就是老房型不太會被尊重，大家都喜歡新的房屋。老的東西就不要了，這確實是很大的問題，在中國另外一個很大的問題就是處於一些不太對的、推陳出新的東西。因為它推陳出新的只是真正新的，不是全新，創新，那種有技術含量、有價值的新的，而僅僅是一些外觀之類的新的。現在的人不太注重對歷史信息或歷史價值的保護，都是比較簡單粗暴地拆掉舊建築，我們應該推出一個更新的架空，仔細分析研究舊的東西，提出新的方式和架空的架空的，用新的東西來改變舊的，這個方法難做到，簡單粗暴的拆掉或者簡單粗暴的推陳出新的東西是舊的東西。這是兩個極端，真正的情況就是你要尊重歷史，尊重文化，但是從中提出新的東西，一個是被歷史文化裹著走，沒有什麼，未來是新的，我們覺得這個是很關鍵的。所以我們做的不管是預製系統裡面的插件塔、插件家、架空，還是其他的設計，都要嚴格按照這個要求。坦白來說，我們不希望依賴現有的東西，而是要以一種獨立、客觀的方式來做事情。
5.6. People's Canopy

The design references expandable street food canopies popular in Southern China.

The two-story high expandable roof structure on bicycle wheels can seat up to 10 cyclists. It is designed to collapse to the size of a double-decker bus so that it can be pedaled from one location to another. When parked, a canopy can open like an accordion to 12 meters in length, or a span of 10 meters to cover entire streets.

Principal:
He Zhe, James Shen, Zang Feng

行道

“行道”參考了中國南方常見的兩層帳篷，形狀類似為自行
行車輪為頂，頂層為不同的立柱或鐵架， février
10人坐地無動。為行
行車輪，它可以用於
聖誕節大型橄欖、春
節時，可以有多層
一層層延伸至12米的長
度，覆蓋整個街道。

設計主持:
何哲、沈順、臧峰

6

360°—“內盒院”和“插件家”都很成功，但是還沒
有大區域的蔓延開來，是因為這種建築的形式和概念
太新嗎？

眾——這是需要一個適當的過程，“插件家”“內盒
院”之間的競爭對手不是新的房屋，也不是新的產品，
而是參觀廠房。這個建築材料、建築工藝都是處處
在之前的某個時間段，不是那麼開放。所以，當有新的
建築材料、建築工具出現，背後的理念和整個社會的看
法和角度，就需要時間來改變。這幾年來，建築慢慢
變得越來越好，越來越多人感興趣，更多的人希望能夠
嘗試，這些都是在改變。

7

360°—可以看到眾建築的設計其中一個出發點是讓
社區更好地連接，那未來有沒有可能按照眾建築的設
計理念和方式對一整片區域進行改造和規劃？

眾——當然，這是我們的目標，我們一直希望自己的
想法能夠在一個城市裡發生。而不在是一個小型的建築
體，我們所想的事情無論是系統、產品，還是建築，
都是整個設計地討論人和人應該以怎樣方式生活在一
起，空間怎麼參與這些關係，甚至包括交通、基礎設
施，我理解多數建築師並不會從這個自下而上的角度來
討論這個事情，大部分建築師都是自上而下地看待建
築，所以這也是我們的特色之一。當然，我們的方式如
果能是一個智慧城市，或者在某種程度上被採納，這
是非常了不起的成果。

8

360°—“插件家”的介紹說明，這是交錯的社會力量
在許多實際限制中催生出來的新城市景象：“留”“住”
“移動房子”等都是在探索未來居住空間。按照眾建
築的理念，未來城市居住地會發展成什麼樣貌？

眾——希望對空間的追求在未來能變得更輕鬆，相對
更容易一些。我們在這個情況比較理想，一生都要住
在一個城市裡，實現把大家養得不得行了，一個小空間可能要住
很多年，它不是很靈活。放棄了機會不好的空，要不然
就是永遠另外一處。希望以後人對空間的追求來得
會更容易，比如現在需要什麼樣的空間，希望它離這
麼地方更近。如果家庭成長了就要變大或變小，或者
說我今天我要搬到什麼地方，我需要再回家來等等。這些想法
都能更輕鬆地實現。或者說到底不那麼大，而現在的代
價有點太重。這個是一個很大的社會問題。

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無論是系統、產品、
還是建築，我們都在想
方設法地討論人和人應
該以何種方式生活在一
起，空間怎麼參與這些
關係？
“Be it system, products, or architecture, what we try to discuss is how people should live together, and how space participates in this relation.”

