«Anonymous» and «Versioning» Approaches: The Spread of Bauhaus in China

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N] How do our own cultural, social, and political beliefs and stances affect our understanding of the Bauhaus, Modernism, and modernity?

The Bauhaus' spread in China involves the interlacing of an «anonymous» approach and a «versioning» approach, which also signifies the overlap between the tangible level and the intangible level. It is the reaction of popular culture and elite culture at one and the same time. It spans disciplines such as the fine arts, design (craft), and architecture.

«Anonymous» means that the design or concept originating from the Bauhaus school is disseminated without the name «Bauhaus» through commodity circulation, interpersonal communication or images. «Anonymous» also implies the multiplicity of subjects and the concealment of logic in the establishment of the «Bauhaus» discourse.

The discourse transformed into «multiple versions», which shows the different interpretations of «Bauhaus» and its different interpreters. In China, different subjects have varying understandings of «Bauhaus» for various reasons, such as discipline, political standpoint, and historical accident, or the same subject has a different judgment in different periods.

First Stage of Dissemination in the 1930s: The «Anonymous» Bauhaus as a Symbol of Modern Life for the Masses and as a Tool in China's Revival for the Intellectuals

The Chinese translation of the book *The Art of Contemporary Europe* (1926) was published in 1930 in the «Marxist Theory of Literature and Art Series» co-planned by Lu Xun and Feng Xuefeng Fig. 1. 1 The word «Bauhaus» was translated into Chinese for the first time by left-wing intellectual Feng Xuefeng. The author Ivan Matsa/Macza (Иван Людвигович Маца), a Marxist from Hungary, described the Weimar Bauhaus as a collectivist group of artists or a self-sufficient «art commune», 2 not just a «work» by Walter Gropius. This book had great influence on left-wing intellectuals.

Also in 1930, Rudolf Hamburger, one of the first architects to realize Functionalist and simple-form architecture in China during the Imitation Period of Art Deco, arrived in Shanghai with his wife Ursula Hamburger.³ With Ursula, Lu Xun organized the German Woodcut Exhibition at the Shanghai German Bookstore in June 1932, exhibiting works by Lyonel Feininger and other artists.⁴

At that time the magazine *Manufacture and Crafts* published photos of the Bauhaus, which was described as a «craft school» Fig. 2.5 The following year, the magazine published an

spread of bauhaus through commodity circulation

bauhaus discourse

[N]

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

new architecture movement

encounters with bauhaus and modern design

bauhaus signifying art's power to transform society

[F]

spread of Bauhaus through commodity circulation

modern architecture and design as a response to social modernization

new women's movement

article by Chu Xiaoshi, Vice-President and Head of the Design Department at Beiping (Beijing) Art College, advocating that the model of the German craft school should be adopted and proposing a plan for the future China National Craft School.⁶ However, more often than not, in China the word «Bauhaus» was used as a «footnote» to Walter Gropius, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, or the new architecture movements.⁷

With international students returning to China in the mid-1930s, the introduction of the Bauhaus into arts, crafts, and architecture circles gradually deepened. One example is the designer/ artist Zheng Ke, who started to teach at the Architecture Department of Kwangtung Xiangqin University in 1934.8 He had visited the Bauhaus school in Dessau while studying abroad and throughout his life endeavoured to adapt the Bauhaus concept.9

Young students from the Xiangqin University founded the *New Architecture* magazine, ¹⁰ which responded to the Bauhaus manifesto in its inaugural statement ^{Fig. 3}. Beginning by introducing Gropius and other Modernist architects closely related to the Bauhaus, ¹¹ they defined the «Bauhaus» as an «architecture Gestaltung school» based on «comprehensive plastic art». ¹²

During this period, Chinese students and practitioners from different disciplines had different definitions of the Bauhaus: «art community», «craft school» or «architecture Gestaltung school». However, there was a consensus on one point: They saw in the Bauhaus model that art, architecture, or craftsmanship could transform society, seeing this model as a tool for reviving China in a semi-colonial situation.

