

# Manifestations of Bauhaus on the Mainland: Historical Advent of China's Modernities in Arts, Crafts, and Architecture

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Fig. 1  
 The images of Bauhaus Dessau (top right), Gropius and Meyer (bottom left) published in: *Manufacture and Crafts*, 1931, Issue 2

bauhaus and politics  
national socialist politics

bauhaus signifying  
left-wing culture

Mies van der Rohe liaised with influential Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg to win his support for reopening the Bauhaus in Berlin on the day after its closure on 11th April 1933. Rosenberg's simple, yet incisive, question «Why didn't you change the name for heaven's sake?»<sup>1</sup> reverberated in a 2009 exhibition monograph published by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York—a publication largely indebted to the foundational work by Hans Maria Wingler, who proposed that the Bauhaus-Archiv be established. It revealed that this leading Nazi ideologue considered the name «Bauhaus» far more dangerous than the school itself, because it had become a powerful signifier for radical left-wing culture. The idea that the Bauhaus could have been reopened in the Nazi era under a new name and clearly defined conditions was not a new insight upon the school's 90th anniversary, but it is interesting to find it at such a historical moment in an institution that was from its very beginnings deeply connected with the Bauhaus and its mythologization. MoMA's founding director Alfred Barr<sup>2</sup> was prepared for his job by a visit to the Bauhaus in 1927 where he met Walter Gropius, Paul Klee, László Moholy-Nagy, Oskar Schlemmer, amongst others.<sup>3</sup>

### Early Encounters with Bauhaus and Modern Design in China

A connection of the Bauhaus with China was established at an even earlier stage in terms of personal contacts and reception of literature, albeit not involving solely Chinese citizens. Saito Kazo, for example, was a Japanese student who trained from 1912–14 at the Kunstgewerbeschule, Berlin, led by Bruno Paul, which Nikolaus Pevsner regarded as one of the most significant schools in the field. Before joining China's first Higher Education in Fine Art National College of Art (today's China Academy of Art; CAA) in Hangzhou, he visited the Bauhaus in Weimar and talked to Wassily Kandinsky as well as Paul Klee in 1923.<sup>4</sup>

encounters with bauhaus and  
modern design

The following year, 1924, art historian Ivan Matisa from Hungary wrote a book *Modern European Art*, which was translated in Shanghai by 1930 and was one route for introduction of the Bauhaus—specifically noting its location «Weimar» in Chinese «威瑪爾 (Wei Ma Er)»—through literature at a very early stage;<sup>5</sup> this not only seems to be an important step in spreading knowledge about the Bauhaus in China but also indicates the country's

considerable interest in the German avant-garde school. As we can see here in *Producing Crafts*, published in Beiping (now Beijing) by 1931, the signature building of the Bauhaus in Dessau entered Chinese audiences' awareness for the first time <sup>Fig. 1</sup>.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the school's fourteen-year existence, from 1919 to 1933, there were no Chinese *Lehrlinge* who sat at the feet of the Bauhaus Meister in Weimar, Dessau, or Berlin. However, not unlike a comment once made by Charles Jencks—Being there makes the difference!—Zheng Ke may be the one and only or one of just a few Chinese persons who ever went to the Bauhaus, visiting during summer 1929, possibly at some point between Meyer-led exhibitions in Basel and Leipzig. As a French-trained painter and sculptor at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, he attended a few courses at the school in Dessau and drew in class on the basis of his atelier *modus operandi*.<sup>7</sup>

Pang Xunqin, an equally crucial figure in Chinese modern design, studied fine arts—to be more precise, oil painting—at Académie Julian, an art school quite different from Zheng's, yet also in Paris. However, their contacts with the Bauhaus were chronologically very close to each other in the same year 1929 when Pang Xunqin went to Berlin for Mary Wigman's dance performance. During his days there, he not only enjoyed the paintings of the Bauhaus teacher Paul Klee in the Nationalgalerie's [National Gallery's] New Department at Kronprinzenpalais, but also came across Modernist housing estates in Berlin. Such a seminal experience inspired him, early in 1946, to start dreaming of establishing a school of applied arts in his motherland.<sup>8</sup> However, it was not until 1956, a decade later, that his proposal became reality: The Central Academy of Arts and Design in Beijing, to which the National Hangzhou School of Art (previous National College of Art in Hangzhou, as mentioned above) also dispatched teachers.<sup>9</sup> It appeared as an aspiring «Chinese Bauhaus», consonant with most mainstream opinions, and for multifarious reasons.