360° — Could you introduce your latest project the People’s Station to us?
P — The People’s Station is an architecture that quickly appeared in the old district of Yamate. The development of this historic district has lost control a little bit in recent years. There was no overall planning and control of leasing and property management, and the district later gradually became a high-end area with fine dining and clubs that are not approachable for ordinary people. The owner wished to use the People’s Station to test the most suitable development way for this district. The People’s Station can be adapted to various kinds of functions. First of all, it can be quickly set up, which only takes three months; secondly, the space inside can be divided into diversified function systems, including large exhibition hall, discussion room, cafe, the book bar on the second floor, and the projection room on the third floor. It is also equipped with a flexible rooftop; for instance, the People’s Canopy and the Tricycle House can move around, bringing activities and information inside the building to other places. This building is more like a moving and inspiring thing.

360° — The design of PAO is based on a concept called prefabricated system. Could you elaborate this concept to us?
P — The People’s Station’s fast set-up speed owes to its systematic design, such as the structure system and material system. No matter it is called system or method, it is built within this space. We can quickly build up the space according to the need of the owner, the orientation and arrangement of the rooms according to the space’s layout, and the appearance of the building according to the city’s condition. We always call it a system, because all the parts have joggles that can be matched and combined in light with a certain situation. Why we recommend this method is because, the current construction methods bring too many social problems, such as its inflexibility. A systematic way can help a building be matched and established in a short time, and adjusted when it is used. The building itself can be adjusted, too. People do not have to be forced to accept the things that are not good enough or stay in a certain house for a long time. Thus the prefabricated system can benefit the society and families.
360° — Does prefabricated system suit for the humid areas like the south China? Will it be affected by weather condition?

P — Actually, the north needs to consider more factors like rain, humidity, cold, sharp temperature difference between day and night, while the south is much easier. For instance, the setting of stilts floor that is recommended by prefabricate system is to facilitate the city life and allow the original feature of the land and architecture to evolve naturally. In this way, the new comers can live in the upper space and use it for further development. This application will be more difficult for the north, because the south has accustomed to the stilts floor for the purpose of ventilation and damp proofing. I adore this adaptable society more.

4

360° — In the recent decade, urbanization puts the ancient culture and architecture in a difficult situation. In your opinion, how can design help integrate the old and new culture, and contribute to the harmony of city?

P — Undeniably, the old houses in the current society receive little respect. People prefer the new houses to the old, which is a serious problem. There is another problem in China: that is, the newness that people adore is not the type with technological innovation or genuine value, but just the type that is new outside and does not pay attention to the preservation of historical information. We should come up with a new way to study and change the old things after thorough analysis. It is too extreme to tear down the old buildings or simply simulate the old ones with new ones.

5

360° — What is the role of prefabricated system in the future urban planning?

P — It will very possibly exert important influence. Currently, the urban planning has an apparent disadvantage, i.e. inflexibility. Those that are planned for five years may lose effectiveness in two years. We are still in urgent need of a flexible urban construction way instead of a costly investment to change people's lives. As a result, those more flexible and economic methods should gain more priority, such as a simple, low-cost, and temporary way to test the urban space rather than immediately tearing it down. Prefabricated system allows more flexibility and is easily adapted. Moreover, this type of prefabricated system has many stilts floors, which allows those cities with rare land resource to apply new methods without affecting their original development path. It is also a combination between the old and the new, as the prefabricated system extends many old things' life. Meanwhile, the users can adjust the space and other things. If the price and the cost is well controlled, it will be a perfect case.
that not many architects consider things from down to top, which is also one of our distinctive characteristics. For sure, it will be amazing if our methods can be applied, or to a certain extent be adopted in one city.

8

360° — Projects like Tubular Living and Moving Recreational Vehicle are all exploring the future place of residence. According to PAO’s concepts, how will the place of residence evolve in the future?

P — We hope people’s requirement of space can become younger and more casual. The current residential situation in China is severe; a person’s whole life is tightly tied to a house, the cost of which puts him in undue pressure. He has to live in a tiny space for many years, and it cannot be flexibly traded for other things. We hope in the future, people’s wishes of a space can be realized more easily, such as what place it is nearby, making it larger or smaller according the change of family members, and moving it to another place for a few days. I wish the realization of those thoughts could become easier or at least cost less. It is a severe social problem.