



The Modern Home in Architectural Journals and Mass Market Texts in Early 20th Century China

Journal:	<i>The Journal of Architecture</i>
Manuscript ID	RJAR-2016-0080.R1
Manuscript Type:	Special Issue Paper
Keywords:	domesticity, modern architecture, design, home, China

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

View Only

Constructing a New Domestic Discourse: The Modern Home in Architectural Journals and Mass Market Texts in Early Twentieth Century China

This paper explores how changing ideals of the modern home were articulated in China's architectural journals and mass market texts during the 1920s and 1930s, a period in which many Chinese cities experienced increasing housing shortages for the working poor along with changing expectations of 'contemporary' dwellings for middle income urbanites.¹ More specifically, I examine how the design of residential houses and domestic arrangements became a subject of intellectual and political concern for architects and cultural intermediaries. By tracing the competing moral claims ascribed to the modern home through these writings, I illustrate their shifting assumptions about the 'social role' of architecture in the Chinese context. I argue that while these critiques were closely related to those in Europe and elsewhere, they were specific responses to accelerating capitalist urbanization in China and were undergirded by a shared anxiety among Chinese elites and professional experts to institute an authentic modern design culture. Central to their efforts was the belief that well designed dwellings would not only help to improve the lives of Chinese citizens, but also transform their everyday habits and develop China into a more 'civilized,' healthy and productive nation. While modern architecture was promoted by architects as a key means to modernization and social betterment, they debated over the suitability and appropriateness of forms, aesthetics and domestic arrangements for the Chinese populous, often selectively linking particular designs with (progressive) values that defined modernism in Western contexts as well as those associated with 'Chinese culture and tradition.' Meanwhile, these expressions were utilized by those in building trades to encourage consumption for the home by projecting imaginaries of modern domestic life that did not always correspond with those of intellectual elites.

These explorations, which build on expanding scholarship on modern architectural history in China, will contribute to a fuller understanding of the contradictory perspectives of architecture and domesticity in an unsettling period characterized by simmering social discontent and emerging nationalism. The attention to lesser known – and arguably collectively important – figures in this study will elucidate the multifarious exchange of knowledge between different factions of architects and institutions beyond

¹ In the 1920s and 1930s, major cities in China saw a dramatic increase of population and concomitant severe scarcity of affordable housing. Between 1930 and 1934, population in Nanjing increased by 80% and that in Shanghai by 40%. The number of households living in shanty towns was estimated to be 30,000, which accounted for one-tenth of the population. M. Yan 閻明, 'Yimen kexue yu yige shidai—shehuixue zai Zhongguo' 一門學科與一個時代—社會學在中國 (One discipline and one time: sociology in China) (Beijing, Tsinghua University Press, 2004), p. 73; and X. Ye 葉新明, 'Dushi zhuzhai wenti' 都市住宅問題 (Urban housing problems), *Zhongguo Xinlun* 中國新論, 1: 7 (1935).

1
2
3 the familiar ones represented in existing historiography.² Finally, the illustration of concerted attention
4 to the problem of the home in this period will underscore the significance of domesticity in the
5 construction of architectural discourse, which is an aspect that has been largely eschewed in the
6 writings of modern architectural history.
7
8
9

10 11 **Modern Architecture and Domesticity in Comparative Perspectives** 12

13
14
15 In her discussion of modern architecture and domesticity, Hilda Heynen writes that the design of the
16 modern home had been a focus of avant-garde architects in the West throughout the early 20th
17 century.³ Notwithstanding the anti-domestic rhetoric of modernism and its presumed association with
18 high culture, prominent European architects experimented with new household arrangements in their
19 works and many were involved with designing social housing aimed at transforming the 'whole
20 environment for modern men.'⁴ Members of the avant-garde movement were also committed to
21 abolish the autonomy of art which was deemed to have 'no real impact on the social system.'⁵
22 Although their interests in integrating art with daily living of the 'common person' might seem at odds
23 with modernism's disdain of mass culture, they must be seen as specific responses to the advent of
24 industrial capitalism and rise of consumerist economy in the European context. The goal was to
25 develop a different relationship between art and everyday life for the masses that would be part and
26 parcel of instilling a new dwelling culture for a progressive society. These ideas, which were
27 underpinned by a socialist critique of bourgeois family values and commodity culture that emerged
28 with industrial capitalism in Europe, were most forcefully advocated by the leftist group CIAM⁶ in the
29 late 1920s and 1930s. In alignment with other political commentators at the time, these architects saw
30 the 'petit-bourgeois home' and its overfull interiors to be thoroughly bound up with capitalist values of
31 ostentation and property ownership.⁷ The setups of these environments were further critiqued as
32 reinforcing a gendered division of labor that consigned women to the 'private sphere.' These concerns
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47

48
49 ² For example, see T. Yang 楊永生 and L. Ming 明連生, *Jianzhu Sijie 建築四傑 (Four Outstanding Architects)* (Beijing, Zhongguo Jianzhu Gongye Chubanshe, 1995), which focused on the lives and works of four architects that have long been considered to be the most important figures in modern architectural history in China.

50
51 ³ H. Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity,' in H. Heynen and G. Baydar, eds., *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London; New York, Routledge, 2005), pp. 1-29.

52
53 ⁴ Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity,' p. 4; A.T. Anderson, *The Problem of the House: French Domestic Life and the Rise of Modern Architecture* (Seattle, Washington University Press, 2006).

54
55 ⁵ Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity,' pp. 4-5; P. Burger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

56
57 ⁶ CIAM stands for Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne, which was an organization founded by European architects in 1928 and remained in operation until 1959.

58
59 ⁷ Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity,' p. 17.
60

1
2
3 led CIAM and other architects to engage with designing proletarian housing and advocate for a new
4 form of domesticity that would no longer be based on the nuclear family that defined the bourgeois
5 household. In replacement was a new, 'minimum' type of dwelling centered on collective living, where
6 women would be liberated from their domestic duties and every individual would be given equal
7 opportunities to exploit his or her potential participation in public life.⁸
8
9

10
11
12
13 The work of CIAM and other architects of the modern movement did not escape the attention of their
14 contemporaries in China, including especially those who received their training overseas.⁹ These
15 architects were keen to adopt 'Western models' as a means to modernize China and to develop a
16 modern design culture of their own. Like their European counterparts, they wanted to improve the
17 lives of ordinary citizens, including the many urbanites who were compelled to live in undesirable
18 conditions amidst escalating housing rents in large cities. Since the mid-1920s, a time that
19 corresponded with the rapid expansion of the popular press in Shanghai, they actively promoted
20 emergent ideas of modern design and called for professionalization of architectural practice by
21 contributing articles and translated texts in mass market journals and magazines.¹⁰ A closer
22 examination of these texts, however, also suggests that despite their faith in the role of modern
23 architecture in enabling social betterment, most writers did not fully align themselves with the
24 positions of European modernists. Most notably, their shared desire to create an authentic 'Chinese
25 design culture' led to deep reflections on the meanings of tradition, culture and role of art in China's
26 modernization process. These debates, which became especially lively in the second half of the 1920s,
27 encouraged many architects to project competing visions of the future that incorporated cultural
28 expressions taken from China and the West. By the mid 1930s, the growing influence of the socialist
29 avant-garde movement caused some younger architects to begin to turn to Soviet Union for design
30 inspirations. These ideas, which were based on socialist ideology that supported collective living and
31 integration of domestic and public life, gradually departed from the earlier attention to cultural
32 particularities and artistic expression in the design of the home.
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51

52 ⁸ Ibid., p. 19. For a discussion of the ideas of collective living in the early 20th century, also see D. Hayden, *The Grand Domestic*
53 *Revolution* (Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1981).

54 ⁹ The number of Chinese architects with foreign training was relatively small (less than a hundred by 1938). Most of them
55 returned to China in the 1920s with high hopes of participating in the state's ambitious nation-building project. See C. Lou 婁
56 承浩, 'Jindai Shanghai de jianzhuye he jianzhushi' 近代上海的建築業和建築師 (Building industry and architects in modern
57 Shanghai), *Shanghai Dangan Gongzuo* 2 (1992), pp. 49-52.

58 ¹⁰ For a discussion on the significance and impacts of these mass market texts, see P.G. Pickowicz, K. Shen, and Y. Zhang,
59 *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926-1945* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013).
60

1
2
3 The other departure from European modernism was the rationale behind domestic reform. Up until the
4 mid 1930s, there was almost no challenge to the authority of the nuclear family as the most
5 appropriate unit for household organization. Instead of associating it with Victorian conservatism and
6 the petit-bourgeois that were denounced by European socialists, Chinese intellectuals saw it to be the
7 foundation of the modern economy that had helped to strengthen Western nations. To them, the
8 nuclear family presented a superior alternative to the traditional Chinese joint family system that was
9 deemed to be the root of despotism and a major obstacle that prevented China from becoming
10 'modern.'¹¹ That said, this perspective was increasingly being questioned in the mid-1930s by young
11 leftist intellectuals, who advocated for the socialization of domestic work and provision of collective
12 housing.¹² However, the latter's ideas never gained much traction among the larger network of
13 architects and state administrators, who were unwilling to restructure the existing economic system in
14 which they were imbricated. Proposals for collective living also ran up against the Kuomintang
15 government's effort to contain the growing influence of communism by recasting Chinese tradition and
16 'Confucian family values' as essential components in China's modernization.¹³
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

29 The ultimate failure to implement radical social reform in this period must also be explained by another
30 important factor. As in the West, avant-garde architecture was conceived by elite intellectuals and was
31 somewhat out of touch with the desires of a majority of ordinary citizens. In particular, the stripped-
32 down aesthetics and standardized 'minimum dwelling' form did not resonate with the sphere of
33 consumption which tended toward diversification and was more aligned with the 'bourgeois home'
34 condemned by the socialists. This was especially descriptive of the many urbanites in cosmopolitan
35 cities such as Shanghai, which had long been exposed to Western consumer culture and were
36 considered to be more 'modern' than other parts of the nation.¹⁴ The fact that many architects relied
37 on commissions to design family homes for the middle and upper income class also made them more
38 inclined to support the status quo even though many were adamant about their commitment to
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47

48
49 ¹¹ These ideas could be seen in many newspapers and mass market journals since the mid 1910s. For a discussion on the ideal
50 of nuclear family in China, see H.M. Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of*
51 *Modern China* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011); and S. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953* (Berkeley; Los
52 Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

53 ¹² A major site that dissemination these ideas was the architectural journal *Xinjianzhu* 新建築. See discussion of the journal
54 and their writers in a later section in this paper.