The Dutch architect and designer Mart Stam, guest lecturer for urban planning at the Bauhaus Dessau (1928–1929), was invited by Mies van der Rohe to the Werkbund exhibition «Die Wohnung» [The Dwelling] in Stuttgart-Weißenhof 1927 where he introduced his pioneering cantilever chair, looking like what we see in this 1934 Shanghai film «New Women» <sup>Fig. 2</sup>.<sup>10</sup> There is a suggestion of a well-to-do life style, especially in a city like Shanghai that had opened its gates to the world since the mid-19th century, and where people could hire the first generation of Chinese architects

between beaux-arts  
and modernism

encounters with bauhaus  
and modern design

new women's movement

modern architecture  
and design as a response  
to social modernization

bauhaus symbolizing  
modern life



Fig. 2  
Photograph of a Chinese woman sitting in  
the Bauhaus-designed tubular steel chair,  
1930s–1940s

- [F] What are the social, political, and economic preconditions for Bauhaus reception? And how do they vary from one period or country to another?

trained overseas, like Dong Dayou, to design a neo-Corbusian house filled with tubular steel furniture.<sup>11</sup> That is to say, design as the «enlightenment» of modernities first occurred in the field of arts and crafts, then moved onto a larger scale and physical dimension, as in architecture.

dismantling arts' hierarchical order

- [F] Seen in this light, straddling the rift between fine and applied arts in Europe seemed to pose the same challenge once again for Chinese professionals trained abroad upon their return to the motherland, paving the way, in their droves, for the multiple influences, if not for simplistic transplantation, of modern design and education. Various leaders, mainly Chinese architects and planners as addressed in the following paragraphs, obtained a more well-rounded reception/assimilation of Bauhaus wisdom/stardom, rather than random encounters with modernities, which in reality can only have stemmed from technological progress, institutional support, and interpersonal cooperation.

### To-be-Modern Discourses and Pedagogies of Chinese Architects

Huang Zuoshen attended the Architectural Association (AA) in London from 1933 to 1938, and then followed Walter Gropius to the United States (US), becoming his first Chinese disciple. Prior to his well-known 1937–1952 position as Harvard University's Professor for Architecture—for which initial candidates included Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in Berlin and Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud in Rotterdam—Gropius's interim period in Great Britain is usually prone to be overlooked, as is also the case for Huang. Gropius arrived in London on 18th October 1934 and lived there until his move to America. For those three years subsequent to his departure from Nazi Germany, Gropius lived at Lawn Road Flats (later known as the Isokon Building) designed by Wells Coates: a British icon of modern architecture and also home to László Moholy-Nagy and Marcel Breuer during their brief stay, which overlapped with Gropius' time there. Given that the émigrés were only allowed to practice if they entered into partnership with an established British architect, Gropius entered into partnership with the young Maxwell Fry, who brought the Bauhaus founding director's head-in-the-clouds utopianism down to the earth. In fact, it was immediately apparent, at a glance, that the so-called «London Bauhaus» consisted of Gropius' stripped-down functionalist aesthetics.<sup>12</sup>

modern architecture

emigration and exile

In contrast to records showing that AA talks by Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier later in the Fifties were much-heralded, Gropius seemed to have kept a low profile during his short stay in Great Britain (1934–1937). Fry and other active members of the Modern Architectural Research group (MARS), like Berthold Lubetkin and FRS Yorke, on the contrary, were fully involved in AA circles, whose base at Bedford Square served as their regular meeting venue. In addition, they on the one hand worked a great deal with emigrated Bauhaus teachers or students in practice, and on the other, they organized an exhibition that Huang certainly did not miss.

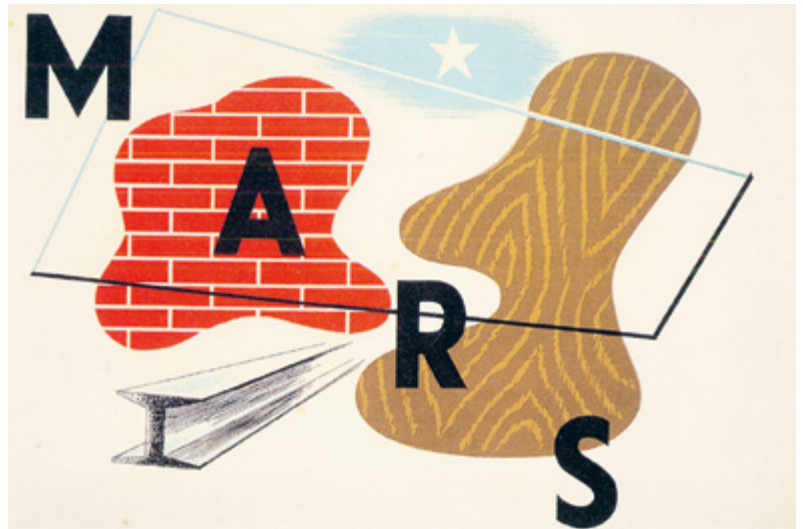
In January 1938, the MARS exhibition was held in Bauhaus-like «new architecture» at New Burlington Galleries in London. Huang's classmate and bosom friend A. J. Brandt went to the event and published a review in the *Architectural Association Journal*, which Huang was certainly aware of <sup>Fig. 3</sup>. When it comes to AA students' publications, there is no way to overlook *Focus*. There were only four issues, scattered over 1938–1939, but this offered Huang an opportunity to read articles including László Moholy-Nagy's *Education and the Bauhaus*<sup>15</sup>, Sigfried Giedion's *The Bauhaus, 1919–28*<sup>14</sup>—not to mention his face-to-face contact with Le Corbusier in Paris.

bauhaus reception  
educational reform

european avant-garde movements

His direct exposure to these European avant-garde Modernists, however, led to an outcome that was both unpredictable and uncliché. Turning down even a truly hard-won internship offered by the godfather of modern architecture, Le Corbusier,<sup>15</sup> Huang followed Gropius to the US and joined his Master Class at the Graduate School of Design (GSD) throughout the 1938–1940 academic years. He was the first Chinese architect, earlier than the famous I.M. Pei, to train at the legendary «Harvard Bauhaus».<sup>16</sup> In 1942, one year after graduating in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Huang returned to China and was invited to set up the architecture department at St. John's (the former Architecture and Urban Planning School of Tongji University), one of the earliest missionary universities in Shanghai.

