

# Trans-Colonial Modernities in East Asia

Dr Edward Denison [e.denison@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:e.denison@ucl.ac.uk)

Associate Professor, Architectural History and Theory

Director, MA Architecture and Historic Urban Environments (MAHUE) #Bartlettmahue

The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL

## Prologue - Multiple Modernities

Much academic effort is at last being invested in remedying the cultural, historical and historiographical asymmetries that have characterised architectural history since its inception as a formal academic discipline in the nineteenth century. This positive trend will only increase as the geo-political (and consequently intellectual) influence of the West continues its recession as the twenty-first century progresses, revealing rich and fertile territories once concealed below the high-water mark of Western hegemony up to the late-twentieth century. Different disciplines have responded to this new terrain in different ways and with varying degrees of enthusiasm over recent decades. The vanguard has been the social sciences, who have helped fashion this new landscape as much as they have profited from the opportunities it has presented. In the Preface to the 1998 Summer Edition of *Daedalus* the *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* titled 'Early Modernities', the editor noted that "It is a fact that Asia, like Africa and Latin America, figures less in major scholarly tomes than do either Europe or North America."<sup>1</sup> This seemingly obvious and innocuous statement of fact casts a spotlight on a fundamental problem in the arts, humanities and social sciences that, for architecture and urban studies, remains as accurate now as it was a century ago and is the motive for this study.

One of the reasons why modern architectural historiography has been framed largely by Western values and perspectives is that their foundation coincided with an era dominated by the prevailing and persuasive assumption that modernisation and Westernisation could be equated. Two years after the publication of 'Early Modernities', the 2000 Winter Edition of *Daedalus* was titled 'Multiple Modernities,' in which the architect of this nascent theory, the sociologist, Shmuel Eisenstadt, wrote: "One of the most important implications of the term "multiple modernities" is that modernity and Westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only "authentic" modernities."<sup>2</sup>

The modernist canon, like that of modernisation theory, is at last being silenced by the growing inclusion of and attention to modernist histories previously beyond the Western gaze. Few places offer such a compelling and varied account of encounters with architectural modernity outside the West than China during the first half of the twentieth century. This encounter gave rise to a uniquely diverse range of urban forms and conditions before the Second World War that were unmatched in the variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Graubard, Stephen. "Preface to the Issue "Early Modernities"." *Daedalus*, Vol. 127, No. 3, (1998): vi.

<sup>2</sup> Eisenstadt, Shmuel. "Multiple Modernities." *Daedalus*, Vol. 129, No. 1, *Multiple Modernities* (2000): 3.

territorial typologies in which they emerged. Defying conventional postcolonial categorisations, China hosted no less than six different foreign settlement types: the colonial, the imperial, the leased territory, the treaty port, the concession, and the foreign legation. Most treaty ports were divided into separate foreign concessions, which were often surrounded by Chinese-administered areas, creating a group of independent settlements within a city. This peculiar legacy of inequitable foreign relations remains engrained in the urban fabric of many major Chinese cities, with their tight, disorderly street pattern of historic quarters formed by municipally disinterested foreign merchants up to the mid-twentieth century. Among the most exceptional sites of modernity within this broader national landscape were the global city of Shanghai, and in northeast China, Hsinking (Changchun), the capital of the Japanese puppet-state of Manchukuo from 1932-1945. The simultaneous experiences of these two inimitable cities challenge conventional notions of modernism and modernity, as well as modern and modernist historiography, in ways that are incomparable not only globally, but also, and perhaps especially, because of their concurrent existence within the singular territorial context of China.

In 1939, T. V. Gilchrist, a European journalist visiting Manchukuo remarked that: “*In Hsinking one seems to breathe freer in such an atmosphere of complete “modernism” ... Hsinking is a true city of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and not a casual product of the “Colonial” style of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as so many other cities in the Far East ... It is strange to find that ultra-modernism here ... Modernism in Asia!*”<sup>3</sup> Commissioned by the Japanese to write favourably about their imperial project, these kinds of enthusiastic pronouncements from foreign observers not only deliberately elevated Japan’s programme of ‘ultra-modernism’, but here Gilchrist did so at the expense of the tired ‘colonialism’ of European nations that had transformed so many cities up to the Second World War, albeit with little care for or interest in planning. Gilchrist’s deliberate double-edged slur was an attempt to distinguish Japanese modernity over that of others, notably the European empires that, since the Meiji Restoration of 1868, had provided the blueprint for Japan’s own modern project, which realised the imperial territory of Manchukuo in 1932 and concluded in the attempt to conquer the whole of East Asia under the banner of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which ended abruptly and horrifically with the total devastation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima in August 1945.

This paper explores novel ways of framing modern encounters outside the West by tentatively examining some of the interconnections between the capital of Japanese-controlled Manchuria, Hsinking, and the proto-global and quasi-colonial city of Shanghai before the Second World War. The central theme is the distinct yet multifarious and non-Western nature of modernity on which both cities were founded, and includes in its cast some of the architects affected by the fraught political conditions that defined the cities’ respective experiences. This includes foreign architects that arrived in China via the newly completed Trans-Siberian Railway and China Eastern Railway (CER), and the vital branch-line down to the Chinese coast at the modern port of Dalian: the South Manchuria Railway (SMR). It also

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<sup>3</sup> T. V. Gilchrist, ‘Hsinking’, *Manchuria* (15 September 1939): 1442.

encompasses important stages in the careers of Chinese architects such as Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin, the famous husband and wife pair who were thwarted in their attempts to establish one of China's earliest schools of architecture in Shenyang. Of the many architectural figures to have been caught up in the geopolitical maelstrom that eventually engulfed the entire region, the Hong Kong architect, Luke Him Sau (Lu Qianshou), personifies the trans-colonial modernities that characterised pre-Communist China.

### **Making Manchuria**

In 1890, Russia started work on the Trans-Siberian Railway connecting St Petersburg with Vladivostok. 'Since the Great Wall of China,' marvelled the writer Henry Norman, 'the world has seen no material undertaking of equal magnitude.'<sup>4</sup> A subsequent treaty agreement with China's ailing Qing Dynasty saw this great iron railroad carve its shortened route across the Chinese territory under the guise of the China Eastern Railway (CER) or *Kitaiskaya Vostochnaya Jeleznaya Doroga* (Chinese Eastern Iron-road).<sup>5</sup> Subsequent treaties further strengthened the myth of Manchuria's modern creation and permitted the leasing of the Liaodong Peninsular to Russia for a period of 25 years. The deep-water military port of Lüshun was renamed Port Arthur, and the nearby nascent commercial port of Talienwan became Dalny (Dalian), Russian for 'Far Place'. Linking these ports with the motherland was the branch-line of the CER, which formed the central spine of Manchuria's embryonic modern transport network. Dalian served as its southern terminus and the gateway to the region, while in the north the new settlement of Harbin formed the T-junction with the railway line to Vladivostok and St Petersburg. The impact of this trans-continental endeavour would be immense, as one observer noted in 1898:

One of the greatest arteries of traffic the world has ever seen [and] one of the chief factors in shifting the centre of gravity of the world's trade ... The eventual effect will be colossal, for the railway will open up enormous underdeveloped regions, and will facilitate the conveyance of passengers, correspondence, and the lighter class of goods; a most important matter when it is a question of connecting within a fortnight's time the capital of Europe with those of China, Japan and Corea [*sic*]. A great portion of the eastern section of the line will pass through a splendid country, – Manchuria, – a white man's country, and full of valuable resources.<sup>6</sup>

The impact was no less significant for the future of the built environment. As Gilchrist would later point out, unlike the unplanned, cosmopolitan, and commercial treaty ports throughout China, Manchuria's cities were planned, organised and modern. Dalian and Harbin were the first cities in China's modern

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<sup>4</sup> Norman, H. *All the Russias*. London: Heinemann, 1902.

