



The First Generation of Architectural Historians in Modern China: Their Studies and Struggles

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This paper examines the intellectual history of the first generation of architectural historians in China, with a focus on the activities of Liang Sicheng and his colleagues from the 1920s to the 1950s. It analyzes the various oppressive forces they encountered during this period. Initially, they challenged Western and Japanese hegemonies in Chinese architecture research. Following World War II, they faced off against Soviet Union experts to safeguard China's architectural heritage. The paper evaluates their successes and failures in achieving academic and social goals, their impact on the preservation of Chinese heritage, and their ongoing influence in academic and societal spheres. Additionally, it explores how professional ethics were utilized to dismantle colonial narratives and perceptions in China, suggesting that professionalism can serve as a mode of intellectual opposition.

Keywords: Modern China, intellectual history, architectural historian, Liang Sicheng

The intellectual history of architectural historians in China from the 1920s to the 1950s, particularly focusing on the endeavors of Liang Sicheng and his contemporaries, reveals a dynamic interplay between scholarly pursuits and sociopolitical contexts. This period witnessed the multifaceted engagement of these historians with various oppressive forces, from the challenges they issued to Western and Japanese hegemonies in Chinese architectural research to confrontations with Soviet Union experts in the immediate postwar era in their efforts to safeguard China's architectural heritage. By examining the successes and failures of their academic and social initiatives, as well as their enduring influence on the preservation of Chinese heritage, this paper sheds light on the intricate relationship between professional ethics and intellectual opposition.

Western and Japanese Hegemonies in Chinese Traditional Architecture Research before the 1930s

When the first generation of Chinese architectural historians started their academic research at the beginning of twentieth century, they faced two different

hegemonies, Western hegemony in the international academic community and Japanese hegemony in the East Asian academic community.

Both colonial powers attempted to reconstruct the history of Chinese architecture by promoting their own favorable historical narratives in part to diminish the historical achievements and artistic status of Chinese architecture and gardens, thus serving their agendas of cultural oppression. Western hegemony, for instance, sought to discredit the evolutionary development of Chinese architecture, criticizing it as an ahistorical style and thus denying the significance of Chinese architectural culture in world architectural history. Meanwhile, Japan aimed to elevate the artistic value of Tang and Song architecture, indirectly elevating the status of Japanese architecture and positioning itself as the heir to the highest achievements in Eastern architectural art.

In the second half of nineteenth century, in the context of the political, economic, and cultural confrontation between the East and the West, Western scholars devalued Asian arts as a whole. This situation had partially changed at the beginning of the twentieth century because of the propaganda of the Japanese government. Western society had begun to appreciate Japanese art and Chinese art before the Tang and Song Dynasties (960–1279 AD).

However, Chinese architectural historians found themselves under the second culture hegemony caused by this situation. Japanese scholars had a reason for placing emphasis on the importance and value of Chinese art before the Tang and Song Dynasties. It was impossible to deny the Chinese origins of many aspects of Japanese culture, so they emphasized that Japan, instead of China, was the heir to the Chinese culture of the Tang and Song Dynasties. Thus, they sought to establish the dominance of Japanese culture in Asia. As a result, Chinese architectural historians needed to challenge the dual hegemony, in the world of scholarship, of the West and Japan when starting research on the history of Chinese architectures.

Western Hegemony before the Twentieth Century

Before the twentieth century, the international image of Chinese architecture and garden arts underwent several transitions. The Western world first learned of Chinese architecture and gardens from the writings of explorers and missionaries. Before the sixteenth century, *The Travels of Marco Polo* introduced the cities and architecture of China to the West. This was the first work to offer Westerners detailed impressions of Chinese architecture.

From the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, Westerners were full of curiosity about Chinese architecture and gardens. In the seventeenth century, Western missionaries developed a strong interest in Eastern art and culture, and they naturally paid attention to the unique Chinese architecture and garden art. Texts and drawings depicting Chinese architecture and gardens were brought to the West. Westerners loved the naturalistic styles, and they imitated these styles in architectural design and gardening practices. Designers from the United Kingdom absorbed the aesthetic elements of Chinese gardens and created English landscape gardens characterized by structured informality, which made free layout garden design increasingly popular across Europe. Between 1757 and 1763, Swedish-Scottish architect William Chambers caused a sensation in Europe by introducing Chinese architecture into the garden during the renovation of Kew Gardens in London.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Chinamania began to cool down. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the deepening of the western invasion of China, Western opinion on Chinese culture changed from positive to negative. Western attitudes towards Chinese architectural arts also changed from admiration to derogation.