While a few intellectuals introduced the Bauhaus deliberately, Bauhaus-derived products entered China in an «anonymous» way. From 1930 to 1937 (before the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression), the Chinese economy and its diplomatic relations with Germany flourished. At this time, the «Bauhaus products» designed by Marcel Breuer and other Bauhäusler were popularized through international trade and local imitation. On the one hand, the steel industry was understood as a symbol of the strength of modern industry and national defence, while, on the other hand, concepts of the modern family and reform of daily life, as represented by the new women's movement, meant that hygienic, durable, simple and efficient products were held in high esteem.

At that time, while resisting political, economic, and cultural colonialism from the West, China had to learn modernization









Fig. 2 Manufacture and Crafts, 1931, Issue 2

Fig. 3 Cover of New Architecture magazine, 1936, 1st Issue







Fig. 4
The New Chrome Furniture Produced
by Diaward (Introduction to Domestic
Products), Weekly Report for Production
and Marketing of China National
Domestic Products, 1937, Volume 3,
Issue 14, p. 1

Fig. 5 Photograph of movie actress Miss Hu Shan, 1937

Fig. 6 Wang Manke, Three-Use Furniture, in: A Special Collection of the Second National Exhibition of Chinese Art under the Auspices of the Ministry of Education, Part 3 (Modern Chinese Occidental-Painting, Design, and Sculpture), 1937

Fig. 7 Crafts Guidance Office of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Japan, Catalogue of Exported Industrial Products, No. 81, 1934, p. 42



resisting colonialism and learning modernization from the west

tension between modernization and national identity construction

bauhaus symbolizing modern life

reception of different versions of modernism

from the West. It was therefore only by distinguishing «modernization» from «Westernization»/«colonization» that modernization reform could gain legitimacy in China. Modern technology, aesthetics, and lifestyle all needed to be gradually decoupled from the sense of being «Western» in order to integrate with the local realm and to gain identity in China.

The Chinese government therefore applied a temporary copyright system to acquire Western technology at a low cost, and adopted the «Provisional Standards for Chinese Domestic Goods Act» to designate locally-manufactured products containing Western technology as «domestic goods». 13 In this context, Bauhaus-derived steel-tube furniture was imitated and improved by Chinese manufacturers, such as the Diaward Steel Furniture Factory and others Fig. 4.14 Neither the original prototype designer nor the local Chinese designer who had redesigned it were credited by name. Although government departments and movie stars could afford the imported products, they still bought Bauhaus-derived furniture produced by local factories. In order to ease the contradiction between «modernization» and «nationalism», the link between «the West» and «modernization» was broken by concealing the initial «Western» background of such furniture with the nationalist label «domestic product».

The public could discover these products through widely available publications, exhibitions, domestic product fairs and other activities. At the grand industrial exhibition, «Better Home», which was held in Shanghai in 1935 and 1937, domestic manufacturers such as Diaward, as well as overseas manufacturers like Deutsche Werkstätten, Siemens and «The Modern Home», displayed products. The spread of Bauhaus in the market by «anonymous» products and in mass culture through «anonymous» images was much wider than introduction of the «Bauhaus» into the elite circle Fig. 5. Mass culture was a hotbed for creation and diffusion of the Bauhaus «mythology». At this time, the «anonymous» Bauhaus as a symbol of modern life and the different versions of the Bauhaus in different disciplines essentially regarded the Bauhaus as progressive and advanced.

However, we should bear in mind that such Modernist products were limited to middle-class families in a few large cities or only used in institutions and commercial spaces that served the urban middle class. ¹⁶ At the time, not only Bauhaus design, but also modern designs from Britain, France, the United States, Japan, Austria and other countries were localized Fig. 6.

Second Stage of Dissemination in the 1940s: The Bauhaus as a Resource for China's «New Architecture Movement»

bauhaus pedagogies

Progress had been achieved in introducing the Bauhaus' theory, design practice or pedagogy to China. Due to the Japanese invasion of China, this dissemination extended from coastal cities to areas in Middle China such as Chongqing and Guangxi. More interestingly, «Bauhaus» supporters were to be found among both the colonizer and the colonized during the war.