<sup>5</sup> Clarence Cary, 'Dalny—A Fiat City', *Scribner's Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1903): 485.

<sup>6</sup> Colquhoun, A. R. *China in Transformation*. London: Harper & Bros, 1898: 327–28.

history to be the subject of comprehensive urban plans, which in turn accommodated architectural solutions to problems of a uniquely modern kind—factories, railway stations, telephone and telegraph facilities, radio stations, hotels, and international ports.

By 1901, Harbin's New Town (*Novui Gorod*) was planned on 3,000 hectares of raised ground to the west of the Old Town adhering to modern urban planning principles emanating from Europe and North America. Mr Miller, a US consul, later described these plans in a report to Washington as a 'record of the wonderful enterprise worth special mentioning in the history of modern town-building in the nineteenth century'.<sup>7</sup> Streets were laid out in a regular and orderly pattern, with a combination of rectilinear, diagonal, and curved routes converging at, or radiating from, key sites, such as parks or civic buildings, to create a grand and dignified appearance [Fig.1].



<sup>7</sup> 'Official Report to DC by US Consul Miller in Manchuria in 20 Years', *Far Eastern Review* 22 (1926): 341.

**Figure 1:** The Russian urban plan for Harbin, a city created from the end of the nineteenth century by the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

At the other end of the CER, the Russians planned to ‘build a modern city and port on gigantic scale [*sic*]’ at Dalian.<sup>8</sup> It was the only Chinese harbour north of Shanghai at which ocean-going liners could discharge their cargos. Previously, goods imported from Europe and America into Manchuria had to be discharged at Shanghai and sent up the China coast on smaller freighters. Planned as a free port, Dalian dispensed with this inefficient arrangement and for the first time in history plugged Manchuria directly into the international network of maritime trade. The site on which the Russians had chosen to build Dalian was, as one journalist remarked, an area of land that ‘nature had done little to mark out as a future metropolis’.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the plan designed by Mr Kerbech, an engineer from the CER, with the assistance of the future governor and chief of engineering construction, Mr Saharoff,<sup>10</sup> was unprecedented for China and acknowledged by the British architect Inigo Triggs in his seminal book, *Town Planning: Past, Present and Possible* (1909), where it features alongside Sir Christopher Wren’s plan for London after the Great Fire in 1666. To Triggs, Dalian was:

An interesting example of this type of the combined radial and chessboard system. . . . There are many diagonal arterial thoroughfares. The crossing points of the different systems of radials create a number of local centres, the most important of which has been planned in front of the railway station. In the heart of the town a circular public space has been laid out, with ten long straight streets converging upon it. Built round this, with excellent effect, as may be imagined, there are ten structures, each in its separate block. The city is divided into various quarters, the Administration Town on the north, with three broad thoroughfares leading to the railway station; the commercial quarters in the centre of the city, radiating from one large round-point round which are gathered the important public buildings; the private residences and parks, grouped together on the south-east, and the Chinese quarters in a separate city on the south-west.<sup>11</sup>

Dalian’s ambitious plan was often compared to various Western precedents, with some arguing it was modelled after Paris with ‘the main streets radiating from several circles like the spokes of a wheel, and intersected by narrower streets’,<sup>12</sup> while others saw it as ‘the future New York of the East.’<sup>13</sup> But Dalian cannot be seen as a Western incarnation. To regard it as such is to misunderstand it. ‘There is,’ as the journalist H. J. Whigham described, ‘something splendid and Oriental and almost barbaric in [its]

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<sup>8</sup> *Far Eastern Review* 24 (February 1928): 78.

<sup>9</sup> Whigham, H.J. *Manchuria and Korea*. London: Isbister & Co., 1904: 7.

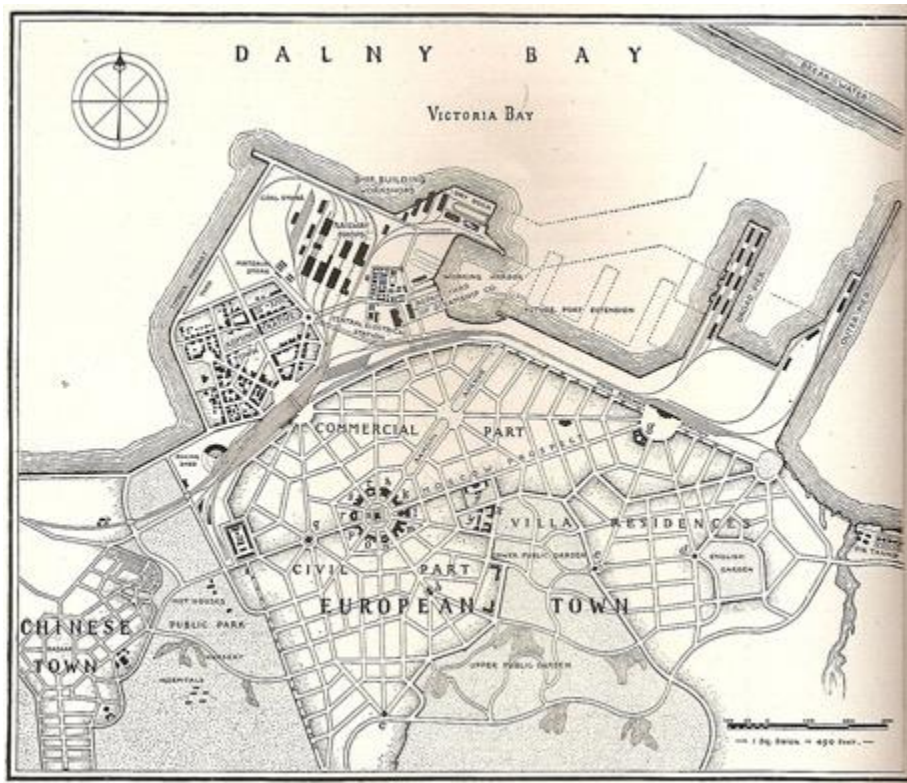
<sup>10</sup> *Dairen*, South Manchuria Railway Company, 1935: 3.