In 1793, the Macartney Embassy visited China. All the members of the embassy described Chinese architecture and gardens in their travel notes. The accompanying painter William Alexander depicted Chinese cities along the way in watercolors. Mission member John Barrow made negative comments on Chinese architecture and cities in his book *Travels in China*, arguing that Chinese architecture is not as grand or artistic as the architecture of European countries. He commented in his book that “their architecture is void of taste, grandeur, beauty, solidity, or convenience; that the houses are merely tents, and that there is nothing magnificent, even in the palace of the Emperor.”¹

In 1896, British scholar Banister Fletcher (1866–1953) published his masterpiece of world architectural history *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*.² In this book, he included an illustration that reflects the genealogy of the world’s architectural development, which is the famous “Tree of Architecture.” Fletcher regarded ancient Greek and ancient Roman buildings as the main trunk of this “tree,” from which the Romanesque style developed. After the development of Gothic and Renaissance styles, the tree of architecture

1 Barrow, *Travels in China*, 101

2 Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*.

finally flourished in Europe and the United States. At the same time, Fletcher placed the styles of Chinese and Japanese, Peruvian, Mexican, Indian, and other non-European styles on the branches roughly in the same period as ancient Greece, thus implying that these styles did not evolve over time.

Before the twentieth century, the West lacked an in-depth understanding of the true characters of Chinese architecture. The Western attitude towards Chinese architecture was constantly changing as the various imaginative visions of China changed. These shifts were driven first and foremost by changes in the political and economic relationships between China and the West, but also by competition between China and Japan.

Japanese hegemony at the beginning of twentieth century

In the late nineteenth century, Western interest in Chinese art gradually began to diminish, while interest in Japanese art increased. This situation continued until the 1930s. This understanding of the differences between Chinese art and Japanese art was partially the result of intentional propaganda by Japanese political and cultural figures. Since the Meiji Restoration period, Japan had strategically propagandized Japanese culture in the West to build its international status. Under the guidance and promotion of Fukuzawa Yukichi's (1835–1901) "Theory of Civilization," Japan looked for elements in traditional culture to compete with the West. Japanese politicians and literati constructed the conditions that could make Japan a "civilized" country. They sought to reexamine traditional Japanese culture from a modern perspective, and they actively carried out activities in the public sphere to shape the national image.³

However, for Japan, which came from the East Asian cultural context, Chinese culture was a rather awkward rival. Japan had the advantage over China of having started the process of westernization before China and thus having a more active presence in the international discourse earlier. The Japanese government recruited and hired foreigners to carry out cultural construction in Japan. When these people returned to the West, they became the authorities on Eastern art, and they took with them the prejudice that Japanese culture was superior to Chinese culture. At the same time, Japanese critics also took advantage of their relationship with these orientalists to further propagate the alleged superiority of Japanese culture. Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), who was recruited by the

3 Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan*.

Japanese government to teach at Tokyo Imperial University at the end of the nineteenth century, was one of the representative figures. Fenollosa's student Okakura Tenshin (1863–1913) went a step further, advocating the “leadership” of Japanese culture in East Asia.

In the propaganda of Japanese critics and Western critics, the rhetoric of contrast was repeatedly used. Chinese art was always used as a foil to Japanese art. Although no one could deny that the origins of numerous elements of Japanese art lay in Chinese art, this did not in any way enhance the status of Chinese art in the international discourse. Western critics often criticized the alleged stagnation of Chinese art after the Song Dynasty. They claimed that only the Chinese art from the period before the Song Dynasty merited praise, while Japan had avoided stagnation by learning from the nature and thus had become the successor of the culture of the Chinese Tang and Song dynasties. This argument mirrors the image of China being closed and conservative and Japan's westernization and progressiveness at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it had many negative consequences from the perspective of the protection of and research on traditional Chinese architecture for Chinese scholars.

Japanese architectural historian Itō Chūta (1867–1954) argued that, “[t]he culture in the Tang dynasty (618–907 AD) is not only the culmination of Chinese civilization, but also the successor of Central Asian, Indian, Greek and Roman civilizations, while Japanese culture combines native Shintoism with Tang culture, thus representing the essence of Asian culture. Therefore, the Japanese culture is sufficient to lead Asia.”⁴ Chinese architectural historian Lai Delin incisively pointed out the intentions of Japanese scholars at that time: “If Chinese architecture begin to decline after the Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD), then what were the representatives of East Asian architecture in the Ming and Qing Dynasties? (Japanese architecture).”⁵

The First Generation of Chinese Architectural Historians and Their Studies from the 1920s to the 1940s

The first generation of Chinese architectural historians, represented by Liang Sicheng(1901–1972), Lin Huiyin(1904–1955), Tong Jun(1900–983), and Liu Dunzhen (1897–1968), started pursuing research on and make efforts to protect

4 Lai, *Changing Ideals in Modern China and Its Historiography of Architecture*, 257.

5 Ibid., 198–99.

traditional Chinese architecture and gardens in this unfavorable international cultural context.