55 ¹³ These efforts were most notable in the New Life Movement (新生活運動) initiated by the Kuomintang government in 1934.
56 See Z. Guan and Z. Zhe, 'Shilun Xinchenghuo Yuandong zhi yuanqi' 試論新生活運動之緣起 (Origin of 'New Life Movement'),
57 *Shenzhen Daxue Xuebao*, 11: 2 (1994), pp. 64-72.

58 ¹⁴ For a discussion on modern life in Shanghai, see L. Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China,*
59 *1930-1945* (Cambridge, Mass; London, Harvard University Press, 1999), and W. Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments*
60 *and the Making of Modern China 1843-1949* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London, University of California Press, 2007).

1
2
3 China's nation-building project. These complex dynamics, tensions and emerging aspirations, which will
4 be discussed in the following sections, show that the conception of architectural modernism and
5 discourse of domesticity were shaped as much by multiple social actors with divergent agendas as by
6 specific historical trajectories and cultural practices.
7
8
9

10 11 12 **Reforming Nation and 'Tradition'**

13
14
15 Historians write that domestic reform in China began in the late 19th century as part of political debates
16 concerning the need to overcome 'national weakness.' Up until the 1890s, China pursued a policy of
17 developing Western technologies while retaining its own cultural traditions. After its devastating loss in
18 the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, some Qing reformers became convinced that China could not succeed
19 in applying Western knowledge without also instituting some elements of cultural reform. A key focus
20 was the education of women, who came to be seen as primary educators of children and 'guardians' of
21 new China.¹⁵ The push for women's liberation accelerated during the New Culture Movement in the
22 mid 1910s, when a new generation of intellectuals began to call for the abolishment of the traditional
23 joint family system, which was perceived as reinforcing the gender hierarchy that was a root cause of
24 despotism.¹⁶ Replacing the old system was the nuclear family, or *xiao jiating* (小家庭), a Western
25 model of the conjugal family that represented a more efficient economic unit based on free marriage
26 choices and economic independence. However, as pointed out by Doris Croissant and others,
27 promoters of the nuclear family concept, who were mostly male educated elites, rarely discussed the
28 liberation of women in terms of the power dynamics between men and women but rather in relation
29 to education and literacy.¹⁷ Such discussions thus framed the issue of women's rights within national
30 politics as part of China's modernization effort, a phenomenon that continued to the later socialist era.
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44

45 Up until the 1910s, discussions of domestic reform did not focus so much on specific designs of
46 residential houses, but primarily on reframing the home as a moral space that broke away from the
47 Confucian hierarchy. From the mid 1910s onward, the idea of nuclear family was enthusiastically
48 promoted by many writers in the popular press targeting both a general audience as well as female
49
50
51
52

53 ¹⁵ These ideas were exemplified, for example, in the writings of Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), one of the founders of the Chinese
54 Communist Party (CCP). For a critical discussion on women's liberation in China, see D. Croissant, C.V. Yeh, and J.S. Mostow,
55 eds., *Performing the 'Nation': Gender Politics in Literature, Theater, and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880-1940* (Leiden;
56 Boston, Brill, 2008).

57 ¹⁶ F. Fitzgerald, 'Equality, modernity, and gender in Chinese nationalism,' in D. Croissant, C.V. Yeh, and J.S. Mostow, eds.,
58 *Performing the 'Nation'*, pp. 19-54.

59 ¹⁷ D. Croissant et al., 'Introduction,' in D. Croissant, C.V. Yeh, and J.S. Mostow, eds., *Performing the 'Nation'*, pp. 1-13.
60

1
2
3 readers.¹⁸ An example is a 1915 article published in the progressive journal *Jinbu* (進步), which
4 provided detailed accounts of the merits of *xiao jiating* and its adoption in different parts of the
5 world.¹⁹ The key emphasis was how the system contributed to the economy and helped foster national
6 strengths. In another piece that appeared in the same year in the women magazine *Funv Zazhi* (婦女雜
7 誌), the focus turned to expectations of ‘modern women,’ particularly in their roles as wives and
8 mothers, to become managers of all aspects of their households.²⁰ The same issue also included other
9 articles that discussed the importance of hygiene and sanitation, offering advice on various domestic
10 practices including cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and organization of household items in order to
11 ensure the wellbeing of the home. These discussions, which were supported by emerging scientific
12 theories framed under ‘domestic science,’ were further elaborated in subsequent issues of the
13 magazine and many other texts that stressed the linkage between management of domestic space and
14 fate of the Chinese nation.²¹

15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26 As pointed out by Helen M. Schneider, contributors to these journals were mostly men and members of
27 literate class who ‘claimed authority with their overseas education and who mediated Western and
28 Chinese knowledge in order to encourage social change.’²² While they strongly supported learning from
29 Western models, some were worried about potential ‘Western infections,’ in particular unfettered
30 individual freedom and materialism associated with capitalism that would lead to potential moral
31 decline and loss of national culture. Amidst these growing anxieties, some looked to Japan as a relevant
32 model for the its successful efforts in modernizing its economy whilst affirming its own ‘culture
33 tradition.’ As Jordan Sand’s study on domesticity in Japan illustrates, one striking feature of Japanese
34 modernity was its powerful strain of ‘national cultural reform,’ which was aimed at elevating Japan to a
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43

44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

¹⁸ Although the literacy rate in China in the 1930 was only around 20%, the market of mass market journals and magazines was expanding quickly. This was especially significant for those targeted at female readers, partly due to the fact that publishers recognized that these texts were generally presumed to be less ‘political’ and would help its distribution. See ‘Wushijiu guo zhi bushizi renshu’ 五十九國之不識字人數 (The illiterate population of fifty-nine countries), *Jiaoyu Zhoukan*, 87 (1931), pp. 21-25; X. Tao 陶賢都 and Y. Ai 艾焱龍, “Funv Zazhi’ yu Zhongguo jindai de keji chuanbo” 《婦女雜誌》與中國近代的科技傳播 (‘Women Magazine’ and the dissemination of technologies in modern China), *Zhongguo Keji Qikan Yanjiu*, 24: 6 (2013), pp. 1227-1230.

¹⁹ Bihui Quanci 聶誨詮次, ‘Shijie xiaojiating zhuyi zhi qushi’ 世界小家庭主義之趨勢 (The development of the concept of conjugal family around the world). *Jinbu* 7, 4 (1915), pp. 1-7.

²⁰ P. Hu 胡品元, ‘Zhijia siyao’ 治家四要 (Four key concepts of home management), *Funv Zazhi*, 5: 9 (1919), pp. 4-8; C. Sheng . ‘Zhuzhai gailiang’ 住宅改良 (Improvement of domestic house design), *Xueyi Zazhi*, 3: 3, 4, 5, 7 (1921); Shuyuan 淑苑. ‘Jiating weisheng zhi xinzhishi’ 家庭衛生之新知識 (New knowledge of family hygiene), *Funv Zazhi*, 3: 7 (1915), pp. 20-29.

²¹ Schneider, *Keeping the Nation’s House*, p. 24.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 21. That said, some magazines also included a growing number of female authors, including the women magazine *Funv Zazhi*. See discussion in Tao and Ai, “Funv Zazhi’ yu Zhongguo.”

²² Bihui Quanci, ‘Shijie xiaojiating zhuyi,’ pp. 1-7.

1
2
3 modern industrial nation whilst retaining its own tradition.²³ This can be seen mostly clearly in the
4 arena of domestic reform. While Meiji reformers promoted women's education and instituted
5 domestic science as a modern discipline, they supported the absolute gendered division of labor and
6 argued that the 'separate spheres' of men and women in the West resonated well with traditional
7 Japanese views of society. Indeed, a persistent argument put forward by the reformers was that
8 'Western ideas' did not necessarily represent a break with tradition, but worked to reinforce existing
9 traditions that the Japanese already possessed.²⁴
10
11
12
13
14
15
16

17 As in Japan, the push for modernization and social change in China incited rigorous debates over the
18 roles of culture and tradition, which acquired new significance and moral meanings in the early 20th
19 century. These debates, which were carried out mostly amongst educated elites, were not
20 unidirectional but encompassed a range of positions that were shaped by ongoing political
21 development.²⁵ Unlike the Japanese who had never experienced the deep humiliation of military
22 defeats by European powers, many Chinese intellectuals felt ashamed of China's national weakness
23 and were critical of the Confucianist thinking that was deemed to have paralyzed any incentives for
24 innovation. These perspectives were strongly adopted by young intellectuals associated with the New
25 Culture movement that reached its height between the late 1910s and mid 1920s. And it is within this
26 context that the term 'development' became associated with the idea of *wenming* (civilization),
27 pointing to a pedagogical process in which the acquisition of Western scientific knowledge was key to
28 advancement of societies.²⁶ In this 'evolutionary narrative,' the 'West' was being construed as an
29 essential category for use to expose China's backwardness. However, there were also others who used
30 it to consider the potentials of Chinese traditions as a source for innovation that would enable the
31 development of an authentic modern Chinese culture.²⁷
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44

45 **The Call for a New Domestic Architecture**

46
47

48 ²³ J. Sand, *House and Homes in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space and Bourgeois Culture, 1880-1930* (Cambridge,
49 Massachusetts; London, Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 17.