<sup>11</sup> Triggs, 1911: 101–2.

<sup>12</sup> *Dairen*, South Manchuria Railway Company, 1935: 6.

<sup>13</sup> Whigham, H.J. *Manchuria and Korea*. London: Isbister & Co., 1904: 8–11.

wholesale creation. . . . Even in its present embryo state Dalny is one of the marvels of the present age. For surely nowhere else in the world has a Government built a city and port of such dimensions on absolutely barren soil, hundreds of miles from its own borders, without a penny's worth of trade already in existence to justify the expense.<sup>14</sup> [Fig.2]



**Figure 2:** Plan of Dalian (1903) showing (clockwise from top left) the first Russian ‘administrative’ settlement, the railways workshops, docks, proposed new ‘European’ town with main circus, and the separate Chinese town.

Despite the dubious site and the unsustainable budget, the Russian plan was to create a complete and modern city serving global trade on Chinese soil. Witnessing the nascent settlement in 1903, Whigham foresaw ‘a large seaport town with ample docks and wharves, with a splendid sea frontage and convenient railway depôt, with wide streets and boulevards and shady gardens, with a commercial quarter that will eclipse every foreign settlement in the East and a residential quarter which might grace Manchester or Philadelphia’.<sup>15</sup> Dalian, like Harbin, was a twentieth-century city and, as such, not only combined contemporary urban planning theory with the accoutrements of urban modernity, but was itself a product of modernity—the terminus ‘of the greatest railway in the world’.<sup>16</sup>

Modernity’s assimilation into contemporary urban planning was exemplified at Dalian by the railway and the vital link it had with the port. As the primary conduit for goods into and out of Manchuria through

<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid: 8–11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid: 10.



the city's wharfs, the railway was not a clumsy incision compromising an established urban plan but an essential part of an entirely new one. The terminus of the CER, which was completed in 1904, made Dalian the gateway to Manchuria. The city's railway station therefore assumed a vital role in both the urban and cultural landscape.

By the end of 1902, Russian engineers had completed the CER and fulfilled their objective of connecting St Petersburg with the China Sea within a matter of days. By 1903, the journey took 13 days on 'one of the most luxurious trains in the world'<sup>17</sup> along a land route to Europe that was for the first time a competitive alternative to the sea. Where a boat took 31 days and was double the price, passengers could travel from London to Shanghai via the CER in 18 days. Many did, and among their ranks were some of China's most influential and prolific architects.

### **Modern Manchuria**

Minutes before midnight on 8 February 1904, the unthinkable happened for Russia and especially for its forces in Manchuria. Without warning, Japan launched an attack on the Russia's Army and Navy in what would be the opening salvo in the first Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), the first conflict in the modern era in which a Western nation was defeated by an Eastern counterpart. It was a major step for Japan in its quest for empire. The Russo-Japanese War upended the singular notion of modernity and became a milestone in a very different reading of history in which the East could claim not merely to be modern, but to be so on its own terms. It was, as Harootunian stated, the moment 'the geopolitical monopoly of modernity was shattered'.<sup>18</sup> Despite the West's considerable effort to lay claim to modernity throughout much of the twentieth century—which was as strong in architecture as in any other field—Japan's experience, especially in the context of Manchuria, reveals modernity's many forms. The Russo-Japanese War fractured modernity's Western edifice and marked the point at which it became a truly global phenomenon. In Manchuria, Japan's efforts to build an empire presents the earliest and one of the foremost examples of multiple modernities, where the experience and condition of modernity in the non-Western host, China, arrived from the East and materialised largely in the absence of the West.

Japan's reward for its victory of Russia was the acquisition of the CER and all its interests and investments, including urban settlements, south of Changchun. The entire line became the South Manchuria Railway Company (SMR). The SMR was a product of the early twentieth century and of modernity itself. It not only was a consequence of shifting power in the region and unique encounters with modernity in the early twentieth century, but it also would affect much more profound encounters in subsequent decades. The SMR continued the colonial tradition of utilising a combination of political and commercial interests to infiltrate and exploit a foreign territory. In this respect it bore similarities to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid: 50.

<sup>18</sup> Harootunian, H. *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice and the Question of Everyday Life*, New York Columbia University Press, 2000: 63

Britain's East India Company, but it was also vitally different, not merely for being based on land rather than sea. While the SMR followed similar Western precedents, it was the first time that such an enterprise had originated outside the West. Furthermore, Japan's relationship with China was neither colonial nor distant. China was Japan's cultural progenitor and until the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 had been revered by its neighbour. The SMR responded to this relationship in a way that Western colonial ventures did not have to in their acquired and invariably remote territories. It was subtle, sophisticated, and scientific—learned even—and thus could be presented as a mutually beneficial enterprise that supported China's struggle against pernicious Western influence and, eventually, the entire liberation of Asia under the guise of *bunsō teki bubi* - 'military preparedness in civilian clothing'. [Fig.3]