Having received systematic professional education in the West, these architects had a clear understanding of the value of architectural historical narratives for national cultural identity and the international status of culture from the outset. Liang Sicheng, Lin Huiyin, and Tong Jun all graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. They received a systematic education on Western architecture. While pursuing studies in the United States, they were deeply influenced by Western history, culture, and aesthetics. But they did not agree with the Western views on traditional Chinese architecture and garden arts.

During their stay in the United States, they realized that European countries attached great importance to the study of their own architectural history and achieved fruitful results. A group of architectural historians also emerged in Japan. They made great achievements in the study of the ancient architecture of their country and extended their range of study to Chinese architecture. This situation brought a sense of urgency for Chinese scholars. They started research on Chinese architecture and gardens in part out of fear of leaving this field of research under the domination of Western and Japanese hegemony.

Liang Sicheng was the eldest son of Liang Qichao, a prominent politician and historian in modern China who was one of the leaders who advocated for the Hundred Days' Reform. Liang Qichao deeply understood the importance of architectural history in national culture. Therefore, he had high hopes for Liang Sicheng and his daughter-in-law Lin Huiyin's research on Chinese architectural history. During their studies in the United States, Liang Qichao sent them the recently rediscovered Chinese traditional architectural technical treatise *Yingzao Fashi* (Treatise on Architectural Methods or State Building Standards), first printed in 1103. He inscribed a message on the title page, urging them to conduct in-depth research: "This masterpiece from a thousand years ago can be a great treasure for our cultural heritage."⁶ Therefore, during their studies in the United States, Liang and Lin had already begun to attempt to create a modern Chinese national and social identity through their research on traditional Chinese architectural history.

Lin Huiyin hailed from a distinguished background and had already established herself as a celebrated poet, novelist, and literary figure prior to

6 Zhao. "Significance of 'Oracle Book' and 'Grammar' in Yingzao Fashi Studies in the Academic System of Chinese Architecture."

her engagement to Liang Sicheng. During their studies at the University of Pennsylvania, she encountered barriers in pursuing the study of architecture due to its male-dominated nature at the time, leading her to enroll in the art department while auditing courses in architecture. In contrast, Liang Sicheng faced no such impediments in the architecture department. Despite encountering discrimination, Lin excelled academically and was appointed as a teaching assistant in the architecture department. As the sole woman in the field of modern Chinese architecture, Lin endured unfair treatment throughout her life, yet her exceptional talent ensured that her accomplishments were not overshadowed by her husband. Her exceptional literary abilities and profound insights rendered her writing accessible to the public, and her scholarly works and essays contributed to the heightened recognition of ancient Chinese architectural art among the broader public.

Northeastern University and Chinese architecture education

When the first generation of architectural historians came back China from their studies abroad, they built education in modern Chinese architecture from its foundations. In 1928, Liang and Lin returned to China after having graduated. They joined the architecture department at Northeastern University in Shenyang. The department had been founded a month earlier, and Liang and Lin became the only two teachers in the department for the first academic year. In 1930, Tong Jun also returned from the United States, and joined them as a colleague.

The three earliest teachers at Northeastern University graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. They built the architectural curriculum on the basis of the fine arts Beaux-Arts traditions in the United States. Meanwhile, they began to construct the discipline of Chinese architectural history. In the following years, they started three courses for East Asian arts studies: History of Oriental Architecture, History of Oriental Sculpture, and History of Oriental Art.

Liang Sicheng also started to survey and study traditional Chinese architecture in this period. He believed that, in order to sort out the development process of Chinese architecture, modern architectural theories and methods must be adopted. He therefore attached great importance to the investigation of architectural heritage. In one article, he made the important statement concerning methodology that, “[t]he study of traditional Chinese architecture cannot be

conducted without field investigation, surveys, and mapping.”⁷ Moreover, he sought to confirm the descriptions and records in historical architectural documents such as *Yingzao Fashi* by discovering evidence.

Shenyang had once been the capital of the Manchu Qing Dynasty. There were many royal buildings in the city, which undoubtedly provided rich cases for Liang Sicheng’s study of traditional architecture. Liang’s first survey subject was the Northern Mausoleum of the Qing Dynasty, the Zhaoling Mausoleum, located in the suburbs of Shenyang. The experience he gained from this project became the foundation for his future fieldwork in architecture investigation and research.

He also began his efforts to further the preservation of traditional architectures in China in this period. According to Fei Weimei,⁸ the mayor of Shenyang decided to demolish the old Bell and Drum Towers on the grounds that it was a hindrance to traffic. When Liang heard this news, he approached the municipal authorities, hoping to preserve the ancient buildings and find another solution to the traffic problem. However, his proposal was rejected. This incident became one of the considerations that prompted Liang to resign from Northeastern University.