50 ²⁴ *Ibid.* It is worth noting that discussions related to domestic design often underscored the contrasts between 'native' and
51 'foreign' aesthetics, tastes and decorative styles, and the unique Japanese sensibility to absorb new styles into modernist
52 design and make them their own. See Sand, *House and Homes in Modern Japan*.

53 ²⁵ For a discussion about the ambivalent attitudes toward modernism, see S. Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing
54 Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London, University of California Press, 2001).

55 ²⁶ A.F. Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture*. (Cambridge, Mass; London:
56 Harvard University Press, 2011).

57 ²⁷ William Schaefer explains that discussions of modernity in China in the 1920s and 30s was intertwined with a collective
58 anxiety of making sense of local identities. W. Schaefer, 'Shadow photographs, ruins, and Shanghai's projected past,' *PMLA*,
59 122 (2010), pp. 124-134.
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Toward the early 1920s, a growing number of articles in mass market journals came to link discussions of domestic reform with the physical design of houses. These pieces typically began by criticizing the traditional Chinese house as inefficient and unscientific. A favorite subject of attack was the Chinese courtyard dwelling (四合院) whose spatial organization was said to represent all the negative trappings of 'Confucian tradition' centering on the joint family system.²⁸ Some writings also criticized such houses for their inappropriateness in serving the needs of modern cities with a fast expanding population comprised of the lower and middle income class. Although by the 1930s the courtyard house was no longer the predominant type of residence in many Chinese cities, it continued to be used heuristically as a convenient representation for exposing the regressive nature of Chinese domestic culture.²⁹ These writings supported the adoption of the 'Western-style' house, whose design was set up to encourage more intimate interactions between conjugal couples and with their children, as well as conforming with all the requirements of modern domestic management that ensured household organizations to be efficient, hygienic and orderly – namely the essential aspects for a modern productive economy. However, most of these articles also to accepted continual use of a female servant for middle income households, seeing no contradictions between this longstanding practice with their conceptions of the modern home.

Many of these writings were authored by recent graduates with training in architecture and applied arts from abroad. Dismayed by the lack of scientific knowledge amongst Chinese builders and growing dominance of foreign architects who monopolized major architectural projects in Shanghai and other metropolises, they began to call for the institution of a modern design education that could equip Chinese students with knowledge in both the arts and sciences -- a connection that they felt was missing in the conventional training for builders and artisans.³⁰ One example of these was a lengthy four-part article published in 1921 in *Xueyi Zazhi* (學藝雜誌), a journal established by Chinese students

²⁸ Hu, 'Zhijia siyao,' pp. 4-8; Sheng, 'Zhuzhai Gailiang.'

²⁹ For example, a majority of housing in Shanghai in 1930 was comprised of a new style of Chinese commercial townhouses, the lilong, which departed from the traditional courtyard dwelling. For a discussion of the distribution of housing types in Shanghai, see C. Lo 羅志如, 'Tongji biao zhong zhi Shanghai' 統計表中之上海 (Shanghai as shown in statistical tables), (Nanjing, National Research Institute of Social Sciences Academia Sinica, 1932), p. 18.

³⁰ In the 1920s and 30s, architectural design was dominated by foreign design firms. In 1936, there 39 registered architectural firms in Shanghai and only 12 were run by Chinese architects. See C. Lou 婁承浩, 'Jindai Shanghai de jianzhuye he jianzhushi' 近代上海的建築業和建築師 (Building industry and architects in modern Shanghai), Shanghai Dangan Gongzuo 2 (1992), pp. 49-52.

1
2
3 in Japan for promoting intellectual thinking and new scientific knowledge.³¹ The article, entitled
4 'Zhuzhai Gailiang' (住宅改良) (Improvement for Domestic House Design), was authored by Sheng
5 Chengyuan (盛承彥) (1892-1945), a young architect who graduated from the Tokyo Higher Technical
6 School in 1919 and whose family owned a construction firm in Shanghai. Sheng had participated in
7 China's New Culture Movement and was closely associated with other Chinese students who studied in
8 Japan in the same period.³² Like his contemporaries, Sheng was adamant that China must modernize its
9 built environment by adopting 'Western methods' in design education and practice. His article began
10 with a detailed account of the evolution of built forms in Europe, which, after a long period of
11 stagnation in the medieval period, finally broke free from religious and aristocratic conventions and
12 made significant progress in addressing the needs of society. Sheng then reflected on the state of
13 domestic houses in China:
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23

24 It is also inevitable that residential dwellings in China have also evolved over time. But it is
25 indeed a great pity that, in the modern era of 1920s, our mentality is still equivalent to that in
26 Europe in the 15th century, or maybe even earlier.³³
27
28
29
30

31 Sheng attributed the backwardness of Chinese dwellings to entrenched Confucianist thinking, which
32 continued to reinforce gender hierarchy and a regressive political culture. This rigid social structure,
33 coupled with a lack of modern scientific knowledge amongst Chinese builders and artisans, resulted not
34 only in the creation of many extravagant and wasteful buildings inhabited by the very rich, but also an
35 even greater number of poorly constructed houses that accommodated a majority of the population.³⁴
36 Sheng also stressed that to engage with meaningful changes, it was necessary to re-conceptualize
37 household arrangements based on the needs of women and children rather than that of men. That said,
38 it must also be noted that he did not challenge the continual employment of a female servant in such
39 households, seemingly seeing this as a norm to be upheld. Sheng then went on to list thirty-six
40
41
42
43
44
45
46

47 ³¹ Xueyi Zazhi 學藝雜誌 was published by Zhonghua Huishe (中華會社), which was established by Chinese students who
48 studied in Japan and served as a progressive platform for promoting intellectual thinking and new knowledge. For a discussion
49 of the history of the magazine and the organization, see F. Xu 徐鋒華, 'Zhongguo liu Ri xuesheng yu Zhonghua Xueyishe' 中國
50 留日學生與中華學藝社 (Chinese overseas students in Japan and the Zhonghua Xueyishe), Zhongguoshi Yanjiu, 98 (2015), pp.
51 269-287.

52 ³² For another discussion on Sheng's ideas on the improvements on Chinese houses in early 20th century China, see W. Yan 顏
53 文成, 'Chuantong Minju de Xiandaihua: Cong Minguo Shiqi de Chubanwu Kan Dangshi de Zhuzhai Gailiang Wenti' 傳統民居的
54 現代化: 從民國時期的出版物看當時的住宅改良問題 (Modernization the vernacular residences: researching the house
55 modification from Republican-era publications), South Architecture, 1 (2014), pp. 11-17.

56 ³³ Sheng, 'Zhuzhai Gailiang,' p. 7.

57 ³⁴ Like many other writings, Sheng's article did not explicitly address the problem of urbanization in Chinese cities but focused
58 on the design of dwellings. But this final section did offer a oblique critique of the exacerbating housing problem facing many
59 cities with escalated cost of living amidst fervent property speculation.
60

1
2
3 characteristics of a typical 'Chinese house' that were each tied to longstanding cultural conventions.
4
5 These aspects, which ranged from the conceptions of room layouts to building systems to decorative
6
7 elements, were all deemed to be either inefficient or unhealthy.³⁵
8
9

10 While Sheng's statements resonated with other emergent writings on domestic science in the early
11
12 1920s, his article was one of the very few that offered a systematic analysis of design of residential
13
14 houses at this time.³⁶ It represents an early attempt by a professional-trained architect to construct a
15
16 new discourse of domestic architecture and to professionalize the discipline. This ambition was
17
18 reflected in the last section of the article, in which Sheng included a proposal with comprehensive
19
20 guidelines for redesigning the Chinese house (改良方案).³⁷ The proposal was divided into seven
21
22 sections. The first five sections included suggestions for interior configurations, exterior design,
23
24 construction methods, and choice of decorations, all of which were predicated on a functionalist
25
26 aesthetic with minimal ornaments that would suit the needs and aspirations of modern nuclear families.
27
28 The last three sections of the article turned to larger issues beyond the scope of the house. Here, Sheng
29
30 called on architects and builders to enrich their professional knowledge and specify the use of local
31
32 materials rather than foreign ones to support local manufacturers. He also urged the government to
33
34 take bold steps in urban planning, such as modernizing the transportation system, providing collective
35
36 housing for the masses, and tightening building regulations to ensure the health and safety of the
37
38 population. The article ended with a passionate call for citizens to adapt to 'a modern way of living' and
39
40 to learn to appreciate modern design whose aesthetics was predicated not on extravagance but
41
42 simplicity and honesty.³⁸
43
44

45 In contrast to some critics that saw New Culture intellectuals to be overly eager to transplant 'Western
46
47 ideas' to Chinese soil, Sheng's writing shows that he was keenly interested in discerning the variances
48
49 between different strands of 'Western architectural traditions' and the pros and cons of each in their
50
51 development.³⁹ This was explained in a diagram in the article that illustrated how the 'different
52
53 architectural systems of the world' had evolved over time and their ongoing interactions with each
54
55 other. The diagram was not the work of Sheng, but a translation of a sketch drawn by the influential
56
57

58
59
60

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 7-9.

³⁶ It is important to note that this article was written before the existence of Yingzao Xueshe (營造學社), a well-known research institution established by Chinese architects in 1930.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 8-12.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For a discussion on May Fourth intellectuals' conceptions of and admiration for the 'West,' see S. Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2001).