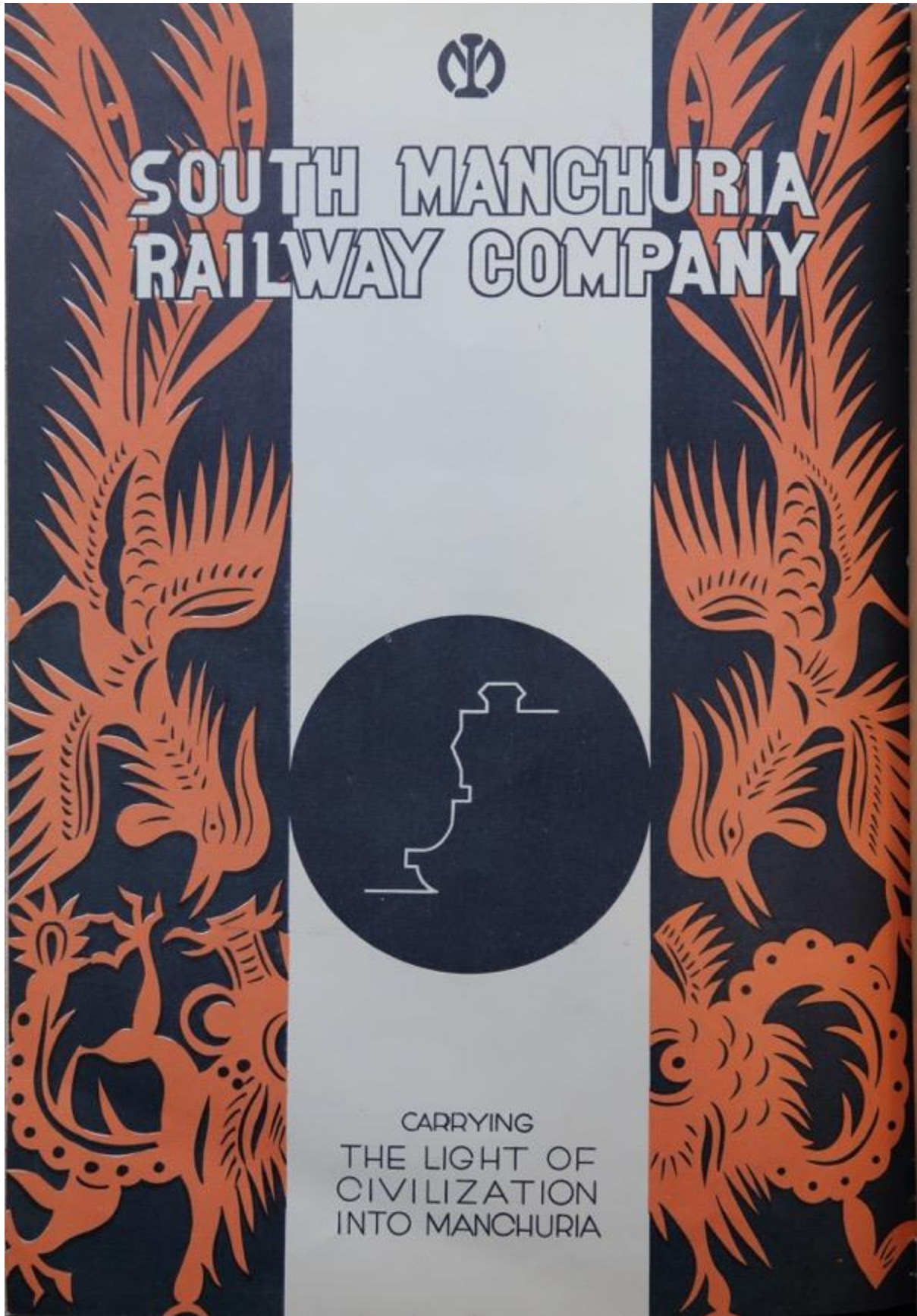


Figure 3: SMR advertisement from the mid-1930s proudly declaring its imperial mission: 'Carrying the Light of Civilization into Manchuria'.

From humble origins, the SMR grew into an enterprise of such immense power and influence that it became the very object through which Japan was able to realise its subsequent imperial ambitions. Controlling the trunk line between Changchun and Dalian and numerous branch lines linking other towns and cities, it also owned the mining rights in the mineral-rich regions of Fushun and Yentai, outside Shenyang, and the ports along the coast. It was responsible for the planning, construction, and public administration of the settlements along the railways, which were vigorously promoted as sites of metropolitan modernity. It also became a vital route for social and cultural engagements within Manchuria and throughout Asia more broadly. White Russians fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution, European émigrés, Chinese overseas students, warlords and legions of soldiers, merchants, and adventurers relied on the SMR to gain entry to or exit from China through the early decades of the twentieth century. It laid the very fabric of modernity in Manchuria and very quickly became the region's primary asset and the principal conduit through which many foreign architects arrived in China on their way to transforming its urban landscape before the Second World War.

Among the most renowned and prolific of these Trans-Siberian émigrés was Laszlo Hudec (1893-1958),<sup>19</sup> a young Hungarian architect, graduate of the Royal Technical University of Budapest and prisoner of war who managed to escape from his Russian captors and reach Harbin, from where he made his journey to Shanghai. His journey was similar to many of his generation who were either First World War veterans, victims, or both. They had witnessed first-hand what modernity was capable of when applied to warfare and were more inclined to embrace modernity's potential in a professional capacity than their predecessors. The Austrian architect and graduate of Vienna's Polytechnic University and Adolf Loos's (1870-1933) Free School of Architecture, Josef Alois Hammerschmidt (1891-),<sup>20</sup> also made this journey. Having been captured in the Carpathian Mountains in late-1914, he was incarcerated for three years in Siberia before being released and travelled to China where, in 1921, he settled in Tianjin.

While Manchuria served as a vital conduit between Europe and Asia, its ancient capital of Shenyang hosted China's second architectural school at North-Eastern University. China's first architects were mostly trained in Japanese universities which were popular for their cultural and geographic proximity.<sup>21</sup> It was from Japan, not the West, that China's first trained architects emerged.<sup>22</sup> From the late 1910s a second generation travelled to Europe and America, in particular the University of Pennsylvania, but by the 1920s, there was a concerted effort to establish architectural schools in China. In 1928, these two experiences collided when the Dean of North-Eastern University's Engineering College, Gao Xibin, invited the brilliant architect and University of Pennsylvania graduate, Yang Tingbao, to Head the new Department of Architecture.

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<sup>19</sup> Hudec was born in Banskobystrica, then in Hungary (now in Slovakia) (*Men of Shanghai and North China*, 1935: 269).

<sup>20</sup> Hammerschmidt was born in Vienna, Austria (*Men of Shanghai and North China*, 1935: 207).

<sup>21</sup> The total number of Chinese students in Japan had risen from 280 in 1901 to 15,000 by 1906 – more overseas students than at any other time or in any other country.

<sup>22</sup> Wang Yichu, *Chinese Intellectuals and the West 1872-1949*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966: 59.

However, Yang Tingbao ‘turned it down, because [he] was already tied up with the architectural office of S.S. Kwan and Pin Chu to which [he] became later a partner’,<sup>23</sup> but instead recommended Liang Sicheng (1901-72), another University of Pennsylvania graduate and son of the famed Chinese reformer Liang Qichao (1873-1929). Liang was close friends with Yang and had ‘always considered [him] as his mentor in school days at Penn, as well as after.’<sup>24</sup> Liang Qichao was ‘very glad to hear of this opportunity’<sup>25</sup> and immediately set about planning his son’s return from overseas. Political instability in Manchuria made Liang uneasy about sending his son to Shenyang, but when faced with the choice between Beijing’s Tsinghua and Shenyang’s North-Eastern University, Liang Qichao confided in a letter to his eldest daughter that North-Eastern, ‘is the better because the prospect of launching an architectural career there is bright. He can organise a firm there and start in a small way, then gradually expand.’<sup>26</sup> Liang Qichao did not wait for a reply. ‘Before he answers,’ Yang recalled Liang Qichao saying, ‘I have already made the decision for him, declined the offer from Tsinghua and accepted the Tung Pei [North-Eastern] position.’<sup>27</sup>

Liang Sicheng stopped short his architectural tour of Europe with Lin Huiyin and, like Hudec, Hammerschmidt and thousands before him, made his way to China along the Trans-Siberian Railway, across what his father described as ‘barbarous and dilapidated Russia.’ By the end of 1928, Liang was ‘Assistant Professor In Charge, Department of Architecture’ and establishing China’s second ever architectural course with Lin, modelled on the training they had received at the University of Pennsylvania under the supervision of Paul Philippe Cret (1876-1945) and the Dean, Warren Powers Laird (1861-1948). As the sole lecturers in the Architecture Department for the first year, Liang and Lin did their best to instruct some of the first home-grown Chinese architects.