The Consultancy Offices for the Industrial Arts (kōgei shidōsho 工芸指導所), founded by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (商工省, Shōkōshō) of Japan, hired Bauhaus graduates to design modern products Fig. 7. Under the guise of the «Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere», Japan opened up opportunities by war to display and sell its modern design products in China. In 1943, Shenji Koike and Bauhaus graduate Iwao Yamawaki, technicians from The Consultancy Offices for the Industrial Arts, joined the «Gestaltung. Culture Alliance for East Asia Development», which was jointly organized by the Japanese government and the Nanjing puppet government then in power.¹⁷ In the same year, this organization held a week-long «Gestaltung. Culture Exhibition for East Asia Development» and «Modern Japanese Gestaltung. Culture Exhibition» in Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai and other cities. 18 One year before the exhibitions, Shenji Koike investigated China's crafts situation¹⁹ and held a Sino-Japanese symposium on design and craft with the Nanjing puppet government.²⁰ At the symposium, not only the Japanese representatives were supporters of the Bauhaus, but also the Chinese academic Chu Xiaoshi who had advocated learning from the German craft/design school.

When the Chinese government led by Chiang Kai-shek was forced to move west to Chongqing due to the war, many schools and scholars in the East followed the westward movement supporting the Anti-Japanese War. Design in Chongqing during the war period applied principles such as Functionalism more consciously. In 1943, when Japan indiscriminately bombed Chongqing, Li Lunjie, a graduate of Xiangqin University in Kwangtong, published a book in Chongqing on the international new architecture movement, with reference to the *Bauhausbücher*.²¹ The author declared that the Bauhaus was one of the three most important resources of China's «new architecture movement». The educational experiments influenced by the «Bauhaus» also expanded to western China. To give but one example, in 1945, Liang

new architecture movement

new pedagogies

bauhaus school acting as a precedent

bauhaus reception and geopolitics

Sicheng, an architect and architectural historian, who took refuge in Chongqing, wrote to the Director of Tsinghua University in Beijing, Mei Yiqi, suggesting that the Department of Architecture of Tsinghua University should be established based on the Bauhaus educational model.²² Other Bauhaus supporters, such as Zheng Ke, Hsia Chang-Shi²³, Pang Xunqin, also moved westward one after another.

Bauhaus dissemination in the east was not stopped by the war. When Shanghai was occupied by Japanese troops in 1943, Henry Huang, who had studied under Gropius at Harvard, and Richard Paulick,²⁴ who had worked in Gropius' architectural office in the late 20s, replaced the previous Beaux-Art system with the Bauhaus teaching method in the newly created Department of Architecture at St. John's University.²⁵ By the end of the 1940s, their first students were working in urban planning, architecture, furniture, and textile design projects. However, it was difficult for them to achieve commercial success. Because the eastern city was occupied by Japanese troops and most factories were moved or ruined, there was a severe economic decline. The industrial productivity retained in China was basically used for preparing for war and ensuring the population's survival.

From the end of World War II to the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the defeat of Japan and Germany meant that the US, through religious activities, international trade, and academic visits, became a main source of information on forms of «modernization» such as the «Bauhaus». The signing of the «Sino-American Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation» in 1946 also led to a massive influx of American goods and culture into China. The number of American schools in China, such as St. John's University, increased correspondingly and the number of Chinese scholars visiting the United States with US funding reached a peak.²⁶ Zhou Buyi, Luo Weidong, Li Ying went to America and started their learning inspired by the Bauhäusler. Liang Sicheng's «Drafting Plan of Curriculum and Course for the Department of Construction and Architecture of Tsinghua University»,²⁷ published in 1949, is the result of his visit to the US. Gropius was invited by a US-supported institution, the United Board for Christian Colleges in China, to begin designing the East China University campus in Shanghai. After the founding of the PRC, the power of the US in mainland China began to be eliminated.²⁸ Therefore, US influence on «Bauhaus» dissemination on the mainland quickly weakened, while it continued to influence Taiwan and Hong Kong.