1
2
3 Japanese architectural historian Ito Chuta in 1909.⁴⁰ The diagram was meant to challenge the
4 hierarchical view of Western historians who viewed architecture in Asia to be at a lower level along the
5 'universal scale' of development. The diagram also presented an argument that 'Asian architecture'
6 never developed in isolation but had interacted with those in the West at different times in history.
7 Following Ito, Sheng further claimed that although the Japanese still lagged behind Europe in their
8 architectural achievements, they were on the right path to modernization by having already
9 established a comprehensive design education. And it is for this reason that Japan, like America in the
10 West, was ahead in its 'cultural development' compared to other nations.⁴¹
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19

20 **[Insert Figure 1 and Figure 2 here]**
21

22 As Sheng himself acknowledged, it was through his own education in Japan and exposure to Ito and
23 other prominent Japanese scholars that he became convinced of the importance of understanding the
24 essence of one's own culture and translating this knowledge into designs that suit local contexts and
25 modern needs.⁴² Here, Sheng was making a nationalistic statement predicated on cultural specificities.
26 But it was also a statement that aligned with an emergent evolutionary narrative in which all cultures
27 could be placed under a common analytical frame such that their levels of development could be
28 assessed.⁴³ The huge challenge facing Sheng and other Chinese intellectuals then was to find a way to
29 catch up with Japan and the West from a position already placed at the very end on the 'scale of
30 development.' As the next section discusses, this agony was also widely felt by other architects
31 committed to modernize China's domestic environment and design education. But their interpretation
32 of the roles of cultures and aesthetic preferences were also specific to the contexts through which they
33 gained exposures to design knowledge of the West.
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52

53 ⁴⁰ M. Bao 包慕萍, 'Yidongzhongtai de jianzhulun yu Zhongguo diaocha' 伊東忠太的建築論與中國調查 (Ito Chuta's
54 architectural theory and China investigation), in F. Zhang, ed., *Zhongguo Jindai Jianzhu Yanjiu yu Baohu* (8) (Beijing: Tsinghua
55 University Press, 2012), pp. 705-717.

56 ⁴¹ Sheng, 'Zhuzhai Gailiang,' p. 5.

57 ⁴² Ibid.

58 ⁴³ For a discussion of such techniques of comparative cultural representations, see D. Preziosi, 'Art history: making the visible
59 legible,' in D. Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 5.
60

Contending the Role of Decorative Art: *Meishu Jianzhu* and 'Aesthetic Education'

The 1920s was a period of political transition that coincided with the return of a growing number of Chinese graduates from abroad.⁴⁴ Although their number was relatively small, they were highly demanded by the newly established Kuomintang government which wanted to inject a fresh momentum of nation building by recruiting well trained young professionals to the administration. Among other initiatives introduced in the period was a new administrative plan for university education that aimed to safeguard academic independence freed from political control. The plan, which was set up by the influential Chinese educator Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培) and was modeled after the system in France, did not ultimately succeed.⁴⁵ But it helped facilitate new discussions among young intellectuals who were eager to participate in developing a modern education for China. Cai's strong awareness of the importance of bridging different knowledge from the 'East' and 'West,' including especially the humanities and fine art, led him to establish the National Hangzhou School of Art, one of the first schools devoted to modern art education in 1928.⁴⁶ The school soon attracted some of the best talents around the country with a large contingent of recent graduates who had completed their training in Europe.⁴⁷

One of these was a young architect named Liu Jipiao (劉既漂), who graduated from L'Ecole Nationale Des Beaux-Arts in Paris and later became the director of the Design Program (圖案科) at the National Hangzhou School of Art.⁴⁸ Liu had earlier participated in the design for the Chinese pavilion at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris. Like many of his fellow colleagues returning from France, Liu was strongly influenced by the emergent Art Deco movement (Art Decoratif) (裝飾藝術) in Europe and believed that decorative art could play a key role in

⁴⁴ Although the total number of graduates who were educated overseas was relatively small, many of them were recruited by the Kuomintang government to participate in major state initiatives.

⁴⁵ T.B. Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ Cai's awareness was rooted from his own training as a classic scholar in Qing China and in art history and philosophy from Germany. See Weston, *The Power of Position*, 2014. For a discussion on the histories of the development of art education in Republican China, see J. Tian, 'Minguo gonyi meishu jiaoyu dashi nianbiao' 民國工藝美術教育大事年表 (Chronology of major events of craftsmanship and art education in the republican era), *Zhuangshi Zazhi*, 10 (2011).

⁴⁷ S. Xu 徐蘇斌, 'Jindai Zhongguo jianzhu de yishu yundong – meishu jianzhu de sixiang he shijian' 近代中國建築的藝術運動 – 美術建築的思想和實踐 (The art movement in modern China – ideas and practices of meishu jianzhu), F. Zhang, ed., *Zhongguo Jindai Jianzhu Yanjiu yu Baohu* (5) (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2006), pp. 731-746.

⁴⁸ K. Liu 劉開渠, 'Meishu Jianzhu' 美術建築 (Architecture as fine art), *Zhongyang Ribao Tekan*, 5, 8 (1928), pp. 1-4; Xu, 'Jindai Zhongguo jianzhu,' 2006.

1
2
3 transforming the everyday environment and uplifting the ‘spirit of the nation.’⁴⁹ This belief was
4 exemplified in the four overarching objectives of the School of Art itself, which included introductions
5 to ‘Western art, reorganization of Chinese art, harmonization of Eastern and Western art, and creation
6 of Modern Art.’⁵⁰ While the strong focus of the School was on fine art, Liu was committed to
7 developing an applied arts program aimed at strengthening student’s scientific knowledge and
8 aesthetic sensibility that were seen to be fundamental to modern living. Central to Liu’s agenda was
9 the avocation of a new kind of architecture, *meishu jianzhu* (美術建築) (architecture as fine art), which
10 emphasized the integration of fine art, decorative art and industrial technologies, connections that
11 were lacking historically in the training of Chinese builders and artisans. As pointed out by Liu’s
12 compatriot Liu Kaiqu (劉開渠), *meishu jianzhu* had the potential to help usher China into a modern,
13 artistic era on par with those of Western nations.⁵¹

14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24 Like many of his contemporaries, Liu’s position strongly adhered to an evolutionary narrative that
25 deemed the traditional Chinese house to be outmoded and unsuitable to modern life in the 20th
26 century. In an 1927 article entitled ‘How to Organize Modern Architecture in China’ published in the
27 magazine *Gongxian* (貢獻), Liu argued that art and architecture were products of human evolution and
28 that every culture had throughout history continued to ‘revolutionize’ its building techniques, material
29 usage and decorative styles to make them adapt to requirements of its time.⁵² The problem with
30 Chinese dwellings was that they had become completely divorced from this ongoing development since
31 the 19th century, a condition that also led to its devaluation amidst accelerating processes of
32 industrialization.⁵³ To develop a modern design culture for China, Liu suggested to model after the
33 French system which was predicated on three key criteria: the implementation of design programs that
34 integrated fine art and decorative art, the establishment of research institutions dedicated to the study
35 of historical and contemporary design, and the establishment of government units specialized in
36 building construction, preservation, inspection, and legislation.⁵⁴

49 J. Liu, 劉既漂, ‘Jianzhu yuanli’ 建築原理 (The fundamentals of architecture), *Gongxian*, 3: 6 (1925), pp. 27-35; ‘Xihu Bolanhui yu meishu jianzhu’ 西湖博覽會與美術建築 (West Lake Expo and meishu jianzhu), *Dongfang Zazhi*, 26: 10 (1929), pp. 87-90; ‘Zhongguo meishu jianzhu zhi guoqu ji qi weilai’ 中國美術建築之過去及其未來 (The past and future of China’s meishu jianzhu), *Dongfang Zazhi*, 27: 2 (1930), pp. 133-140; J. Wong, ‘The Chinese Art Deco architect of the 1925 Paris Expo’—my grandfather,’ *The Newsletter*, International Institute for Asian Studies, 65 (Autumn 2013), pp. 6-7.

50 J. Liu 劉既漂, ‘Zhongguo xin jianzhu ying ruhe zuzhi’ 中國新建築應如何組織 (How should Chinese new architecture be organised), *Dongfang Zazhi*, 24 (1927), pp. 81-84.

51 Liu, ‘Meishu jianzhu,’ pp. 1-4.

52 Liu, ‘Zhongguo xin jianzhu.’

53 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

54 *Ibid.*

1
2
3 Although Liu was critical about the backwardness of Chinese design, he was adamant that China must
4 not blindly follow the aesthetics of foreigners but develop its own 'style' (作風) based on its culture and
5 history. Like Sheng and others before him, Liu also spent much effort in distinguishing between
6 different artistic achievements in the West, especially on how particular decorative styles had been
7 adapted to new technologies and needs of the modern economy.⁵⁵ According to this logic, 'styles' were
8 not merely expressions of artists but representations of the overall advancement of cultures. Liu
9 pointed out that modern architecture was inherently interdisciplinary and must be built upon a solid
10 foundation of science and strong sensibility of art, which was essentially what *meishu jianzhu* aimed to
11 achieve. To elaborate on the 'scientific' basis of the concept, Liu published numerous articles that
12 delineated the nature and functions of different types of decorative art forms, such as murals, reliefs,
13 sculptures, and graphics, and how each could be used to accentuate the true character of specific
14 spaces. To him, the French art deco style, whose forms were derived from a synthesis of nature and the
15 machine and had been adapted to industrial production, was a successful example that captured the
16 'spirit of the modern age.' Chinese architects and designers of the 20th century must therefore also try
17 to develop their own style by incorporating both elements of modern industrial processes and of
18 Chinese culture.
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32

33 [Insert Figure 3 here]
34
35

36 In the years following the opening of the National Hangzhou School of Art, Liu continued to promote
37 his concept of *meishu jianzhu* through teaching, writing and practice. These include most notably his
38 design for a series of art deco style pavilions for the West Lake Exposition in Hangzhou in 1929.⁵⁶
39 Although the concept of *meishu jianzhu* did not become widely adopted by other Chinese architects
40 (and Liu himself seems to have lost momentum in advocating it after turning to private practice in the
41 1930s), Liu's interest in integrating fine art and decorative art in design – what he called 'aesthetic
42 education' -- was shared by many of his fellow colleagues at the School of Art. This can be seen, for
43 example, in numerous articles that appeared in the journal *Yifeng* (藝風) and *Meishu Shenghuo* (*Arts &*
44 *Everyday Life*) (美術生活) with many contributing writers affiliated with the School.⁵⁷ It is in this
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54

55 Liu, 'Jianzhu Yuanli,' p. 35.

56 J. Liu 劉既漂, 'Xihu yishuhua' 西湖藝術化 (Aestheticization of the West Lake), *Lvxing Zazhi*, 3, 4 (1929); 'Xihu Bolanhui hao' 西湖博覽會號 (Special issue on the West Lake Expo), *Lvxing Zazhi*, 3: 7 (1929), pp. 1-25.