In the summer of 1929, Liang and Lin brought two more University of Pennsylvania graduates to Shenyang, Tong Jun and Chen Zhi, and another teacher, Cai Fangyin. The expanded group formed their own private practice, Liang, Chen, Tong & Cai Architects and Engineers. Lin’s name was not in the firm’s title, despite being a ‘full partner in the designing.’<sup>28</sup> She also contributed to the planning of a park outside Shenyang, as well as ‘designing private residences for wealthy [Shenyang] warlord families.’<sup>29</sup> The firm received several commissions, among which the only one to be realised was the new university campus (administration building, classrooms, and dormitories) for Kirin University,<sup>30</sup> completed in 1931.

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from Yang Tingbao to Wilma Fairbank, 6 December, 1979, Fairbank family archive.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Chen Zhi to Wilma Fairbank, 2 February, 1983 Fairbank family archive.

<sup>25</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> V.K.Ting, ed., *Chronicle Biography of Liang Ch’i-ch’ao*, Taipei: World Publishing Company, 1958: 762.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*: 762.

<sup>28</sup> Fairbank, 1994, pp.42-43. In a letter to Chen Zhi dated 9 January 1980, she states that she got this information from Liang Sicheng ‘in a long interview we did together in 1947,’ Fairbank family archive.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Chen Zhi to Wilma Fairbank, 28 November, 1979, Fairbank family archive.

Shenyang's fleeting association with the development of architecture in China ended abruptly with the threat of war with Japan in 1931.<sup>31</sup> The following February Chen left for Shanghai, where he established a private practice with his friend and former classmate, Zhao Shen. Liang remained in Shenyang until the end of the academic year, when he handed over to Tong, a native of Shenyang. Within weeks, the North-Eastern University was closed and Tong also made his way to Shanghai, where he teamed up with Chen and Zhao to form Allied Architects in 1933. The brief but important chapter in architectural education in China was firmly closed, ended by Japan's broader designs.

### **Ultra-Modern Hsinking**

Chief among Japan's designs was the establishment of an entirely new imperial territory of Manchukuo and the creation of a capital city. Completely new and consciously modern cities had been envisioned on paper by some of the most celebrated modernists, such as Le Corbusier, but none had ever been built. Conventional history tells us that such utopian projects were only accomplished after the Second World War, but the scale and ambition of Hsinking (Changchun), causes it not only to not fit into this account of history, but also to be written out entirely—an anomalous victim of historical circumstance defined by three consequent conditions: the West's assumed ownership of modernism, Japan's dishonour, and China's humiliation.

Nevertheless, in the fleeting period between Manchukuo's establishment in 1932 and Japan's wholesale invasion of China in 1937, conditions were ripe for the world's first non-Western modernist capital: 'A splendid new capital for a new empire.'<sup>32</sup> For some, it was 'a "neo-Japanese" city, in which the ideas of Nippon and those of Europe have been ingeniously blended'.<sup>33</sup> Others observed 'the houses one sees are cubes with flat roofs, a few columns, strangely shaped turrets. . . . This seems indeed to be the town of which Le Corbusier, the famous French architect, was dreaming.'<sup>34</sup> But modernism in Hsinking was not that of Le Corbusier or other self-acclaimed modernists in the West. It was inevitably different. After successive translations, modernism in Manchukuo was conceived and constructed in exceptional circumstances by the first non-Western nation to have sought and achieved a state of modernity. Hsinking was planned entirely by Japanese planners and all of its buildings were designed by Japanese architects.<sup>35</sup> [Fig.4]

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<sup>31</sup> Lin had also been diagnosed with tuberculosis and returned to Beijing for treatment in late-1930.

<sup>32</sup> 'Manchoukuo News', *Manchuria* (1 August 1938): 539.

<sup>33</sup> *Contemporary Manchuria* 2, no. 3 (May 1938): 124.

<sup>34</sup> T. V. Gilchrist, 'Hsinking', *Manchuria* (15 September 1939): 1442.

<sup>35</sup> The one exception was the Foreign Affairs Bureau, designed by the French architect Brossard Mopin.