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

Third Stage in the 1950s—a Politicized Bauhaus Representing

Degenerated Culture of Western Capitalism and the Survival of
an «Anonymous» Bauhaus

spread of bauhaus through commodity circulation

bauhaus discourse

critique of bauhaus' formalistic approach

bauhaus signifying western capitalist culture and production

bauhaus reception and geopolitics

The dissemination of the «Bauhaus» in China was a process of «anonymization». However, behind this anonymization lay the struggle between two different «Bauhaus» discourses based on different ideologies. Nevertheless, this did not impede the spread of the (anonymous) Bauhaus in the form of material culture.

The «Bauhaus» was regarded as a Western formalistic culture by the Chinese authorities in the 1950s and was sidelined in the light of Stalin's slogan «socialist in content and national in form». In 1953, Liang Sicheng's article «Soviet Experts Helped Us to Correct the Concepts of Architectural Design» marked the implementation of Soviet cultural guidelines in China's architectural realm.²⁹ The following year, Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin, who had always previously praised the Bauhaus, translated Jozsef Revai's book on the problem of new architecture in Hungary and criticized the «formalism» of the Bauhaus in the translation's footnotes.³⁰

From 1953 to 1954, Bauhaus graduate Selman Selmanagić and Bauhaus graduate Marianne Brandt, who was Vice Director and provisional Head of the Bauhaus Metal Workshop, both marginalized in the GDR, worked for the «GDR Industrial Exhibition» Fig. 8 and «GDR Applied Art Exhibition» in Beijing and Shanghai. The «GDR Industrial Exhibition» received 700,000 visitors in Beijing, which shows its great impact on the public. 31 During the same period as the exhibitions, these Bauhäusler also visited universities and met with leading figures in Chinese arts and crafts, such as Pang Xunqin and Zheng Ke, who knew the Bauhaus. 32 In addition, Bauhaus graduate Franz Ehrlich was commissioned by the GDR to design and plan the China Chamber of Commerce building in Beijing from 1954 to 1956.33

A number of representatives from the GDR were sent to China from 1954 to 1958, such as the Bauhäusler Walter Funkat, Director of the Kunsthochschule Burg Giebichenstein in Halle.³⁴ Conversely, many Chinese scholars visited the GDR, for instance Professor Deng Bai from Zhejiang Art Academy (now China Academy of Art), Hangzhou, and Professor Ai Zhongxin from Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing. Ai Zhongxin visited Selmanagić in 1956 and after returning to China reported on his design for the extension to the Hochschule für angewandte Kunst in



bauhaus reception and geopolitics

industrialized building

bauhaus signifying western capitalist culture and production

bauhaus representing modernization

bauhaus signifying western capitalist culture and production

bauhaus reception and geopolitics processes of oblivion and repression Berlin-Weißensee (today weißensee kunsthochschule berlin).³⁵ Deng Bai published the design suggestions of experts from the GDR and Poland on Chinese porcelain.³⁶

In his speech at the National Conference of Builders, Architects. Workers on December 7, 1954. Nikita Khrushchev set the target of extensive introduction of industrial methods, improving the quality and reducing the cost of construction and criticized Stalin's aesthetics. This caused the Chinese authorities to criticize Liang Sicheng's retro-style monumental architecture for «formalism» at the beginning of 1955. Against the backdrop of criticism directed against the wastefulness of retro style, as well as the «Hundred Flowers Movement», a period in 1956 in the PRC during which the Party (CPC) encouraged citizens to express their opinions of the Communist regime openly, scholars such as Tsinghua Professor Zhou Buyi³⁷, Tongji Professor Luo Weidong³⁸, and Zheng Ke from the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, Beijing³⁹ had opportunities to re-introduce Bauhaus. However, these people were quickly categorized as «rightists» for introducing Western capitalist culture and suffered political persecution.