In terms of the nationality and diversity of the team he brought together, Huang's faculty recruitment was indeed «Bauhaus». In addition to his AA colleague Brandt, teaching construction, Richard Paulick took up a position teaching interior design and urban planning; he was recommended by Gropius directly, as head of the College of Engineering, as part of the Architects' Collaborative (TAC)'s deployment to the Far East.<sup>17</sup> And last but not



**圣约翰大学建筑系“建筑理论课”课程大纲**

● 建筑理论大纲（七）

1. 概论：建筑与科学、技术、艺术
2. 史论：建筑与时代背景、历史对建筑学的价值
3. 时代与生活：机械论
4. 时代与建筑：时代艺术观
5. 建筑与环境：都市计划与环境

（一下）讲解新建筑的原理，从历史背景、社会经济基础出发，讲述新建筑基本上关于美观、运用、结构上各问题的条件，以及新建筑的目标

（二上）新建筑实例的批判（criticism），“评论”的意思，引者注）新建筑家（的）介绍和批判

● 该课程的参考书籍有：Architecture For Children, *Advantage of Building*, Le Corbusier 著；Toward a new Architecture, F.L.Wright 著；On Architecture, F.R.S.York 著；A Key to Modern Architecture, S.Giedion 著；Space, Time and Architecture, S.Giedion 著

资料来源：圣约翰大学建筑系档案，1949年

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Syllabus: "Architectural Theory," Department of Architecture, St. John's University

● Outline:

1. Introduction—Architecture and Science, Technique, Art.
2. History & Theory—Architecture and Context, History's Value in Architecture.
3. Time & Living—On Machine
4. Time & Architecture—Artistic Perspectives of Ages
5. Architecture & Circumstance—Urban Planning and Built Environment

Explanation for the principles of new architecture, in terms of historical background and socio-economic context, as well as those requirements regarding aesthetics, function and structure, including the goals of new architecture.

Criticism of examples of new architecture and of new architects and their survey.

● Course References: *Architecture for Children*, *Architecture of Building*, Le Corbusier's *Toward a New Architecture*, F. L. Wright's *On Architecture*, F. R. S. Yorke's *A Key to Modern Architecture*, Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time, and Architecture*.

东北大学建筑系四年级段尚楼设计名人纪念馆

名人纪念馆习题

廿一年九月七日作

吾國革命自有嚴字 (Patriotism)，以成名人  
 建築供奉神恩，吾國京城奉祀諸紀念堂，凡  
 文學海內外救國大家，國家之盛，非特其  
 中華行前，而後海諸堂下，堂內要有長官，則  
 則先列行前。

堂宜高而深，宜廣而宏，四百尺以內，凡  
 建築本面，古雅且固，非尋常建築可比。

堂內宜有大廳，行禮之期，大廳之外，有  
 長官，則列於之，下層分列於本堂，則  
 則於之。

— 22 —

Fig. 3  
MARS Group's catalogue of their exhibition in London, New Burlington Galleries, Graphic design by Ashley Havinden, 1938

Fig. 4  
Huang's outline of Architectural Theory course in 1949, with translation by the author

Fig. 5  
A student project under the traditional Beaux-Arts pedagogy in 1932



- [B] What do we understand by taking a stand regarding architecture and design, and particularly of the Bauhaus and Modernism?

least, the Hungarian scholar Hans J. Hajek oversaw history courses, as well as those students-turned-teachers, in keeping with the Bauhaus tradition, in the postwar period.

bauhaus pedagogies

bauhaus propaedeutics-*vorkurs*

functionalist approach

Taken together, a decade of Bauhaus-inspired pedagogies at St. John's University (1942–1952), after all, trains our sight on Huang's preliminary course, modelled on the *Vorkurs*, with elements like «Pattern and Texture», where students had to make materials perform with intrinsic qualities through hands-on practice. Besides, their anti-formalist studio works were surely Functionalist-oriented because, led by mechanical engineers, their teaching was unmistakably distinguished from programmes available in beaux-arts-centric training.

reception of different versions of modernism

When it comes to realism and social relevance, however, Huang's experimental emphasis was elsewhere: for example, his groundbreaking theoretical class in architecture. As clearly demonstrated by his reading list for the syllabus, in addition to Le Corbusier and Giedion's enduring «bibles», the radical clout added via MARS members came to the fore, along with selected writings by Frank Lloyd Wright, whose Taliesin Fellowship insisted on traditional methods of British apprenticeship <sup>Fig. 4</sup>.