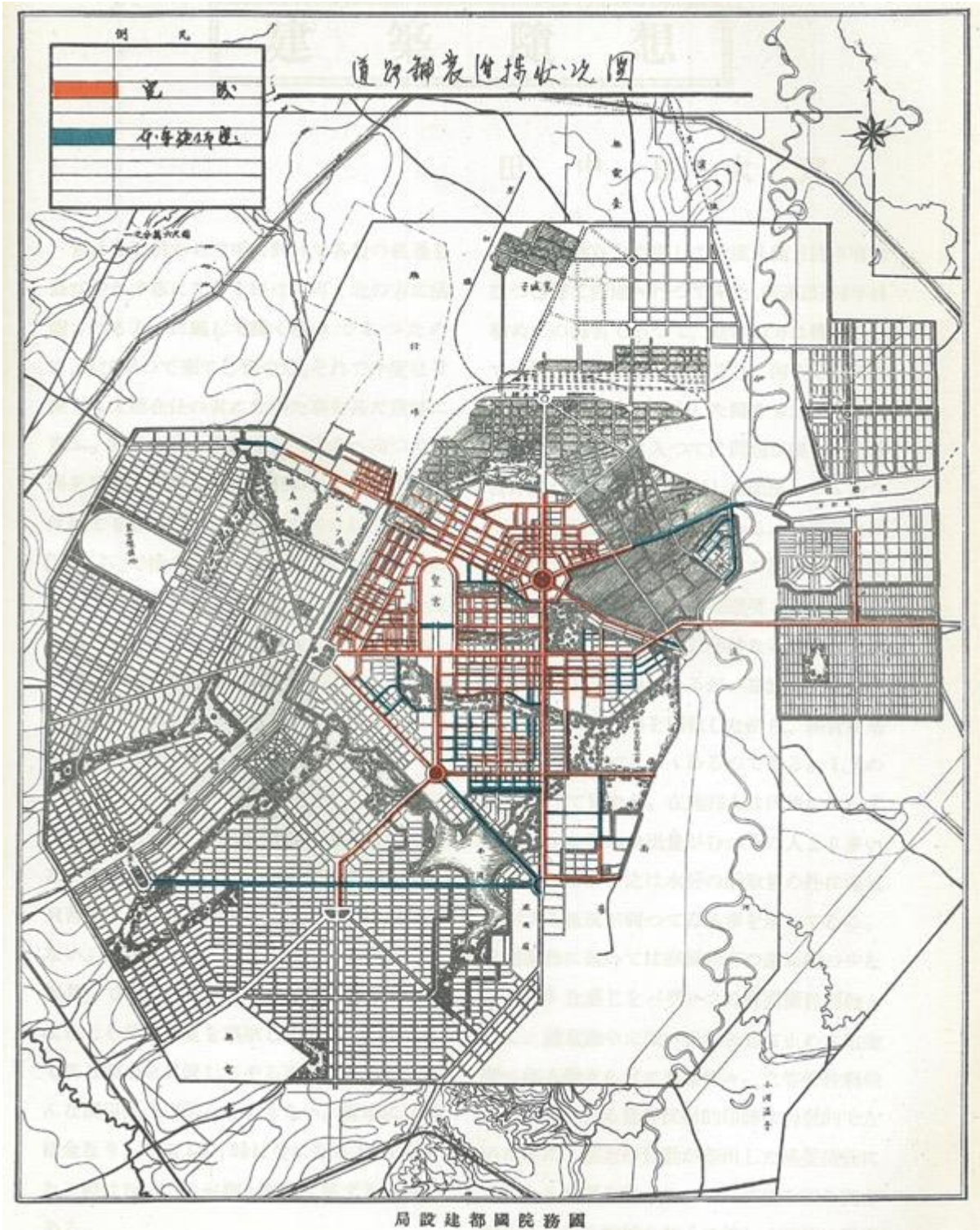


Figure 4: Plan of Hsinking, showing complete and planned road surfacing. The plan is dominated by the Tatung Circle in the centre, with the old SMR Zone to the north and the old Chinese city to the east, the new imperial compound to the west and much of the new capital spreading out to the south and southwest.

Hsinking, more than any other city in Manchukuo, defined the aspiration to be ultra-modern—more modern than the motherland. Even the name—Hsinking (New Capital) —emphasised its modernity. As one American visitor and war veteran General J. Leslie Kincaid wrote following his visit in 1938: ‘Manchoukuo has dramatized modern empire-making more effectively than any other country in this

world, and any intelligent observer who has travelled through the new empire and has seen the wonderful new capital of Hsinking must be convinced that Manchoukuo has been solidly built in the few short years, and built for all time.<sup>36</sup>

However, Hsinking's ultra-modernity, like so many modernist visions of utopia, was encountered more fully on paper than in concrete reality. Despite the considerable efforts of the state-sponsored media and hired foreign hacks, the pan-Asian co-prosperity dream that the Japanese claimed Manchukuo represented quickly turned into a nightmare of global proportions. 'In Europe modernism expresses itself in slaughter and destruction,' asserted one visitor in 1939, 'Here it finds its expression in planned construction.'<sup>37</sup> On 7 July 1937, skirmishes between Japanese and Chinese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge (*Lugouqiao*) sparked Japan's all out invasion of China and the preface to the Second World War. For Manchukuo, Japan's formerly concentrated interests and resources were dispersed across a much wider area. Construction peaked in 1937 and would never again return to the same feverish levels experienced in the preceding five years.

For Japanese, the deteriorating economic situation experienced in Manchukuo was amplified at home. For architects in Japan, work had been drying up throughout the late 1930s. By 1944 construction in Japan had fallen by 75 per cent since 1937.<sup>38</sup> Attracted to empire by the worsening conditions at home, this drought motivated some of Japan's most important modernist architects—Sakakura, Maekawa, Arata, and Tange—to be associated with Manchukuo. However, the militarisation of the state was suffocating architecture and planning and undermining the once rich variety of research activities conducted by Japanese scholars and professionals. Collectively, these formerly worthy endeavours were victim to the 'fascist assault and repression by the military'.<sup>39</sup>

### Shanghai's Multiple Modernities

Where Hsinking's central role in the imperial project caused it to be highly prescribed, the obverse was true of Shanghai, where unfettered freedom was an essential part of its experience of modernity. There was no place in China (and few places in the world) where a pluralistic and advanced modernity was so highly developed than in Shanghai, China's largest city and by 1929 the fifth largest in the world.

Modernism frequently claimed to transcend nationality, but few places genuinely achieved an environment where this was possible. Those metropolitan centres that claimed international status were seldom truly places of unrestricted internationalism. Shanghai, in contrast, was a place in which modernity

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<sup>36</sup> 'Manchoukuo Built for All Time, Gen. Kincaid Declares', *Manchuria* (1 December 1938): 796.

<sup>37</sup> T. V. Gilchrist, 'Hsinking', 1442.

<sup>38</sup> Reynolds, J. *Maekawa Kunio and the Emergence of Japanese Modernist Architecture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001: 97.

<sup>39</sup> Itō Takeo, SMR researcher, cited in Fogel, J. *Life Along the South Manchuria Railway: The Memoirs of Itō Takeo*. New York: M.E.Sharpe, 1988: 203.

was negotiated and refracted multifariously and was quite distinct from many Western cities and other cities outside the West, whose exotic or traditional attributes tended to prevent them from being seen as 'modern'. Shanghai's modernity was uniquely multi-layered: at a metropolitan level, Shanghai possessed its own distinct interpretation of modernity in the form of *Haiipai* and spawned the unique modern axiom *modeng*; at a national level, Shanghai represented a version of modernity that was new and expediently removed from ancient precedents; and at an international level, Shanghai was a hub of migration globally at a unique point in history, where new ideas, new technologies and new opportunities penetrated China and were interconnected through a web of interrelations that, in terms of their impact and profundity, had never occurred before.

Although Shanghai was a city ahead of its time in being both international and ruled by global capital, it was not an epicentre of artistic modernism. It was not Paris, Berlin, or New York. Laurence argues that this situation, where expressions of modernism (here the preserve of a tiny minority and privileged class) exist in a wider context that is fundamentally 'unmodern', provided the conditions for the 'existence of multiple aesthetic, cultural, political, and economic discourses in a nation and against a monolithic notion of modernity or movement of modernism'.<sup>40</sup> Throughout the 1920s and the 1930s Shanghai was possibly the best example in the world of a city where multiple modernities co-existed within a wider context that was anything but modern.

Shanghai, 'unmatched as far east as America and as far west as Europe',<sup>41</sup> was in China and a product of China's condition, but, just as it was not a colonial city, it could not be said to be wholly Chinese either. The peculiarity that Shanghai presents is often sidestepped by the suggestion it was not Chinese, a dismissal that frames it as a historical anomaly. 'Shanghai, despite all its influence', writes Esherwick, 'was still not China'.<sup>42</sup> However, although its position literally and figuratively at the crossroads of global trade and politics might not make it entirely of China, Shanghai was unquestionably a Chinese city. Shanghai was an exemplar of the treaty port's ambiguous qualities, a 'concrete example of the problem of China',<sup>43</sup> outgrowing the regional context in which it was formed and becoming a proto free-city of genuine international import. Shanghai had no overarching government; no constitution; no universal legal system or judiciary, and no master plan.<sup>44</sup> Shanghai's anomalous condition can be read in its tortuous and

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<sup>40</sup> Patricia Ondek Laurence, *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes: Bloomsbury, Modernism and China*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003: 390.