57 For example, see J. Tang 唐騫, 'Women de luxian' 我們的路線 (Our mission), *Meishu Shenghuo*, 1 (1934), pp. 1; D. Zhang 張德榮, 'Gongyi meishu yu rensheng zhi guanxi' 工藝美術與人生之關係 (The relationship between arts and crafts and everyday

1
2
3 context that the design of the modern home became a key subject of enquiry in the School of Art's
4 curriculum. This was exemplified in many issues of the *Meishu Shenghuo* with specific sections devoted
5 to showcase student projects that tackled 'the problem of the house' and every aspect of living, with a
6 growing emphasis on the popularization of art among ordinary Chinese citizens.
7
8
9

10
11
12 By the early 1930s, the idea of 'aesthetic education' began to take a firmer root at the national level
13 with strong support of the Kuomintang government under Chiang Kai-shek, who wanted to see art
14 education, along with other state initiatives, play a bigger role in 'civilizing' the everyday habits of
15 Chinese citizens. In contrast to the earlier attempts of New Culture intellectuals who focused their
16 critiques on 'Chinese tradition,' the argument here was that in order to continue to modernize, China
17 must not forget its 'traditional values' that were essential for resisting the negative potentials of
18 Western materialism. These efforts, which would culminate in the conservative New Life Movement in
19 the mid-1930s led by Chiang, were also aimed to counter the growing influence of communist thought
20 that was attracting many young Chinese who were frustrated with exacerbating social inequality and
21 widespread corruption across the country.⁵⁸ Amidst these ideological struggles, the School of Art
22 doubled its efforts in calling for mass education of art. In a 1934 issue of *Meishu Shenghuo*, the editor
23 Tang Jun (唐騫) made a strong proclamation that the education of art must not be confined to the
24 elites but be popularized among ordinary citizens (藝術大眾化, 及社會藝術化), for it was only through
25 a full integration of art into everyday domestic life that the spirit of the nation could be elevated as a
26 whole.⁵⁹
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37

38 [Insert Figure 4 here]

39
40
41 In hindsight, Tang's polemic statement was itself a reaction to an emerging ideological split amongst
42 design professionals. Unlike earlier writings by Sheng and others that critiqued the inefficiency and
43 wastefulness of Chinese dwellings, affiliates of the School of Art now warned against the 'blind
44 adherence to functionalism' which would prevent any kind of 'spiritual nourishment' required for
45
46
47
48
49

50 life), *Meishu Shenghuo*, 1 (1934), and K. Zheng 鄭可, 'Ruhe gaijin gongyi meishu' 如何改進工藝美術 (How to improve arts
51 and crafts), *Qingnian Yishu*, 4 (1937), p. 217.

52 ⁵⁸ The New Life Movement (新生活運動) (1934-1937) was a cultural reform movement initiated by China's Generalissimo
53 Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) in 1934. The goal was to reform the habits of Chinese citizens by relearning traditional Chinese
54 moral values through mass education and everyday practice. For a critical discussion of the Movement, see A. Dirlík, 'The
55 Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 34, no.4
56 (August 1975): 945-980; Z. Song 宋振洲, 'Lun 'Zhongti Xiyong' shi Xinshenghuo Yundong de neizai luoji' 論'中體西用'是新生
57 活運動的內在邏輯 (On Westernized Chinese style: the inner logic of the New Life Movement), *Tangshan Shifan Xueyuan*
58 *Xuebao*, 39: 1 (2016), pp. 99-101.

59 ⁵⁹ Tang, 'Women de luxian.'

1
2
3 modern domestic life.⁶⁰ Such warnings were directed against the socialist avant-garde movement,
4 which appealed to some younger Chinese architects that were concerned with worsening housing
5 problems and the plight of the working class. To these young leftist-leaning architects, the ideas of
6 integrating fine art and decorative art and the 'aesthetization of everyday life' appeared increasingly
7 regressive in that not only were these ideas disengaged with 'real' social and economic issues but
8 helped reinforce the status quo. Here, the problem of domestic design took a radical turn from the
9 earlier focus on cultural synthesis and artistic expression to conceiving a fundamentally different
10 system and types of housing design that would move China toward a more progressive and egalitarian
11 society. These convictions also suggest a growing alignment of political positions between these
12 Chinese architects and members of the avant-garde in Europe, representing an extraordinary moment
13 of transnational solidarity concerning modern architecture's revolutionary mission.⁶¹ \

24 [Insert Figure 5 and Figure 6 here]

27 **A Turn Toward the Social: A New Discourse of Home and Housing in the 1930s**

30
31 At the time when Liu was designing his art deco pavilions for the West Lake Expo in China in the late
32 1920s, Europe saw the rise of a group of avant-garde architects advocating for a 'new architecture' that
33 turned away from the decorative style of the Art Deco movement. Although the modern movement
34 has often been associated with a set of universal architectural aesthetics that was antipathetic to
35 everyday domestic situations, recent scholarship has shown that the concern for reforming the
36 contemporary dwelling in fact preoccupied major protagonists of modern architecture.⁶² These include
37 many key members of CIAM, such as Le Corbusier, Ernst May, Hannes Meyer, Gerrit Rietveld and
38 others, who had all engaged with designing residential houses during the early decades of the 20th
39 century. As discussed earlier, the attempt to create artistic unity for the modern house had been a key
40 concern in the early development of modern architecture.⁶³ This concern would later be expanded to
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51 ⁶⁰ Tang, 'Women de luxian,' 1934; Zheng, 'Ruhe gaijin gongyi meishu.' 1937.

52 ⁶¹ These ideas can be seen in many issues of the journal *Xin Jianzhu* 新建築 (Die Architektur) as discussed in the next section
53 of the paper.

54 ⁶² Anderson, *The Problem of the House*, 2006; Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity.' For a discussion of the antipathy of
55 Modernism against everyday domestic needs, see A.T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (New York:
56 Harry N. Abrams Inc., Publishers, 2007).

57 ⁶³ Anderson, *The Problem of the House*. One important exhibition centered on domestic design was 'The Dwelling' exhibition,
58 which was held in Stuttgart in 1927. Also see C. Wilk, *Modernism: Design a New World, 1914-1939* (London, Victoria and
59 Albert Museum, 2008).

1
2
3 include large-scale housing projects aimed at transforming the 'whole environment of modern men.'⁶⁴
4
5 While a many of these proposals remained unbuilt, some members of the avant-garde were able to
6
7 realize their ambitions in the Soviet Union, where they were invited by the Soviet state to construct a
8
9 series of large-scale proletarian housing projects. This 'new architecture' was expected to play an
10
11 essential role in restructuring everyday domestic life that would no longer be based upon the nuclear
12
13 family that served capitalism but upon an association of adults based upon communism.⁶⁵ The task for
14
15 avant-garde architects thus was to conceive a radically new set of housing typologies that would
16
17 support a new form of domesticity centering on collective living. This environment, which would take
18
19 the form of 'minimum dwelling' in accordance with a pure functionalist aesthetics, would no longer see
20
21 a gendered division of labor and every man and woman would be given equal opportunities to
22
23 participate in public life. To reduce costs and make housing available for all, building forms would be
24
25 standardized for mass production. And these forms and processes would themselves become sources
26
27 for the ongoing conception of art forms, most notably represented by the constructivist movement.

28
29 The commitment of the avant-garde movement to address social inequality carried significant appeal
30
31 for a new generation of Chinese architects, who were eager to create a new intellectual platform to
32
33 promote a new architecture culture aimed at addressing 'real' social issues. In 1936, a group of young
34
35 architects founded the Zhongguo Xinjianzhushe (中國新建築社) (Chinese New Architecture
36
37 Association), which was associated with the newly instituted Architecture Department at Rangqin
38
39 University (勤勤大學建築工程學系) in Guangzhou in 1936.⁶⁶ In the same year, the association
40
41 published a new journal, *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)* 新建築, with the mission to construct a new
42
43 design discourse based on socialist principles. The journal, which consisted of an editorial team with
44
45 graduates mostly affiliated with Rangqin University, made great efforts to disseminate the ideas of
46
47 CIAM and introduce new housing projects implemented in Europe and the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ Their
48
49 position was deliberately articulated in their choice of the journal's modernist graphics and its German
50
51 title, *Die Architektur*, which represented a forceful attempt to associate their convictions with those of
52
53 the European avant-gardes.

54
55 ⁶⁴ Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity,' p. 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

56
57 ⁶⁶ C. Peng 彭長歆 and X. Yang 楊曉川, 'Rangqin Daxue Jianzhu Gongcheng Xuexi yu Liangnan zaoqi xiandai zhuyi de chuango
58
59 he yanjiu' 勤勤大學建築工程學系與嶺南早期現代主義的傳播和研究 (Rangqin University's Department of Architecture and
60
the promotion and study of early modernist Lingnan architecture), *New Architecture*, 5 (2002), pp. 54-56.

⁶⁷ *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, 1936, 1937, 1938. See Jiang, 'Jianzhu Zazhi Zai Zhongguo.'