In the winter of 1930, Lin Huiyin returned to Peiping (Beijing) to recuperate due to a relapse of tuberculosis. In February 1931, Liang Sicheng handed over his work in the Architecture Department to his colleague Tong Jun. He left Northeastern University in June, returned to Peiping and joined Yingzao Xueshe (The Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture).

A mere three months after Tong Jun had taken over as dean of the department, Japanese troops invaded northeast China. Tong strove to meet his responsibilities during the war. He led the teachers and students of Northeastern University into exile in the south. He endeavored to give lectures to the remaining students until they graduated.

Yingzao Xueshe and the study of traditional Chinese architecture

Yingzao Xueshe, or the Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture, was founded by Zhu Qiqian (1872–1964) in 1930. It was the first academic group in modern China for the study of traditional architecture. Liang and Lin became

7 Liang, “Ji Xian Du Le Si Guan Yin Ge Shan Men Kao.”

8 Fairbank, *Liang and Lin: partners in exploring China's architectural past*, 43.

the leading members of the society after they had fully enrolled in 1931. Another leading member was Liu Dunzhen.

The scholars of architectural history had a clear understanding that their work could serve as a means of resistance against colonial narratives. In 1932, Lin Huiyin published an article titled “On Several Characteristics of Chinese Architecture,” in which she pointed out that

Chinese architecture is the most prominent independent system in the East, with profound origins and a simple evolutionary process. Throughout the ages, it has maintained a consistent inheritance and orderly development, without undergoing complex changes due to external influences. ... Compared to architectural styles from various Eastern and Western traditions, it represents an exceptionally unique and coherent system. ... However, the national history of this architecture is not simple, and it is not lacking in various religious, ideological, and political transformations.

This argument was a candid refutation of Fletcher’s “Tree of Architecture,” and Lin Huiyin also noted that,

[b]ecause the subsequent Chinese architecture reached a level of complexity and exquisite artistry in structure and art, its external appearance still presents a simple and unadorned atmosphere. Ordinary people often misunderstand Chinese architecture as fundamentally crude and underdeveloped, inferior and immature compared to other architectural styles. This misconception originally stemmed from the careless observations of Westerners toward Eastern culture, often leading to hasty and rash conclusions that influenced Chinese people themselves to excessively doubt or even disdain their own art. ... The contributions of outsiders to the discourse on Chinese architecture are still very few, and many areas still require urgent attention from our architects to pursue material research, correction of misconceptions, and valuable exploration, thus rectifying many misunderstandings and errors made by outsiders.⁹

These scholars were always patriots, and their love of their country was intertwined with their dedication to their work. Their research on Chinese architecture was aimed at glorifying their motherland and resisting the Japanese.

9 Lin, “On Several Characteristics of Chinese Architecture.”

In June 1932, Lin Huiyin wrote to Hu Shi,¹⁰ mentioning Liang Sicheng's departure to investigate the Baodi Guangji Temple, saying, "[w]e are waiting eagerly for his detailed survey maps and reports to be published, which will surely astonish the Japanese scholars." In 1935, when the Japanese brutally shut down the *Da Gong Bao* (Impartial Daily) newspaper and launched the *Asian People's Newspaper*, she was outraged and wrote to Shen Congwen¹¹ to encourage him to condemn the Japanese.¹²

That year, Japan's imperialist ambitions in China had become apparent, and the situation was increasingly tense. Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin felt immense pressure to complete the survey of ancient buildings in northern China before the aggressors invaded on a large scale, fearing that once the war had broken out, the essence of these national cultural treasures would be reduced to ashes in enemy fire. Liang Sicheng said, "[o]ur days of working in northern China are numbered. Before we are stopped from doing so, we have decided to make full efforts in this area." The Japanese claimed that there could not possibly be Tang Dynasty wooden structures in China, and Chinese people could only go to Nara to see them, but Liang and Lin always believed that there must still be Tang Dynasty wooden structures in China, and he decided to go on a difficult search. After the Lugou Bridge Incident in July 1937, Lin wrote to her nine-year-old daughter, telling her that "the Japanese are coming to occupy Peiping, and we are all willing to fight" and asking her "not to be afraid of war, not to be afraid of the Japanese."¹³

From 1932 to 1937, the members of the Society led by Liang Sicheng and Liu Dunzhen conducted a large-scale survey of traditional works of architecture. With the results of the survey, they conducted in-depth research on important issues related to the history of Chinese architecture, and they made many achievements that have had an important impact on the field. Before the Second Sino-Japanese war broke out in 1937, the members of the Society led by Liang and Liu had successively investigated 1,832 works of traditional architecture in 137 counties and cities, surveyed 206 groups of works of traditional architecture in detail, and completed 1,898 survey drawings.¹⁴

10 Hu Shi (胡适), a prominent Chinese philosopher, essayist, and diplomat in the early twentieth century, known for his advocacy of vernacular Chinese literature and his role in the New Culture Movement.