<sup>41</sup> Speech by Admiral Freemantle given on Friday 17th November in 'The Jubilee of Shanghai 1843-1893, Shanghai: Past and Present, and a full account of the proceedings on the 17th and 18th November, 1893, Shanghai: *North China Daily News*, 1893.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph W. Esherick, ed., *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000: 13.

<sup>43</sup> Hsia Ching-Lin, *The Status of Shanghai – a Historical Review of the International Settlement - Its Future Development and Possibilities Through Sino-Foreign Co-operation*, Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1929: Preface.

<sup>44</sup> The absence of such institutions was not only constitutionally peculiar, it also had a significant impact on the city socially and developmentally: the impunity that the city's separate territories sanctioned fuelled rampant malcontent, criminally and politically; insufficient financial regulations encouraged economic laxity; and the absence of immigration controls that permitted free entry furnished the city with one of the most cosmopolitan populations in the world. For architecture, these conditions gave rise to very particular outcomes.



unplanned street pattern, which reflects the short-term interests of its merchant masters rather than the ambitions of far-sighted officials investing in the future. [Fig.5]



**Figure 5:** An aerial photograph of Shanghai in the 1930s revealing the absence of any urban plan, which in turn reflected the absence of a municipal vision for the city that invited criticism from observers like Gilchrist, who described such cities as “casual product[s] of the “Colonial” style of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Shanghai’s status as a free-port with no restriction on population movement and assorted political and economic administrations shaped the form and layout of the city’s physical composition. Having accommodated successive waves of migrants since the 1840s, from exuberant tax-exiles to humble vagabonds, Shanghai’s openness combined with improving international travel and communications caused an upsurge of immigration in the early-twentieth century. The First World War and the revolutions that followed accelerated this process, driving large numbers of Europeans and Russians into exile, many of whom entered China via the China Eastern Railway. Of all the potential sites of settlement in China, Shanghai was the preeminent destination for the displaced and dispossessed; their presence boosting Shanghai’s population by tens of thousands and contributing significantly to the city’s genuinely international character.

This influx of population, including migrants and returning students, swelled the ranks of the city’s architectural community so that by the 1930s, Shanghai had more Chinese architects, professional practices, trade journals and professional societies than the rest of China put together – with the exception of Manchuria. Both the *Chinese Society of Architects* and the foreign *Shanghai Society of Engineers and Architects* were based in Shanghai. Among foreign architects and related professionals, who designed and built some of the largest buildings in Asia, none was as prolific as Hudec, whose towering Joint Savings Society Building (1934), housing the luxurious Park Hotel remained the tallest building in China until the 1980s. [Fig.6]



**Figure 6:** The Joint Savings Society Building (1934), housing the Park Hotel, designed by Laszlo Hudec.

Shanghai's demographics defy conventional colonial reading. In the census of 1930, representing over 38% of Shanghai's foreign population, the Japanese (18,796) were the largest single foreign community, followed by the British 17% (8,449) and then the Russians 15% (7,366).<sup>45</sup> Collectively, remaining Asian countries<sup>46</sup> represented 7% of the foreign population. American (3,149), Portuguese (1,599), German (1,430) and French (1,406) were the only other western groups with populations exceeding 1,000. Politically and architecturally, Shanghai had been dominated by Britain until the turn of the century, when the balance of power shifted towards Japan. In the city's census of 1910, there were 4,465 British and 3,361 Japanese. By 1915, the Japanese had become the largest foreign population and by 1930 it was nearly three times the size of British,<sup>47</sup> congregating in the northern suburb of Hongkou, dubbed 'Little Tokyo'. As Japan's interests in China grew, so too did its architectural community. Following Japan's invasion of China in 1937, the former student of Le Corbusier, Kunio Maekawa (1905–86), established an office in Shanghai in 1939 to design the dormitory for employees of the Kakō Commercial Bank (1939–

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<sup>45</sup> The British and Russians represented 17% and 15% of the foreign population respectively (Richard Feetham, *Feetham Report*, Shanghai: North China Daily News and Herald Ltd., 1931).

<sup>46</sup> 1,842 Indians, 941 Vietnamese, 381 Filipinos, 151 Koreans, and two Malaysians, (*Feetham Report*, 1931).

<sup>47</sup> In the 1930 census, the British population had risen to 8,449 and the Japanese to 18,796 (*Feetham Report*, 1931, Table 2, Appendices (unpaginated)).



43). Through old school ties, Maekawa found further work in 1942 in Shenyang where he sent staff ‘to work for the Manchurian Aircraft Company—designing factory buildings’.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1939 essay, *The China Sea*, the modern Japanese writer, Yokomitsu Riichi, succinctly describes Shanghai’s multinational character and its relation to the city’s unique sense of modernity:

*The problem of the International Settlement is one of the most perplexing in the world. At the same time this location also represents the problem of the future. To some extent it is a very simple thing, but there is no other place on earth that so manifests the quality that constitutes the modern. What is more, there exists nowhere in the world except the Settlement a site where all nations have created a common city. To think about this place is to think about the world in microcosm.*<sup>49</sup>

One architect that exemplifies the complexity of this microcosm is Luke Him Sau (Lu Qianshou), a Chinese architect whose experience of Shanghai was bookended by the types of experiences that typify the harsh realities of China’s encounter with modernity. Luke enjoyed a long, prolific and episodic career that began in inter-war London and was enriched in Europe, blossomed in Shanghai in its hedonistic heyday, braved besiegement in Chongqing during the Second World War and enjoyed resurrection and maturity in post-war Hong Kong. Born in the British colonial context of Hong Kong in 1904, Luke was sent to London to attend the Architectural Association in 1927. For a young Chinese scholar experiencing London for the first time, the period around 1927 was a seminal epoch, a turning point at home and abroad. With Chiang Kai Shek’s Kuomintang offering China some hope of order and stability after decades of turmoil, nascent national institutions were beginning to flourish. On 4 November 1929, Zhang Jia Ao, the General Manager of the young Bank of China, was in London to attend the official opening of the Bank’s first overseas branch. During this trip Zhang met Luke and, impressed by his experience and conduct, offered him the role of Head of the Bank’s nascent Architectural Department in Shanghai. Luke, like many of Chinese colleagues, experienced Shanghai in its heyday when business was booming and the Chinese architectural community was attaining a degree of parity, numerically at least, with their foreign counterparts who had long held the reins of power in this international city. Luke designed offices, warehouses and residences for the Bank of China all over the country, the most famous of which was the Bank’s Headquarters (1939) on Shanghai’s Bund, which he designed with the Hong Kong firm, Palmer & Turner. The modern tower with its modest Chinese characteristics contrasted with the staid classical foreign banks and offices, and jostled for ascendancy with its neighbour, Sassoon House (1927), designed by George Wilson, Head of Palmer & Turner, for the businessman and vivacious

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<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Reynolds, *Maekawa Kunio and the Emergence of Japanese Modernist Architecture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001: 97.