From the very beginning, the design for domestic architecture was a key topic for *Xin Jianzhu*. Between 1936-1939, almost every issue dedicated at least one featured article to introduce contemporary social housing projects to readers. These included works by Le Corbusier, Bruno Taut, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Ernst May, Walter Gropius and other modernist architects whose projects were hailed for providing radical solutions to housing needs of the modern person.⁶⁸ The journal also devoted a substantial portion to analyze the principles of these designs and considered how new types of socialist housing could be implemented in China. An example of this was in a 38-page article authored by Li Chubai (李楚白) in 1937 on the theme of collective living.⁶⁹ The article began by tracing the evolution of living patterns around the world from antiquity to the present day and explained the emergence of nuclear family as an essential product of industrial capitalism. This was followed by a detailed discussion of the contradictions within the capitalist system and how these led to intensifying social conflicts and worsening urban problems due to the uneven distribution of housing, infrastructures, health services and education. The article concluded that collective living instituted under a socialist system would be an 'inevitable next and final step in human evolution' and the only means to eradicate social ills. In the final section, Li outlined his vision of a 'new architecture' for a future China predicated on the provision of collective amenities including hospitals, schools, nurseries, prisons, public parks and others. In resonance with the utopian vision of European avant-gardes, Li wrote that domestic chores in this collective environment, including childcare, would be shared by everyone and parents would no longer need to live with their children. In this new and more perfect world, every individual would lead a life that would be more mobile and flexible.⁷⁰

[Insert Figure 7 and Figure 8 here]

In 1938, at the 10th anniversary of the first meeting of CIAM, *Xin Jianzhu's* editor Lin Keming (林克明) wrote an editorial piece exalting the achievements of the CIAM masters and reaffirming the journal's

⁶⁸ For example, see X. Wei 魏信凌, 'Dushijihua yu weilai lixiang dushi fangan' 都市計畫與未來理想都市方案 (City planning and conceptions of the ideal city of the future) *Xin Jianzhu* (Die Architektur), 2 (1936), pp. 1-10; L. Li 黎掄傑, 'Dushi zhi jinghua yu zhuzhai zhengce' 都市之淨化與住宅政策 (Urban slum clearance and housing policy), *Xin Jianzhu* (Die Architektur), 5-6 (1937), pp. 1-22; J. Liang 梁淨目, 'Zhuzhai wenti zhi yanjiu' 住宅問題之研究 (Studies of the conditions of domestic houses), *Xin Jianzhu* (Die Architektur) 2 (1936), pp. 17-23; J. Long 龍京公 'Xin Shenghuo yu zhuzhai gailiang' 新生活與住宅改良 (New Life and improvement of domestic houses), *Xin Jianzhu* (Die Architektur), 1 (1936), pp. 3-6.

⁶⁹ C. Li 李楚白, 'Gongying zhuzhaiqu jihua zhi yanjiu' 公營住宅區計畫之研究 (Research on the planning of public housing), *Xin Jianzhu* (Die Architektur), 5-6 (1937), pp. 1-38.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

1
2
3 revolutionary mission.⁷¹ Li also used the occasion to criticize the backwardness of China's existing
4 architecture practice and design culture. In particular, he mocked the recent initiative by the
5 Kuomintang government to reintroduce 'traditional Chinese forms and aesthetics' in the design of the
6 capital city Nanjing in the hopes of enhancing China's national identity. Such a move, Lin lamented, was
7 outdated and essentially ran diametrically opposite to the modern movement's progressive vision,
8 which was to create a universally shared language of design that would no longer be predicated on
9 cultural particularities.⁷² This position was further articulated in another article on the prospects of new
10 architecture by Zheng Zuliang (鄭祖良), who argued that although the development of architecture
11 first evolved from particular cultural traditions, the world had since progressed to a stage where
12 national and cultural boundaries were no longer required. In the 'highest order of civilization,'
13 architecture would take a radically new form that transcend cultural differences and represented a
14 collective interest shared by all people.⁷³

15
16
17 Although the polemical articles of *Xin Jianzhu* may have been confined to a limited readership, their
18 critiques of China's architecture culture was not isolated instances, but connected with other critics
19 who were frustrated with the incapacity of professional elites to address social problems in what they
20 saw to be a morally corrupt capitalist society.⁷⁴ This was evidenced in many writings that appeared in
21 newspapers and general purpose magazines in the 1930s with pointed criticisms of the 'self-serving
22 nature' of design practice in which architects, along with developers and real estate investors, were
23 only interested in making profits at the expense of overall welfare of the nation. The situation was seen
24 to be at its worst in cosmopolitan Shanghai, which saw the largest concentration of stylish homes and
25 speculative townhouses for middle and upper class as well as of shanty towns that accommodated one-
26 tenth of the working population.⁷⁵ In a 1931 article, entitled 'Some advice for Shanghai Architects,' that
27 appeared in the progressive weekly journal *Hongye Zhoukan* (紅葉週刊), the author asserted that
28 despite their contribution to building many spectacular skyscrapers and commercial buildings that gave
29 Shanghai a 'glamorous appearance,' architects paid virtually no attention to the real needs of the

30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49 ⁷¹ K. Lin 林克明, 'Guoji Xin Jianzhu shi zhounian ganyan' 國際新建築十週年紀念感言 (10th anniversary of the first meeting of
50 CIAM), *Xin Jianzhu* (Die Architektur) no. 7 (1938), pp. 1-6.

51 ⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

52 ⁷³ Z. Zheng 鄭祖良, 'Wanjin xin jianzhu de dongxiang' 輓近新建築的動向 (New trends of contemporary new architecture),
53 *Jianzhu* (Die Architektur), 8 (1938), pp. 2-5.

54 ⁷⁴ These ideas were exemplified in many issues of *Xin Jianzhu* (Die Architektur) 新建築 (1936-1947). See a discussion of the
55 orientation of the journal, in M. Jiang 蔣妙菲, 'Jianzhu zazhi zai Zhongguo' 建築雜誌在中國 (Architectural magazines of
56 China). *Shidai Jianzhu*, 2 (2004), pp. 20-26; and Y. Liu 劉源, 'Shixi jindai jianzhu zazhi de lishi gongneng' 試析近代建築雜誌的
57 歷史功能 (Historical functions of architectural periodicals in modern China), *Nanfang Jianzhu*, 2 (2012), pp. 37-43.

58 ⁷⁵ See note 1. In Shanghai, the number of households living in shantytowns in 1930 was estimated to be 30,000 which
59 accounted for one tenth of the working population. Yan, 'Yimen kexue yu yige shidai.'

majority of Chinese citizens including the tens of thousands who were living on the margins.⁷⁶ The article went further to accuse architects of catering to 'imperial interests' through their ongoing cooption with foreign investors and businesses, making them largely responsible for perpetuating the poverty of the nation.

Competing Imaginaries: The Modern Home in Divergent Narratives

How did other Chinese architects respond to the accusation for their lack of concern for society? As the preceding discussions suggest, despite their different approaches to design and preferences for aesthetic styles, most architects who received training from abroad were in fact eager to contribute to modernizing the nation. While designers such as Liu Jipiao and affiliates of the National Hangzhou School of Art might be denounced by leftist critics for their obsessions with artistic pursuits that were esoteric and wasteful, they were committed to shaping a new design culture and professionalizing the discipline that they hoped would help foster national pride. As with the New Culture intellectuals and the authors of *Xin Jianzhu*, they subscribed to an 'evolutionary narrative of development' and believed that art and architecture could help usher a new domestic culture and 'civilize' the habits of Chinese citizens. Although such convictions may not have been shared by all architects, the exacerbating housing problems in Shanghai and other metropolises did capture the attention of many architects and builders. An example was a new featured column titled 'Juzhu Wenti' (居住問題) (Housing Issues) started in 1932 in *The Builder* (建築月刊), a popular trade magazine distributed widely among architectural and building professionals.⁷⁷ Like *Xin Jianzhu*, contributing authors of the column, which included many little known writers involved in the building profession, called on architects and builders to help resolve the nation's housing crisis and take up the moral responsibility for improving the life of the working class. But instead of looking to overturn the existing economic system, they focused mostly on providing what they saw as 'pragmatic solutions,' such as how architects could work more closely with state-planners, investors and developers to open up suburban areas for building more private homes that were affordable to middle class families. These articles also at times referred to more 'radical' solutions implemented elsewhere, such as cooperative housing and policies that aimed to restructure the land tenure system.⁷⁸ But when compared to *Xin Jianzhu*, it is clear that *The Builder*

76 Xiaohe 小鶴. 'Dui Shanghai jianzhujie ren shuo jijuhua' 對上海建築界人說幾句話. *Hongye Zhoukan*, 69 (1931), p. 3.

77 'Juzhu Wenti' 居住問題, *Jianzhu Yuekan* 建築月刊, 1: 3 (1932). For a discussion of the role of the magazines in disseminating these ideas, see Y. Liu, 'Shixi Jindai Jianzhu Zazhi De Lishi Gongneng,' *South Architecture* (2012).

78 'Juzhu Wenti,' *Jianzhu Yuekan* (1933).