- [B] Had it not been for his deep-seated, yet outreaching, Bauhaus adolescence before Pax Americana and US consumerism, Huang would not have quoted the late-Victorian architect Sir Thomas Jackson—«Architecture does not consist in beautifying buildings; on the contrary it should consist in building beautifully» in his 1947/8 lecture at the British Consulate-General in Shanghai.<sup>18</sup> Huang's Bauhaus approach therefore was not solely rooted in obsolete masters; instead, it was much more like a coalescence of «Modernisms» traversing the Atlantic, with London Bauhaus vis-à-vis Harvard Bauhaus, shedding new light on China's architectural education, then still under the sway of the French School.

bauhaus as a collection of attitudes towards design issues of the industrial age

architectural education

between beaux-arts and modernism

In this context, Liang Sicheng would be his counterpart in China. Throughout the 1920s, no architecture school in the US could be without a French academic. In addition to Jean-Jacques Haffner, winner of the Prix de Rome in 1919, whom Gropius replaced at Harvard, there were Eugène Létang at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Jean Labatut at Princeton University, and Liang's alma mater was no exception: Paul Cret made the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) the most distinguished Beaux-Arts-design-based programme on the East Coast.<sup>19</sup>

The first architecture department Liang Sicheng created in China was at Dongbei (Northeastern) University in Shenyang by

1928, which was completely modelled on the French system and honed students' talent in compositional drawing <sup>Fig. 5</sup>. The school, unfortunately, existed for merely three years due to the Japanese invasion. However, Liang was not alone in that short-lived undertaking; Penn alumni including his wife, Lin Huiyin, as well as Yang Tingbao, Louis Kahn's classmate, also joined his faculty.<sup>20</sup>

After his thoroughly rewarding sojourn in America during the mid-1940s, Liang established his second architecture department at Tsinghua University in Beijing by 1946. Most current accounts of Liang's US journey, alas, were simplistically encapsulated in a few photos of him with signature Modernists, serving as a design consultant alongside Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer, doing away with overblown monumentality and anachronistic styles, advocating progressive discussion of building design for the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York.<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, this image de facto overshadows many other significant elements of his 1946–1947 visiting professorship at Yale University. First and foremost, his assistant there was Wu Kinglui, a GSD alumnus who later worked closely with Bauhäusler Josef Albers, who had left Black Mountain College near Asheville, North Carolina in 1950 to lead the Art Department of Yale University. Wu provided Liang with state-of-the-art curriculum and pedagogical logistics from both Yale and Harvard, which had been starkly distinct from Beaux-Arts-orientated training at Penn back in the Twenties.

Not unlike the philosophy of Dean Joseph Hudnut at Harvard for organizing GSD, a precursory notion even before Gropius' arrival, seeking to bring different majors under one umbrella, Liang came up with the idea that his architecture «department» should be upgraded to a «college» in order to accommodate burgeoning professions concerned with the built environment. Alongside industrial art, horticultural studies, landscape, and urban planning, in his draft program for Tsinghua upon returning from America he also carefully divided «architecture» into «design» and «engineering», two-track double-billing.<sup>22</sup>

Each of these programmes required specific courses from five areas of study, also systematically crafted by Liang himself. Students of Architectural Design and Urban Planning, amongst other areas of spatial study, were supposed to take the same Culture and Sociology courses. The decision had much to do with Liang's attendance at the elite conference, «Planning Man's Physical Environment» at Princeton in 1947, where he—as the one and only participant from China—was able to meet with the guru Gropius <sup>Fig. 6</sup>.

architectural  
education reform

new pedagogies

reception of different versions  
of modernism

With respect to such documents, at the conference, however, Liang's attention was captivated by other—in the sense of offering an alternative to Bauhaus—Modernist architects, such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Alvar Aalto <sup>Fig. 7</sup>. The conference title, «Physical Environment»—in Chinese: *Ti Xing Huan Jing* (體形環境)—was not unlike the Bauhaus mission, proclaimed by Gropius in 1919, of creating a «total work of art» (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, in line with a newly-established party state's holistic planning and collective goals, this was the terminology that he invariably applied in official proposals submitted to the Ministry of Education on behalf of Tsinghua's aspiring college of architecture, which also taught Marxism-Leninism-Maoism Basic Courses, such as historical materialism and the new democracy.