Although China's goal of becoming a modern industrial country was continued from Sun Yat-sen to PRC, fierce debates unfolded on the nature of modernization and how to achieve it. Stripped from the discourses of «Westernization» and «colonialism» in the 1930s, the Bauhaus had always represented advanced culture and modernization. However, in the mainstream discourse of mainland China in the 1950s, this «version» was replaced by a politicized «Bauhaus» that represented the degenerated culture of Western capitalism.

Despite this, the «Bauhaus» still has an «anonymous» effect on the mainland. For example, the «Bauentwurfslehre» by the Bauhäusler Ernst Neufert, who had worked in Walter Gropius' architectural office, was used as an important reference for the architecture department of Tongji University. Having studied with Henry Huang and Richard Paulick, the new generation of designers, Zeng Jian, Li Ying, Li Dehua, and Luo Xiaowei, faced the difficult conditions of post-war reconstruction and invariably applied prefabricated, high-volume and functional designs for public housing projects, including interior design Fig. 9.41

Due to the breakdown of diplomatic relations with the USSR and the GDR, China lost the support of these states in the 1960s. After the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, hardly any documentary evidence mentioning the «Bauhaus» is to be found

How do our own cultural, social, and political beliefs and stances affect our understanding of the Bauhaus, Modernism, and modernity?

spread of bauhaus through commodity circulation

in China. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, through the strong support of the US, Japan, and West Germany, the «Bauhaus» representing modernization spread widely in Taiwan.

At this stage, Bauhaus-derived products were not banned due to ideological and political changes. For example, the official catalogue aiming to show the achievement of China's first five-year plan published photos of the new Sanlihe Residence neighbourhood in Beijing Fig. 10.42 The Bauhaus-style, locally produced steel-tube chair can be seen in depictions of a room in the residence. It indicates that Chinese designers with modern ideas also used Bauhaus-derived products in apartments for ordinary workers. These products bearing the Bauhaus imprint still play a role in the daily life of mainland China.

Fourth Stage in the 1980s—Reintroduction of the Bauhaus as Diverse and Different «Versions»

During the early years of China's reform and opening up, liberalism, which had boomed in the 1930s, regained vitality in China in the 1980s, followed by the emergence of nationalism in the 1990s.⁴³ The main problem facing China during this period was the simultaneous influx of multiple schools of thought, which led to the re-introduction of the Bauhaus as well as the controversy concerning it. In addition to internal demand for reforms in mainland China, these changes cannot be separated from the cultural foreign policies of the US, West Germany, and other Western countries.

During this period, the notion that the Bauhaus represents «Modernism» and more generally «modernity» has been re-accepted. The content of the term «Bauhaus», however, varied considerably between «versions» from the Anglo-American world and «versions» from the GDR—one need only think of the enormous difference between Gropius' individual «Bauhaus» and a collective «Red Bauhaus». That means that geopolitics brought different images of Bauhaus.

At that time «Bauhaus» appeared frequently in the discussion of «technical aesthetics». The fine arts, design and architecture circles had re-introduced the Bauhaus from the perspective of their own disciplines, but mostly agreed with the Bauhaus' concept of total art or the union of art and technology. As a part of the «Enlightenment» movement launched by liberal intellectuals

bauhaus reception and geopolitics

bauhaus representing modernism and modernity

different bauhaus versions

[N]

heterogeneity of the Bauhaus

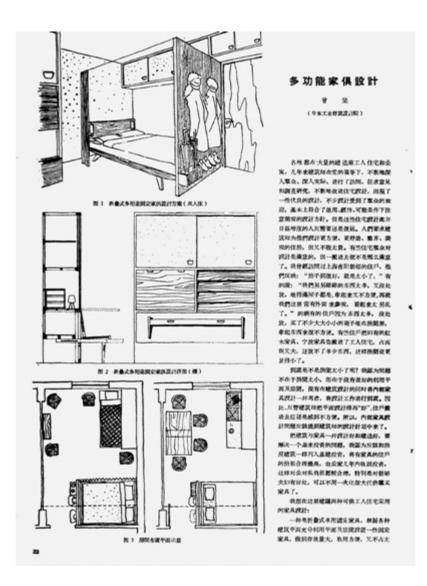


Fig. 9 Interior of the Sanlihe Community in Beijing built in 1953, in: Ten Years of Construction: Commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the People's Republic of China 1949–1959, Nanjing: China Ministry of Construction, Fig. 103

Fig. 10 Zeng Jian, Design of Multifunctional Furniture, in: Architectural Journal, 1959 (06), p. 32



- [J] The Bauhaus embraces different versions and ways of taking a stand. Which version or stance could help us tackle present and future challenges?
- [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?

in the 1980s, the «Bauhaus» discourse was also involved in the first experimental art movement «85 New Wave».