11 Shen Congwen (沈从文), a renowned Chinese writer known for his contributions to modern Chinese literature, particularly for his vivid portrayal of rural life in his works.

12 Cao, *Lin Huiyin xian sheng nian pu*.

13 Fairbank, *Liang and Lin: partners in exploring China's architectural past*, 114.

14 Hu, "Study on Liang Sicheng's Academic Practice", 62.

The first field investigation led by Liang was for the Mountain Gate of the Du Le Temple Kuanyin Pavilion in Ji Count in 1932. The research was published in the *Bulletin of the Society for the Research in Chinese Architecture* (vol. 3, no. 2).¹⁵ After the report was published, it attracted great attention among academic circles at home and abroad. It was the first time that Chinese scholars had studied a work of traditional Chinese architecture with modern scientific methods, and it thus became a milestone in the study of traditional Chinese architecture.

The survey by Liang's team confirmed that the mountain gate of the Du Le Temple had been built in 984 AD under the Liao Dynasty. It was the oldest wooden structure in China known at that time. Liang analyzed the dimensions of the building structures in the Du Le Temple, and he compared the construction dimensions of the buildings with the recordings from the era of the Song Dynasty in *Yingzao Fashi*. The structures intuitively show the basic patterns of architecture from the Song Dynasty. Thus, on the basis of the evidence found in the Du Le temple, the written records in *Yingzao Fashi* had been interpreted clearly and accurately. Thus answered many questions which, until then, had puzzled scholars.

In 1937, Yingzao Xueshe accomplished another important achievement. The team led by Liang and Lin discovered and surveyed in detail the wooden structure of the Fo Guang Temple in Wutai Mountains, which had been built in 857 AD under the Tang Dynasty.

Tang Dynasty architecture represents the highest achievements of ancient Chinese wooden architecture. At the time, no one knew whether there were any remaining examples of wooden structures from the Tang Dynasty in China. Japanese scholars asserted that there were no wooden structure remains from the Tang Dynasty in China, and they claimed that wooden structures from the Tang Dynasty had only been preserved in Nara, Japan.

Liang believed that there were still Tang Dynasty structures in China. When he was sorting out the materials of the Mo Kao Grottoes in Dunhuang in the Gansu province, Liang noticed a temple in the murals painted under the Song Dynasty in cave No. 61. He realized that the edifice might still exist because of its remote location. With this hope in mind, Liang took the Fo Guang Temple as his first choice for investigation when he was planning his fourth visit to Shanxi. Their investigation found that the main building of the Fo Guang Temple was

15 Liang, "Ji Xian Du Le Si Guan Yin Ge Shan Men Kao."

well-preserved, and its wooden structure was a typical example of the Tang Dynasty architectural style.

Precisely when Liang and Lin set out to survey the Fo Guang Temple, Japan intensified its war against China. Liang and Lin had to end their project in a hurry and return to Peiping. After that, the Yingzao Xueshe was temporarily dissolved. The members left Peiping and began to live in exile in the southern provinces. After the Yingzao Xueshe began to function again in Kunming, Yunnan province, Liang and his colleagues continued their research under extremely difficult circumstances. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, members of the Society lacked funds and research materials, and it was difficult for them to ensure their own personal safety. These difficulties notwithstanding, they kept on with their academic research. The Society carried out surveys of works of traditional architecture in southwest China another three times.

The research findings concerning the Fo Guang Temple were not systematically published on schedule because of the outbreak of war. In July 1941, Liang published an article in English in *Asia Magazine* titled “China’s Oldest Wooden Structure.”¹⁶ The article focuses on the investigation process of the Fo Guang Temple, which did not include the surveying data. Although the research findings were not fully revealed, Liang confirmed that the main building of Fo Guang Temple is a wooden structure from the Tang Dynasty, and this revelation came as a shock to academic circles. In 1944 and 1945, Yingzao Xueshe published the last two issues of the *Bulletin of the Society for the Research in Chinese Architecture* (vol. 7, no. 1 and 2) in Lizhuang, Sichuan. In these two issues, the discovery of the Fo Guang Temple discovery and related research findings were finally announced.¹⁷