### The Amalgamation of China's Bauhaus: From Building to Planning

Shanghai established its official urban planning committee in 1946. More than half the committee members were teaching faculty at St. John's, including Huang himself and other lecturers, such as Luke Him Sau, Chen Zhanxing, Zhen Guanxuan, Wang Dahong. They pooled their efforts and also worked together with students, making a prolific contribution to citizens' well-being. When the scheme was completed by 1948, they teamed up as one of the first post-war associated architects' groups «Wu Lian» (Five United), a name that bore testimony to the re-unification of British-trained architects in China.<sup>23</sup>

The most professional planner amongst them, Chen (who graduated in that field at Liverpool University and University College London) went northwards in 1950 to Beijing, to assist Liang in planning the new PRC capital. The two of them wholeheartedly submitted the cause célèbre Liang-Chen Proposal, which is still the subject of heated debates, although it was not implemented due to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) bureaucracy, with its ultimate failure due to political duress arising from alignment with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).<sup>24</sup>

For Huang, MARS Master Plan for London (1942) and for Liang, CIAM's Athens Charter (1933), should be seen in tandem, although based on different options, ever since in the restive Thirties they, individually and collectively, equipped mankind with the

demand to decentralize  
the bauhaus

most progressive planning solutions then available: satellite towns, neighbourhood units, organic decentralization, and so forth. They acted like «architect-planners» abreast of notable counterparts all over the globe, irrespective of whether these were former Bauhaus teachers or students, despite their disappointment that all their endeavours failed when Mao Zedong's CCP propaganda meant, all in all, decisively counting on Soviet experts during the decades that followed his victory in the Chinese Civil War.

Apart from Wu Lian, 1949, Huang marshalled students and colleagues to operate the architecture office «Gong Jian Tu Mu», which was not unlike Gropius' Architects' Collaborative (TAC), and they designed Shangdong Secondary Technical School, completed in 1951. Two years later, Wenyuan Building was inaugurated as a new home for the original St. John's architecture department at Tongji University. Both projects offered an indefatigable sense of Gropius' Bauhaus building in Dessau, where young generations of engineers and architects went to be schooled <sup>Fig. 8</sup>.

bauhaus reception

In 1954, Mao's CCP revolutionary government sent representatives abroad to Communist countries for reconnaissance. A group that went to East Germany (German Democratic Republic; GDR) brought back Gropius-inspired design for a monolithic factory complex in Beijing. After the Ten-Year Great Disaster of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1977), a few books in translation, such as those by Johannes Itten and Wassily Kandinsky, became available in China for the first time. Approaching the 100th anniversary, however, reading about the Bauhaus is only part of the story, for, after all, seeing is believing!

bauhaus centenary

In 2011, the city of Hangzhou purchased a huge collection of European modern design from Berlin-based art dealer Torsten Bröhan, including 7,010 items and approximately 300 Bauhaus-related ones. It is now accommodated at China Design Museum, designed by Pritzker award-winning Portuguese Álvaro Siza.<sup>25</sup> The museum opened with a popular Bauhaus exhibition in 2018, on the campus of CAA, which even contains its own full-fledged Bauhaus Research Institute, a think-tank for *bauhaus imaginista*, an international research project series which culminated in 2019 in the exhibition at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin and Thames & Hudson's centenary publication (in both an English and German version).

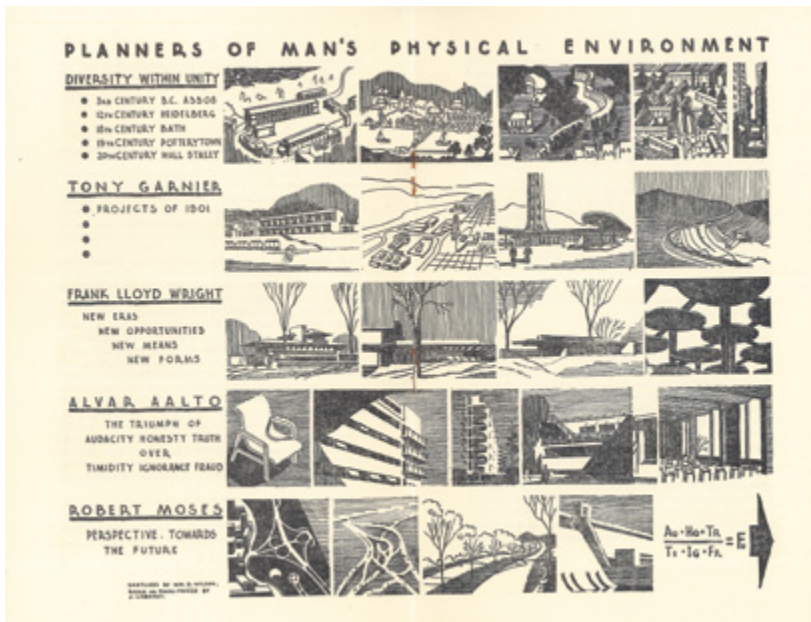


Fig. 6  
Eminent attendees including Gropius sitting in the middle of first row whilst Liang is standing on the far left of the second row

Fig. 7  
Sketches by Wm. D. Wilson based on Jean Labatut's conference photo-frieze

Fig. 8  
Top down: Shangdong Secondary Technical School, 1951; Bauhaus Dessau Building, 1926; Faculty of Architecture at Tongji University (former St. John's architecture department), 1953