1
2
3 occupied a more ambivalent position toward the idea of 'socialist housing' and collective living. As a
4 commercial magazine setting out to promote building trades and private businesses, it also regularly
5 included many adverts and articles that featured trendy homes and luxurious furnishings that
6 contrasted sharply with other pieces that called for a turn to functionalist designs and mass production
7 in the same issue. It is also obvious that all of these writings were not prepared to challenge the
8 normative conception of nuclear family but continued to support conventional domestic arrangements
9 such as the use of servants in middle and upper income families.
10
11
12
13
14

15
16
17 **[Insert Figure 9 here]**
18
19

20 Although the kinds of houses featured in adverts of *The Builder* and other magazines might have been
21 out of reach of most readers, it must be noted that they helped introduce a set of new cultural
22 vocabulary that allowed the expanding reading public to begin to imagine a future home for
23 themselves that was a class above the majority of Chinese citizens.⁷⁹ It is also ironic that, despite the
24 growing calls by some architects to adopt a 'modernist functionalist aesthetics' that turned against
25 traditional décor and ornaments, most readers continued to be attracted to homes that were modeled
26 after the more conventional Western style houses, which to them nevertheless represented a more
27 hygienic, comfortable and modern domestic environment. Meanwhile, other general purpose
28 magazines began to include featured columns that showcased the homes of Chinese celebrities,
29 politicians and other well-known persons, who were presented as tastemakers of the era. These
30 columns carried tremendous appeal to readers, as they satisfied not only the latter's desire for learning
31 about new design trends, but also their curiosity about the private lives of the rich and famous.
32 Furthermore, these images also helped fuel a collective nationalistic sentiment by illustrating that
33 modernity, as represented by life in the modern home, was not the exclusive domains of Westerners.
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45

46 As Paul G. Pickowicz et al. point out in their study of modern print culture in China, that although the
47 ideals of modernity may have been defined by intellectual elites and professional experts, it was the
48 presentation of kaleidoscopic images of modern life and consumer goods in the popular press that
49
50
51
52
53
54

55
56

⁷⁹ Although the literacy rate in China was still relatively low in the 1930s at 20%, it was also a period that saw a rapid
57 expansion of the inexpensive popular print media that was made available to a fast expanding reading public. For a discussion
58 of distribution of one of the most popular illustrated magazine, *Liangyou Zazhi*, see Pickowicz et al., eds. *Liangyou:
59 Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926-1945*.
60

1
2
3 helped expand the social imagination.⁸⁰ It was the non-ideological nature of the many texts and images,
4 including particularly those in the adverts of mass market journals and magazines that allowed people
5 to imagine a different and better future on their own terms. Here, the moral role of the modern home
6 became linked with new material goods in an expanding commercial culture. In the process, the ideal
7 of the nuclear family itself also became a marketable product that symbolized the good life and way of
8 being 'modern.'⁸¹ As a key site of collective social reform as well as consumption, the design of the
9 modern home continued to be an intellectual and political concern for architects and social reformers
10 as well as sources for generating imaginaries among the wider public, who sought to participate in a
11 'Chinese modernity' on their own terms.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19

20 [Insert Figure 10 here]

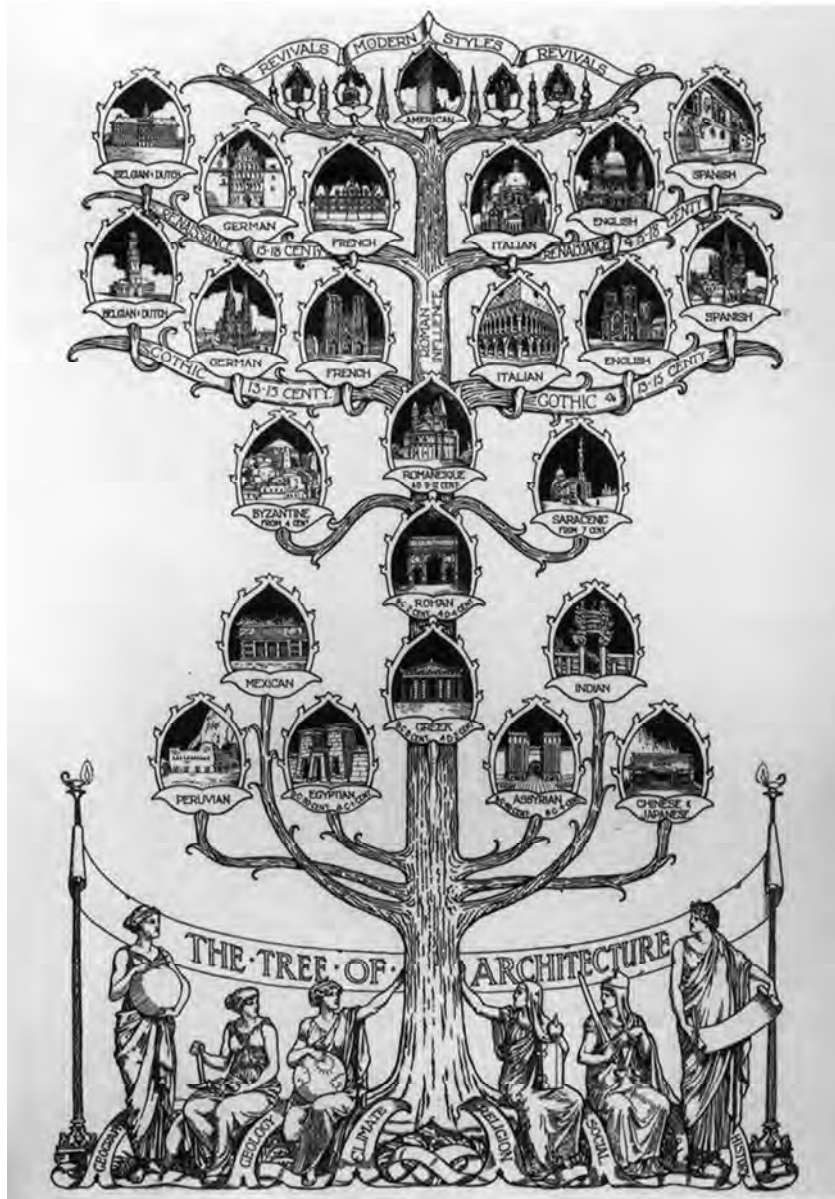
21 [Insert Figure 11 here]

22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

⁸⁰ P.G. Pickowicz et al., eds. *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926-1945* (Leiden; Boston, Brill, 2013), pp. 1-13. For a discussion on the significant of consumption culture and nation in China, see K. Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Asia Centre, 2003).

⁸¹ See E. LaCouture, *Modern Homes for Modern Families in Tianjin, China, 1860-1949*, dissertation manuscript, Columbia University, 2010.

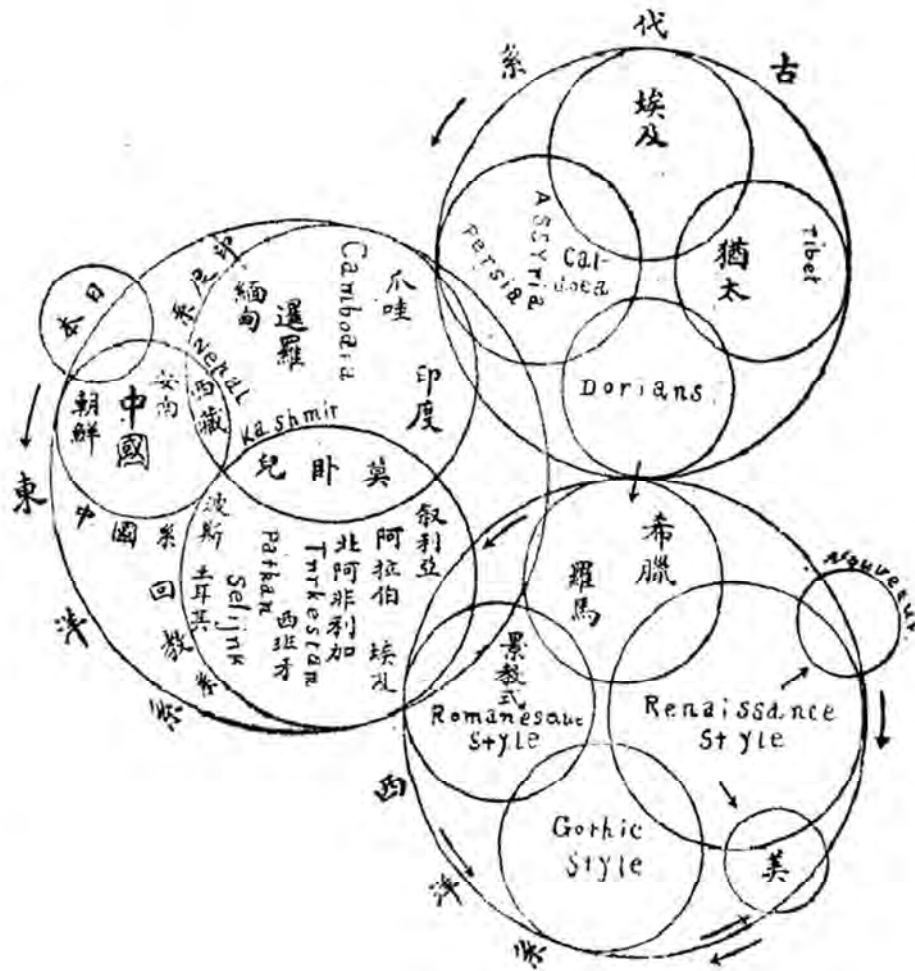
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



'The Tree of Architecture,' by Bannister Fletcher, 1899 (source: B. Fletcher, The History of Architecture: Comparative Methods, London, Batsford, 1905).