At the same time, the focus of the work of the Society shifted to research on previous documents. Liang and his colleagues pursued penetrating research on *Yingzao Fashi*. They sorted out the development process of traditional Chinese architecture and compiled *The History of Chinese Architecture*, which included the findings of their investigations. *The History of Chinese Architecture*¹⁸ was completed in 1944. At the same time, Liang began to write the English version of the book, *A Pictorial History of Chinese Architecture: A Study of the Development of Its*

16 Liang, “China’s Oldest Wooden Structure.”

17 Liang, “Ji Wu Tai Shan Fo Guang Si Jian Zhu.”

18 Liang, *Zhongguo jian zhu shi*.

Structural System and the Evolution of Its Types,¹⁹ which was published in the United States in 1984. In the book, Liang specifically drew several illustrations to show the evolution of Chinese architecture, in part as a protest against Fletcher's contentions concerning Chinese architecture.

The research by Chinese scholars surpassed the work of their foreign peers. Architectural historian Fu Xinian later commented on the survey report of the Du Le Temple, saying, “[t]his work not only surpassed the level of European, American and Japanese research on ancient Chinese architecture at that time, but also surpassed the depth of Japanese research on Japanese architecture at that time, it was the in-depth exploration of ancient architectural design pattern through form.”²⁰

Before Liang Sicheng and his colleagues began to study traditional Chinese architecture, Japanese researchers made several contemptuous comments concerning the efforts of Chinese scholars. Japanese architectural historians Ito Chuta²¹ and Tadashi Sekino both contended that the study of Chinese architectural history could only be done by the Japanese, since Chinese scholars allegedly lacked the skill for scientific surveys and investigations (Ito Chuta, *Chinese Architecture History*, 1925; Tadashi Sekino, *Relics of Ancient Chinese Culture*, 1918).²² However, after the publication of research conducted by the Chinese architectural historians, they no longer made these kinds of comments. And in their study of Chinese architecture, they often cited publications by Chinese researchers.

The protection of traditional cities during World War II

In the later stages of World War II, Liang Sicheng and his colleagues began to use their professional literacy to help further the protection of traditional cities from the destruction of war. During the final stage of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Liang Sicheng and his colleagues helped the Allied and People's Liberation Army compile catalogues of cultural relics on many occasions. Many sites in cities in China and even in Japan were spared damage as a consequence of their efforts.

19 Liang and Fairbank, *A pictorial history of Chinese architecture: A study of the development of its structural system and the evolution of its types*.

20 Hu, “Study on Liang Sicheng’s Academic Practice,” 66.

21 Itō, *Shina kenchikushi*.

22 Xu, *Riben dui Zhongguo cheng shi yu jian zhu de yan jiu*, 7.

In 1944, the Allies planned to strike back against Japan in a comprehensive, devastating manner. In the summer, Liang went to Chongqing to help mark culture relics on military maps. His work included not only maps of mainland China, but also maps of Japanese cities, including Kyoto and Nara.

In order to ensure that the cultural relics and historical sites were not damaged during the attack, Liang marked the locations of historical sites on the maps and compiled a catalogue of cultural relics and buildings in both Chinese and English. The complete catalogue consists of eight volumes, including nearly 400 buildings which are important cultural relic buildings, covering 15 provinces and cities in the occupied area.²³ He also included a note on the “Principle of Identification of Ancient Buildings” at the beginning of each volume.

In the spring of 1949, in order to protect the cultural relics from damage during the civil war, Liang Sicheng was commissioned by the People’s Liberation Army to organize the teachers in the Department of Architecture of Tsinghua University to compile a “Brief List of Important National Cultural Relic Buildings.” This was the first important document on the history of cultural relics’ protection in the People’s Republic of China. Most of the participants were members of the Yingzao Xueshe, and they used the survey data accumulated by the Society. Therefore, this document should still be regarded as the last academic achievement under the name of the Yingzao Xueshe.²⁴

Protection of Chinese Traditional Cities after World War II (1950s)

A failed reform of architecture education

In October 1946, Zhu Qiqian, Liang Sicheng, and Tsinghua University signed an agreement to merge the Yingzao Xueshe into Tsinghua University. The materials and collections of the Society were also transferred to the Architecture Department of Tsinghua University. This marked the end of the history of Yingzao Xueshe as an independent academic research institution.²⁵

From 1946 to 1947, Liang was invited to serve as a visiting professor at Yale University and to attend the International Symposium on Far Eastern Culture

23 Hu, “Study on Liang Sicheng’s Academic Practice,” 99–100.

24 Lu and Liu, “Chronology of Academic Events of the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture,” 231–68.

25 Ibid.

and Society hosted by Princeton University.²⁶ After returning to China from the United States, Liang proposed reforming architectural education according to the new trends in modern architectural education in Europe and the United States. He advocated abandoning the traditional “Beaux-Arts” curriculum, which approached architecture as one of the fine arts, and using the Bauhaus method for teaching.²⁷