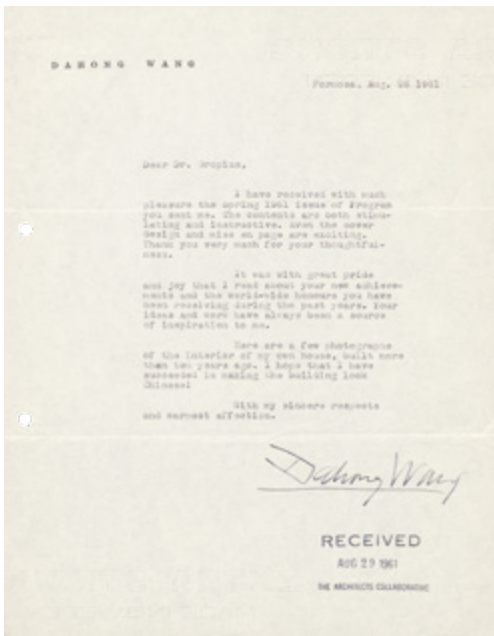
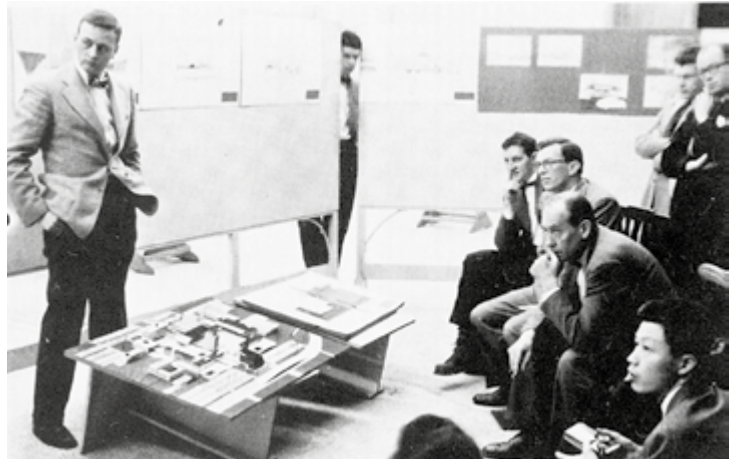


Fig. 9  
Wang (bottom right) at Gropius' Harvard  
Master Class in 1942

Fig. 10a-d  
Accompanying his letter, dated 26th  
August 1961, Wang sent Gropius three  
photographs of his house

- [F] What are the social, political, and economic preconditions for Bauhaus reception? And how do they vary from one period or country to another?
- [I] What can we learn from the history of the Bauhaus and Modernism when facing current issues? And how can this enable us to gain new insights into the past?

### The Legacy Revisited, and/or Revised?

encounters with bauhaus  
and modern design

When Chinese artists first encountered such modernities through traveling and living in 1920s–1930s, the technological circumstance in the motherland thwarted their potential back home:

[F] Zheng could only implement his progressive will in Hong Kong (HK) and Singapore, where he was lauded as a pioneer who broadened horizons concerning modern design. When Chinese architects studied with Bauhäusler and tried to do better in the 1940s–1950s, likewise, turbulent political and social upheavals hampered their endeavours on the mainland: Huang’s partners of could only «hitch wagons to horses» elsewhere, for example after 1949: AA alumnus Luke Him Sau in HK, renowned for residential apartments; as well as another Gropius’ GSD protégé Fig. 9, Wang in Taiwan (so-called «Free China» during the Cold War); his Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall remains one of Taipei’s sightseeing landmarks in the twenty-first century.

modern architecture and national  
identity construction

criticism of international style’s  
claim to universal validity

Having completed the house he designed for himself in the city by 1953, Wang wrote to Gropius years later in 1961 «I hope that I have succeeded in making the building look Chinese!»<sup>26</sup> Fig. 10. This should be read as criticism of the claim to universal validity to be found in the notion «International Style» and hence leads to a tentative conclusion here: The Bauhaus is a way, rather than an object. In other words, the Bauhaus is presented less as the exceptional result of an extraordinary time—the collapse of the German Empire and dramatic birth of a new republic—and more as a paradigmatic case of a broader European project to solve the problems associated with «good design»<sup>27</sup> in an industrial economy.

bauhaus as a collection of  
attitudes towards design  
issues of the industrial age

- [I] «All history» Benedetto Croce recalled in 1915, adopting a diachronic perspective, «is contemporary history», by which he means that all serious study of the past is informed by the problems and needs of the writer’s own time, and the more conscious historians are of their contemporary motives, the more accurate their investigations of the past will be.<sup>28</sup> Why do most Bauhaus-100 celebrations take place at architecture, rather than at art schools? The «Vorkurs» was never devised exclusively for training architects, not to mention the fact that not under the Bauhaus founder’s leadership, but of his successor Hannes Meyer—dubbed the «unknown» Bauhaus director—building education was made a school priority: A year before Gropius left the Bauhaus, the department of architecture was officially established in April 1927.

contemporaneity of history

bauhaus centenary

- [N] How do our own cultural, social, and political beliefs and stances affect our understanding of the Bauhaus, Modernism, and modernity?
- [O] What is the significance and relevance of the Bauhaus and Modernism today—a historical phenomenon or a resource for the present? And what, if anything, constitutes their current relevance?