<sup>49</sup> Yokomitsu Riichi, ‘Shinakai’ (‘The China Sea’), 1939, in *Yokomitsu Riichi Zenshū (Collection of Yokomitsu Riichi’s Works)*, Volume 12, Kawade Shobō, Tokyo, 1956: 197.

socialite, Victor Sassoon. The building served as a prototype of the Bank of China towers in Hong Kong (1950) and Singapore (1951) respectively. [Fig.7]

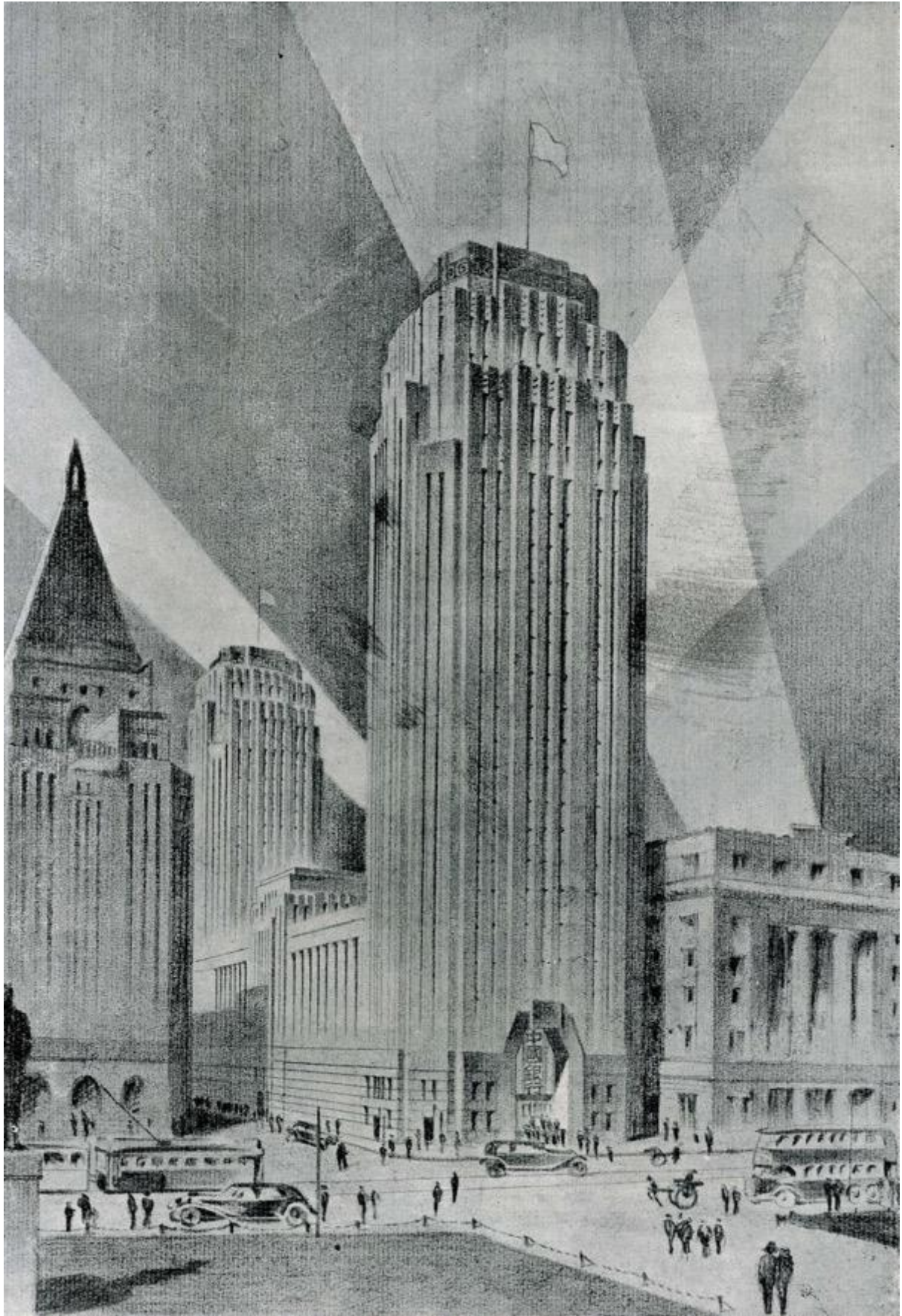


Figure 7: Bank of China Headquarters, Shanghai, 1935-39, designed by Luke Him Sau and Palmer & Turner, showing Sassoon House next door (left). Concept drawing by Palmer & Turner in 1935.

Luke, like so many others, lost everything after the Japanese invaded China from Manchuria in 1937. Along with all his professional associates, he retreated to the wartime capital of Chongqing, 600 miles up the Yangtze River, where he remained until after the war. While Luke's life and career define one side of the experience of modern China, another side can be seen through those who engaged simultaneously in realising Manchukuo's 'ultra-modernity'. While empires everywhere have proven fertile ground for architects and planners hungry to see their designs realised, those Japanese that remained in Manchukuo until the end of the Second World War were left stranded and exposed as the tide turned. These individuals and their families, friends, and colleagues were the incidental flotsam marking the high-water mark of empire and would pay a terrible price for their involvement—for many, it cost them their lives.

All the architects that experienced China before the Second World War, whether Chinese, Japanese or Other, shared a bond of participating in an exceptionally complex trans-global network that generated extraordinary architectural and urban outcomes. All were drawn to China by opportunity. All suffered appalling violence and loss. All grappled with identity. All had to negotiate power struggles between East and West. All wrestled with what it meant to be modern in the twentieth-century. And all have been largely overlooked, concealed from the world by various factors until the twenty-first century when a more complete picture of this astonishing period of history can be pieced together from fragments strewn across the globe by successive convulsions. In *Non-West Modernist Past*, the Singaporean architect, William Lim, argued that "Western mainstream literature on modern architecture and urbanism continues with its Eurocentric universality and dominance. Even significant contributors of the 'non-West' are considered peripheral and ignored."<sup>50</sup> The interconnected experiences that characterise China's tortuous encounter with modernity can be seen in such a light, where a Eurocentric historiography has overlooked such fascinating and important urban and architectural histories. The landscape is changing, as the canonical history that has been in ascendance for over a century is ceding to a more balanced account of urban and architectural history globally. It is this spirit of change that has inspired this study. As Jyoti Hosagrahar aptly argues in *Indigenous Modernities*, for the voices of others to be heard, it is both high-time and vital "not merely to celebrate and give voice to minority discourses and knowledges in order to include them in their subordinate positions in existing privileged accounts of modernity, but to question the master narrative."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Lim, William. "Resetting the Modernist Past." In *Non-West Modernist Past: On Architecture & Modernities*, edited by William Lim and Jiat-Hwee Chang. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2012: 2.

<sup>51</sup> Hosagrahar, Jyoti. *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism*, London: Routledge, 2005: 6.