In the 1920s and 1930s, architecture theories in Europe and the countries of North America changed dramatically. An approach based on a classicism aesthetics was replaced by modernist trends. The Bauhaus method was a new teaching method which adapted to this new trend and was widely accepted. It became the mainstream in architecture education. Liang believed that the Bauhaus method represented the new direction in international architectural education, and in his assessment, it was more suitable for educating the future architects for the reconstruction of postwar China. He suggested that Tsinghua University adopt the new Bauhaus education system.²⁸

His new curriculum plan also reflected strong liberal education characteristics. It included social science courses, such as Sociology, Economics, Physical Environment and Society, Rural Sociology, Urban Sociology, Municipal Management, and courses on architectural history and art history, such as the History of European and American Architecture, the History of Chinese Architecture, the History of European and American Paintings and sculpture, and the History of Chinese Paintings sculptures.²⁹ Together with more narrowly specialized courses in the profession, these courses offered a comprehensive curriculum which offered students a rich knowledge in the fields of society, engineering, and art. The new curriculum was intended to stimulate the modern architect’s research interests and enhance his or her sense of social responsibility.³⁰

Liang’s education reform only lasted from 1947 to 1952. After 1952, the Soviet model of higher education gradually became dominant in China. The mainstream architectural style in the Soviet Union during this period changed from constructivism to classicism. And the Soviet architectural education

26 Dou, *Biography of Liang Sicheng*, 168.

27 Liang and Gao, *Liang Sicheng xue shu si xiang yan jiu lun wen ji*, 79.

28 *Ibid.*, 79–80.

29 Hu, “Study on Liang Sicheng’s Academic Practice,” 95

30 Guo and Gao, “Yi dai zong shi Liang Sicheng,” 150.

program also completely returned to the traditional system resting on an approach to architecture as one of the fine arts.³¹

Soviet experts such as A. S. Mukhin and E. A. Ashchepkov came to China and brought with them the concepts of Soviet architectural education. Soviet experts' opinions became decisive in the formulation of the syllabuses in departments of architecture. Many colleges and universities adopted the architectural education system of the Soviet Union. The Department of Architecture at Tsinghua University gave up the newly adopted Bauhaus teaching mode and focused on principles of classical aesthetics.

Ashchepkov came to the Department of Architecture at Tsinghua University in 1952. He had developed an architecture curriculum in the Soviet Union in 1948, and he specified a new teaching plan with the reference to the “plan proposed in the summary of the Tenth Congress of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1951.”³² Drawing on the Soviet model, Tsinghua University revised the curriculum according to the template of the Moscow Institute of Architecture. The exploration of modern architectural education in Tsinghua was suspended.

Struggles to protect architectural heritage

Another one of Liang Sicheng's contributions in the 1950s was to call for the protection of architectural heritage, particularly the old city of Beijing, also named Peiping before 1949. Since the tenth century AD, the city had served as the capital of China for five different dynasties. After having been chosen as the capital of the People's Republic of China, Beijing faced the challenges of large-scale urban renewal to cope with the pressure of the official entry of the Central People's Government.

In January 1949, Peiping was peacefully liberated, and most of the traditional architecture was saved from damage. What was even more valuable was Beijing's overall layout as a traditional ancient capital. Liang repeatedly emphasized that Beijing's special value lies first and foremost in its urban layout as a whole. For this reason, he suggested “first recognizing the excellent structure of Beijing City's layout, and the architectural monuments in Beijing should be protected as

31 Ibid., 150–60.

32 Liu, “The Sovietization in Chinese Architectural Education in the 1950s as Exemplified in the Department of Architecture at Tsinghua University,” 27–33.

a comprehensive system. They are the world's best-preserved, most special, and most precious masterpieces of art."³³

After the government agencies moved into the city, the urban area of Peiping became crowded. Many palaces, temples and old buildings were in danger of being requisitioned by the government. Due to the lack of systemic regulations, the new construction work in Peiping was also in a disorderly state.

The protection of the old city of Beijing in the urban renewal plans was a foremost issue among Chinese experts and scholars. As a member of the newly established Peiping Urban Planning Committee, Liang wrote to the new mayor of the city in 1949, expressing his concerns about the disorderly development and putting forward suggestions on how to solve this problem.

In May 1949, the Peiping Municipal Government organized a meeting to discuss the plans for the new urban area in the western suburbs of Peiping. Liang Sicheng and other scholars were invited to the meeting. Liang pointed out that the administrative center of Peiping and the central government should be positioned in the new urban area in the western suburb. The old city of Beijing would thus be surrounded by the city wall, and the Forbidden City, which would be the center, would remain intact. The future development of Beijing, he felt, should be founded on this idea. The municipal government showed keen interest in the plan for the new western suburb at the meeting.