Might one venture the thesis that instead of asking what all kinds of Modernist architects, designers or artists in China owe to the Bauhaus, it makes more sense to conceive the Bauhaus as a collection of attitudes, something beyond names and objects that could have been acquired, appropriated, or adopted—in each case in a particular way. And that indeed still works and matters after the historical Bauhaus' demise.

demand to decentralize  
the Bauhaus

[N] [O]

What we do need today is to decentralize the Bauhaus and to foster interest in processes of reception, translation, and transformation and their impact on local people.

local impact of transfer  
processes

I would like to conclude with a short paragraph in Edward Said's *Orientalism* which I slightly modify by simply replacing «the Oriental» by «the *Bauhäusler*»: «The nexus of knowledge and power creating «the *Bauhäusler*» and in a sense obliterating him [her] as a human being is therefore not for me an exclusively academic matter. Yet it is an intellectual matter of some very obvious importance. Too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent; it has regularly seemed otherwise to me [...] that society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together».<sup>29</sup>

power relations and geopolitics

intellectual colonialism

### Coda: A Reflection with Hindsight

Did Gropius ever reply to Wang's letter, mentioned above, sent on 26th August 1961? There was no direct response, yet a later reply did come, albeit not until 1968, hand-written in person by Gropius, one year before his death, with an intriguing poem by Greek diplomat and poet George Seferis Fig. 11 30:

All I want is to speak simply;  
for this grace I pray  
For we have loaded down even the song  
with so many kinds of music  
That gradually it sinks  
And our art we so decorated  
that beneath the gilt  
Its face is eaten away  
And it is now time for us to say  
the few words we have to say  
Because tomorrow our soul sets sail.



"All I want is to speak simply;  
for this grace I pray  
For we have loaded down even the song  
with so many kinds of music  
That gradually it sinks.  
And our art we so decorated  
that beneath the gill  
Its face is eaten away.  
And it is not time for us to say  
the few words we have to say  
Because tomorrow our soul sets sail."

by the great poet Seferis.  
Walter Gropius.  
Cambridge / Mass / 1968

Fig. 11  
Dated 14th August 1968, Gropius's  
hand-written poem posted to Wang

## Notes

- 1 Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman (eds.): *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity*, exhib. cat. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, NY, 2009, p. 337.
- 2 Alfred Barr created the first U.S. course on modern art and architecture, in which he emphasized the continuity of creative production between fine and applied arts, see Robert Wiesenberger, *The Bauhaus and Harvard*, <https://www.harvardart-museums.org/tour/the-bauhaus/slide/6339> (Consulted on April 4, 2020).
- 3 Bergdoll/Dickerman (as Note 1), p. 332.
- 4 Chang Chunyan, «The Spread of the Bauhaus in China», <http://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/articles/735/the-spread-of-the-bauhaus-in-china?0> (Consulted on January 22, 2020).
- 5 Zhou Yuxi and Zhou Wuzhong, «An Investigation on the Early Spread of Bauhaus in China: Take the Modern Native Art Literature as the Center 包豪斯在中國的早期傳播考察：以近代本土藝術文獻為中心», in: *Hundred Schools in Arts* 35 (Mar 2019), p. 183–188.
- 6 Ibid. The reason why the author still includes Gropius' picture in addition to «red» Bauhaus director Hannes Meyer might relate to this being in the aftermath of the successful Deutsche Werkbund exhibition in Paris, at which Gropius, Bayer, Breuer, Moholy-Nagy—who left the school in 1928 together—played leading roles.
- 7 Lian Mian, «Chinese Modern Design Pioneer Zheng Ke and «Bauhaus» Connection—As well as His Relationship with Pang Xunqin» 中國現代設計先驅鄭可的「包豪斯」情結—兼述其與龐薰琹之關係, in: *New Arts: Journal of the National Academy of Art* 39 (Nov 2018), pp. 40–50.
- 8 Ibid. See also Pang Xunqin, *This Was How I Became* 就是這樣走過來的, Beijing: San Lian Bookshop, 2005, pp. 111–117.
- 9 Chang (as Note 4).
- 10 Chang Chunyan, «The Phases and Paths of Bauhaus Dissemination in China» 包豪斯在中國傳播的階段和路徑, in: *Chinese Art* (Jan 2019), pp. 38–43.
- 11 Kuan Seng, «Between Beaux-Arts and Modernism: Dong Dayou and the Architecture of 1930s Shanghai», in: *Chinese Architecture and the Beaux-Arts*, (eds.) Tony Atkin, Nancy S. Steinhardt, and Jeffrey W. Cody, Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011, pp. 169–192.
- 12 Peder Anker, *From Bauhaus to Ecohouse: A History of Ecological Design* 從包豪斯到生態建築：一部生態設計的歷史, transl. Shang Chin, Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2012, pp. 13–19 [Original text in English, Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press (LSU Press), 2010]. Fry was a leading member of the Modern Architectural Research group (MARS): The Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) branch in England was founded in 1933 to support Modernist architects in Britain, where architectural Modernism arrived late compared to continental Europe; one need only think of Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* (1923) and the lessons from Bauhaus and the Weissenhof Estate in Stuttgart (1927).
- 13 László Moholy-Nagy, «Education and the Bauhaus», in: *Focus* (Winter 1938), pp. 20–27, in which the 1923–1928 *Vorkurs* protagonist detailed his instructions including «three parts: The basic design workshop; analytical and constructive drawing, modelling, photography; scientific subjects».
- 14 Elizabeth Darling, «Focus: A Little Magazine and Architectural Modernism in 1930s Britain», in: *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, Bd. 3, No. 1 (2012), pp. 39–63.
- 15 Leah Hsiao and Michael White, «The Bauhaus and China: Present, Past, and Futures», in: *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Fall–Winter 2015), pp. 176–189, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/685869> (Consulted on April 4, 2020).
- 16 Jill Pearlman, *Inventing American Modernism: Joseph Hudnut, Walter Gropius, and the Bauhaus Legacy at*