Figure 1

245x352mm (200 x 200 DPI)

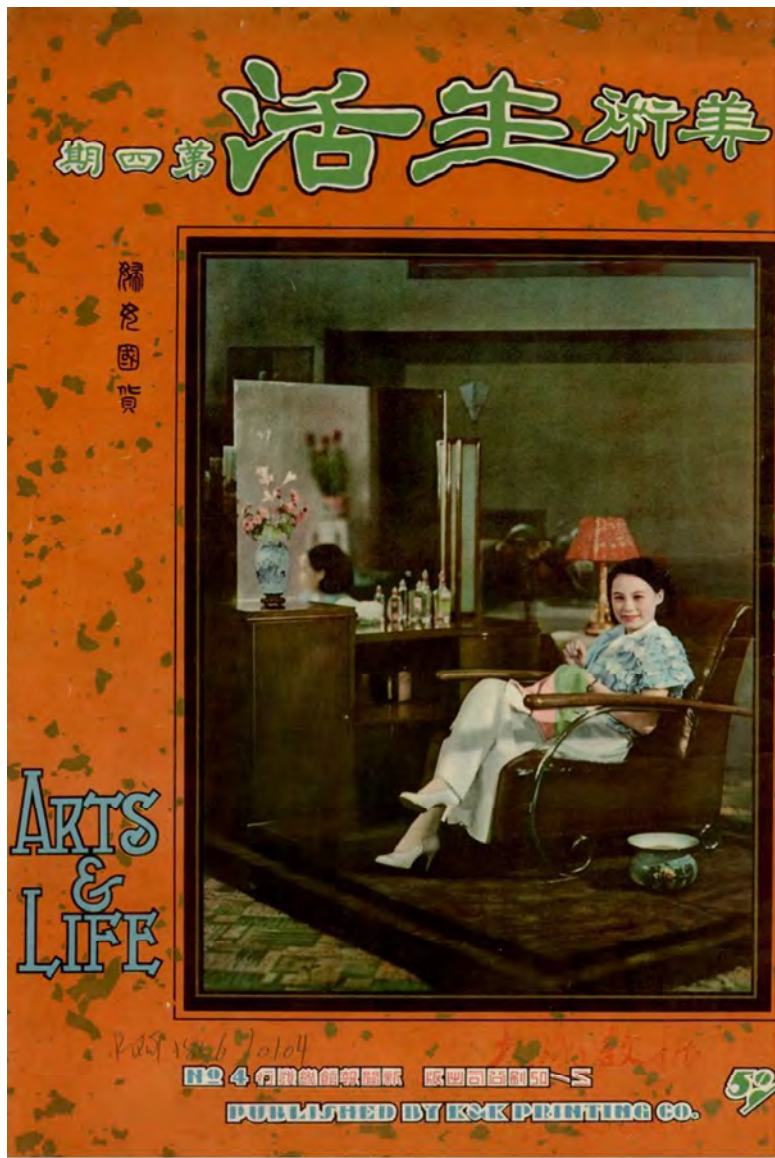


A diagram entitled 'Architectural systems of the world' by Ito Chuta. The diagram was drawn in 1909 and was translated to Chinese by Sheng Chengyan. It was published in Xueyi Zazhi in 1921 (source: Xueyi Zazhi, 1921).

Figure 2

224x224mm (200 x 200 DPI)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

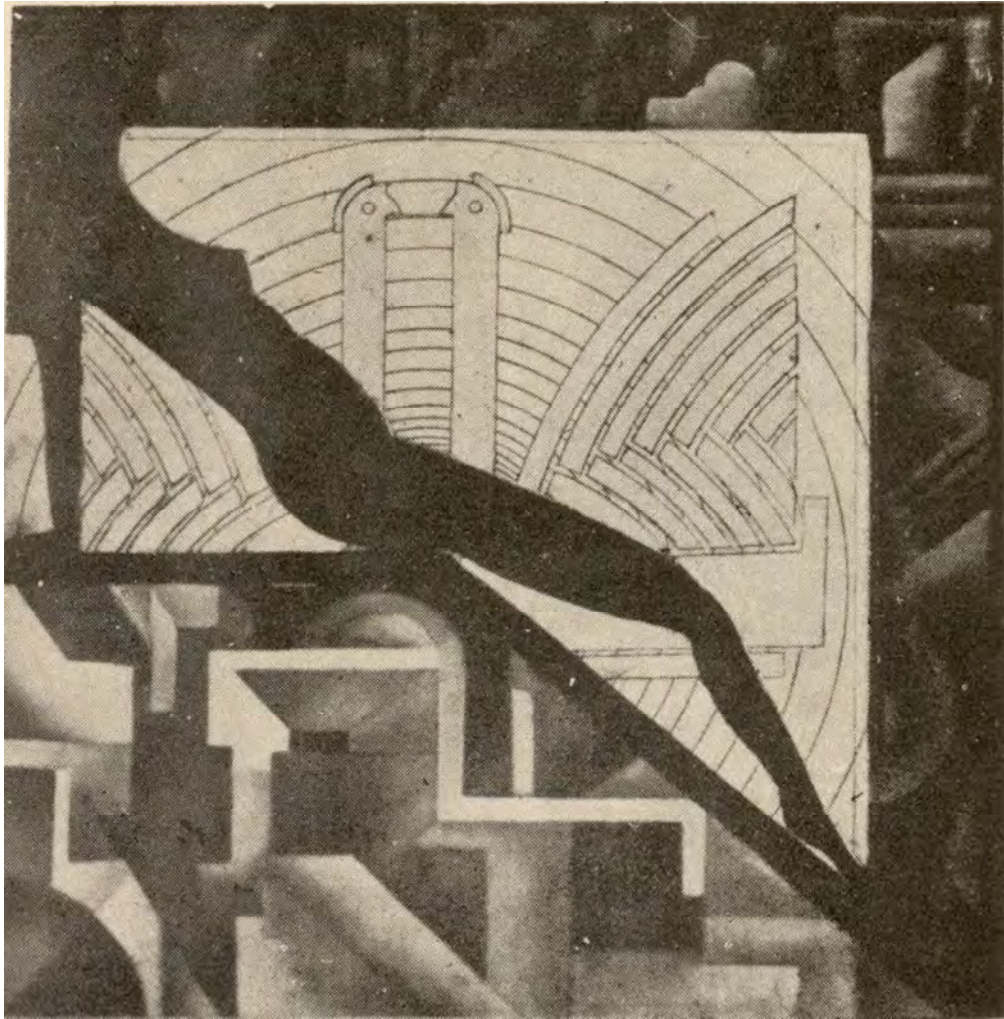


Cover page of the journal Meishu Shenghuo in 1934. (Source: Meishu Shenghuo, 1934)

Figure 4

184x288mm (300 x 300 DPI)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



Work by design students of the Hangzhou National School of Art, featured in Meishu Shenghuo, 1934 (source: Meishu Shenghuo, 1934).

Figure 5
291x296mm (200 x 200 DPI)



1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



Work by design students of the Hangzhou National School of Art, featured in Meishu Shenghuo, 1934 (source: Meishu Shenghuo, 1934).

Figure 6
448x698mm (200 x 200 DPI)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



Cover page of the journal Xinjianzhu (Die Architektur), 1936 (Source: Die Architecktur, 1936).

Figure 7

256x359mm (200 x 200 DPI)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

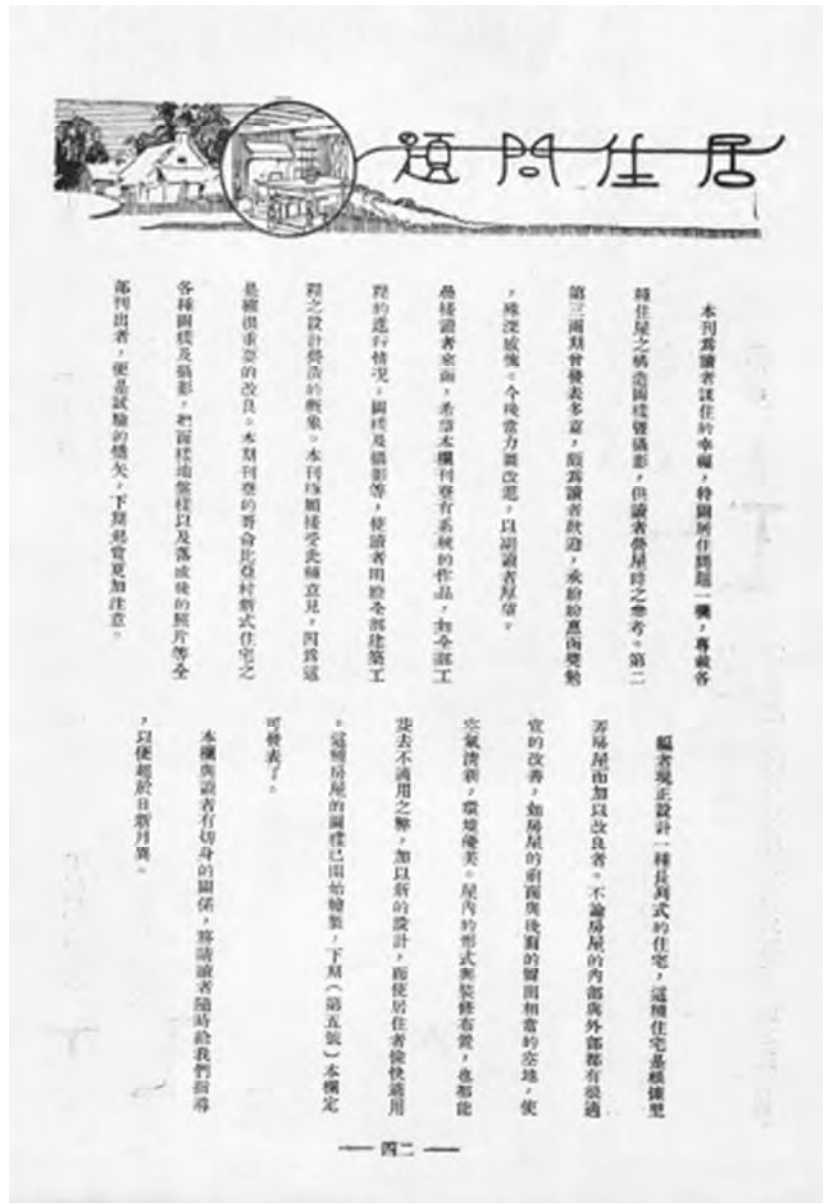


A page in the journal Xinjianzhu (Die Architektur), showcasing the latest socialist housing projects in Europe, 1936 (Source: Die Architecktur, 1936).

Figure 8

125x167mm (200 x 200 DPI)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



The featured column 'Juzhu Wenti' (Housing Issues) in The Builder magazine, 1930 (source: The Builder magazine, 1930).

Figure 9

122x178mm (200 x 200 DPI)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



An article that featured modern domestic interior published in an illustrated magazine, late 1920s (source: Liangyou Huabao (The Young Companion)).

Figure 11

231x316mm (200 x 200 DPI)