However, the situation changed when Soviet experts arrived in Peiping. In September 1949, the Soviet Union sent a group of 17 municipal experts led by P. V. Abramov to Peiping. Their goals were to guide the urban construction or reconstruction of Soviet cities. The Peiping Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government quickly changed their opinion on the plan provided by Chinese scholars and agreed with the urban plan proposed by Soviet experts. One of the key changes made by the Soviet experts was the choice of the location of the administrative center. The new administrative center was set within the original urban area, more specifically, the new urban plan was set with the Forbidden City as the center.

At the city planning report meeting in November 1949, Liang Sicheng and other Chinese experts had an intense discussion on the report submitted by the Soviet experts. Liang Sicheng did not agree with the Soviet experts on multiple issues. The Soviet experts also expressed their opinions on the reports of Liang

33 Liang, *Liang si cheng quan ji di 5 juan*, 113.

and sharply criticized him. Abramov claimed that his design ideas were based on the opinions of the leaders of the Communist Party of China. He criticized the European and American urban planning and heritage protection concepts reflected in Liang Sicheng's speech. And he cited in particular the case of the reconstruction of Moscow as his supporting example to criticize Liang Sicheng's idea of putting the new administrative center in the western suburbs in order to protect the old city of Beijing.

Liang Sicheng did not agree with the Soviet experts at the meeting. Regarding the importance and urgency of formulating an urban plan for Beijing, Liang and planning expert Chen Zhanxiang felt that it was necessary to express their understanding comprehensively in a detailed counterproposal. In February 1950, Liang and Chen completed the "Proposal on the Location of the Administrative Central District of the Central People's Government," which was later called the "Liang-Chen Proposal." In this proposal, they offered a detailed urban plan for the new administrative central district in the western suburbs of the city.

To win more support, Liang and Chen printed more than 100 copies of the proposal at their own expense and distributed the copies among the officials of the Beijing Municipal Government. However, two months passed and they did not get any feedback. In April, Liang wrote to the Premier Zhou Enlai, hoping to gain an opportunity to introduce the proposal to him. He did not get any reply.

Over the course of the next few months, the Liang-Chen proposal drew criticism from different parties. The main accusation was that it was an objection to the opinions of Soviet experts. The attempt to build the new administrative center outside the old urban area of Beijing failed. In 1952, Soviet experts became the main sources of decisive guidance in all professions. Chinese experts such as Liang were marginalized.

The construction of the new administrative center in the old urban area of Beijing caused massive, chaotic upheaval. Many buildings that were part of China's architectural heritage in Beijing were at risk. One demonstrative example was the demolition of the city wall of Beijing.

In Liang's opinion, the city wall of Beijing was an important part of China's cultural heritage as a whole. Liang had once provided a design to transform the old city wall into a high-rise park around the city. In his design, the main body of the city wall was preserved as a recreational area for the citizenry, and new city gates could be opened to adapt to new transportation demands. Regarding the protection of elements of China's cultural heritage under the new construction

project, Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin raised a number of objections in different forms. However, they often failed in their struggle. The city wall and many traditional buildings in Beijing were demolished in the later years.

Conclusion

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the study and struggle of the first generation of architectural historians showed many respectable qualities of Chinese scholars. They started their research as part of an effort to challenge Western and Japanese hegemonies. They introduced modern architectural education in China from abroad. In the 1930s, they investigated and surveyed a large number of Chinese architectural monuments and gardens to fight against prejudices in the international academic world against Chinese culture.

After the beginning of World War II, they struggled to continue their teaching and research under Japanese occupation. While their personal safety was threatened by the war, they strove to pursue their research and professional practice. They also managed to transfer their students and to continue their teaching.

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China, they started the reform of architectural education and called for protection of important elements of China's architectural and landscape heritage in the industrialization movement in the 1950s. The Liang-Chen Proposal, Liang's urban planning proposal to preserve old Beijing, was turned down due to the objections made by Soviet experts. Liang protested many times against the demolition of important historical works of architecture.

Whether oppression came from the West, Japan, or the Soviet Union, the first-generation architectural historians in China always kept their independent mind and professional attitudes. They faced many setbacks in their efforts, but their research saved many historical works of architecture and important elements of cityscapes from being ruined by the war, both in China and Japan. Their surveys and investigations offered invaluable documentation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage that disappeared in the war and in the subsequent industrialization movements. Their ideas still play an important role in Chinese cultural heritage conservation today. They established the modern discipline of architecture in China. Their persisting struggle revealed the unyielding independence and dignity of modern Chinese intellectuals.

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