- Harvard, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2007, pp. 50–84.
- 17 Chang Chin-Wei, «High Modernists at Harvard University GSD: I.M. Pei, Walter Gropius, and TAC's Huatung/Tunghai University 哈佛設計學院的高端現代主義者：貝聿銘、葛羅培斯、以及建築師合作社的華東／東海大學», in: *Fun Matter*, 49 (Jul 2019), p. 30–39. The article is based on author's presentation at a 2017 international event «Rethinking Pei: A Centenary Symposium», jointly organized by the Graduate School of Design (GSD) at Harvard University and the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), Hong Kong, 14–15 December.
- 18 Huang Zuoshen, «The Training of an Architect» 個建築師的培養, in: *Commemorative Accounts of Huang Zuoshen* 黃作燊紀念文集, (eds.) Qian Feng and Wu Jiang, Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press (CABP), pp. 3–14.
- 19 Tony Atkin, «Chinese Architecture Students at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1920s: Tradition, Exchange, and the Search for Modernity», in: Atkin et al. (as Note 11), pp. 45–72.
- 20 Ruan Xing, «Accidental Affinities: American Beaux-Arts in Twentieth-Century Chinese Architectural Education and Practice», in: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians (JASH)*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2002), pp. 30–47.
- 21 Zhu Tao, *Liang Sicheng and His Time* 梁思成與他的時代, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press (China), 2014, pp. 230–269.
- 22 Liang Sicheng, «Draft Plan of Academic Structure and Programme in the Department of Yingjian (Now Known as the Department of Architectural Engineering) at Tsinghua University» 清華大學營建學系（現稱建築工程學系）學制及學程計劃草案», in: *Anthology of Liang Sicheng* 梁思成全集 5, Beijing: China Architecture and Building Press (CABP), 2001, pp. 46–54.
- 23 Edward Denison, «Chinoiserie: An Unrequited Architectural Affair», in: *British Modernism and Chinoiserie*, (ed.) Anne Veronica Witchard, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015, pp. 199–227.
- 24 Zhu (as Note 21), pp. 270–328.
- 25 See Hsiao/White (as Note 15).
- 26 Shyu Ming-Song and Ni Ann-Yue, *Silent Light, Whispering Wind: Mr. Wang Da-Hong* 靜默的光·低吟的風：王大閎先生, New Taipei City: Vista Publishing, 2012, p. 101.
- 27 See for example Achim Borchardt-Hume, «Two Bauhaus Histories», in: id. (ed.), *Albers and Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 69, who deals with the «mismatch between the Bauhaus utopia of good design for all and the efficiency requirements of a capitalist market place».
- 28 Jack D'Amico, Dane A. Trafton, Massimo Verdicchio (eds.), *The Legacy of Benedetto Croce: Contemporary Critical Views*, University of Toronto Press, 1999. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/9781442681620](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/9781442681620) (Consulted on April 4, 2020).
- 29 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books (Random House), 1979, p. 27.
- 30 Xiao Mei (ed.), *Dahong Wang* 王大閎作品集, Taipei: National Taipei Institute of Technology (today's National Taipei University of Technology), 1995, S. 1; cf. George Seferis, Edmund Keeley, Philip Sherrard, *George Seferis: Collected Poems. 1924–1955*, Bilingual Edition, Princeton: University Press, 1981, p. 291: I want no more than to speak simply, to be granted that grace. / Because we've loaded even our songs with so much music that they're slowly sinking / and we've decorated our art so much that its features have been eaten away by gold / and it's time to say our few words because tomorrow our soul sets sail. [https://books.google.de/books?id=dN3\\_AwAAQBAJ&pg=PA291&dq=Seferis+tomorrow+our+soul+sets+sail&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKew-jbrGcnbbpAhXBiFwKHUUN-DRwQ6AEIJzAA#v=onepage&q=Seferis%20tomorrow%20our%20soul%20sets%20sail&f=false](https://books.google.de/books?id=dN3_AwAAQBAJ&pg=PA291&dq=Seferis+tomorrow+our+soul+sets+sail&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKew-jbrGcnbbpAhXBiFwKHUUN-DRwQ6AEIJzAA#v=onepage&q=Seferis%20tomorrow%20our%20soul%20sets%20sail&f=false)