However, with the confrontation between neo-liberalism and nationalism on the cusp of the 1980s and 1990s in mainland China, several fierce debates in the fields of architecture, art, design also used different versions of the «Bauhaus» to «fight». These debates mainly included questions such as: Is the relationship between arts and crafts and modern design inclusive or alternative? Both sides referenced the Bauhaus or more precisely, two different stages of the Bauhaus—the motto «Art and technology—a new unity» had expressed a change of direction in 1923: The young reformers who supported «modern design» emphasized that the Bauhaus combined technology and industry, while the traditional side, trying to maintain traditional arts and crafts, emphasized another former «version» of the Bauhaus that learnt from traditional crafts. By the 1990s, the young reformers had an obvious advantage.

Another debate was the confusion caused by Modernism and Postmodernism—whether to «defend» the Bauhaus or «forget» the Bauhaus? In the early discussions, most scholars intended to make up the missed lesson of «Bauhaus», but there was already a consensus in academic circles that China could not simply copy the Bauhaus model. In fact, in «pleadings» for the Bauhaus, there was a potential fear that Postmodernism may recall the retro ethnic «national style» of the 1950s to 60s and its «ghost», suppressing Modernist ideas. This choice is inevitable when the reform policy just applied, and the ideological inertia of the entire society has not been completely reversed.

In addition to academic circles, the «Bauhaus» discourse was brought to the commercial and production fields since the 1980s. For example, the Ministry of Health entrusted the Department of Decorative Arts of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts to hold the first and second National Medical Packaging Design Training and this was perceived by the reformists of the Academy as a chance to teach basic modern design and with bringing Bauhaus ideas into play.⁴⁴ «Bauhaus» discourse grew more popular in the 1990s. For example, the local generalist newspapers *Hangzhou Daily*,⁴⁵ *China Construction News*,⁴⁶ *Beijing Youth Daily*,⁴⁷ and *Shanghai Wenhui Daily*,⁴⁸ all published brief introductions to the Bauhaus school.

However, the popularity of «Bauhaus» discourse has generated more «versions» of it. From the late 1990s to the first few years of the 21st century, China experienced a real-estate boom.

postmodern attack on modernism

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[N] How do our own cultural, social, and political beliefs and stances affect our understanding of the Bauhaus, Modernism, and modernity?

hauhaus hrand

bauhaus as a complex of material culture, ideas, and geopolitics In the mass market, the name «Bauhaus» was frequently associated with real estate, interior decoration, industrial design, and branding. Not only did real-estate projects such as the «Bauhaus International Community» appear, but the «Bauhaus» had ridiculous labels applied to it, such as «a famous brand in the international architectural design industry» or a design school founded by «Morris». Unlike the Diaward in the 1930s, the name «Bauhaus» was deliberately promoted to increase product sales. This also signifies that the spread of the Bauhaus in China was no longer «anonymous».

The dissemination of the Bauhaus in China involves both facts and interpretations. It should be regarded as a cultural phenomenon formed by material culture, ideas, and politics, not just the spread of ideas. «Anonymous» and «versioning» approaches respectively reveal continuity and rupture in the dissemination of the Bauhaus. When one «version» surfaced, the other «versions» became anonymous, diving «underwater» and continuing. «Anonymous» dissemination can be understood as another «version» beside all other «versions». In fact, it also participates in the construction of discourse. And reflecting on this phenomenon can help us better understand the complex process of the special «modernity» in China.

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