9 Concrete Nationalism: Republican Architecture in Nanjing and Shanghai, 1912–1949

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ABSTRACT

Arguably, one of the most visible and certainly most impressive manifestations of Republican visual culture is architecture, and at a more abstract level, urban planning. An understanding of 20th century Chinese visual culture, therefore, would not be complete without examining the country's built artifacts. The materiality of architecture means that it is also the most tangible embodiment of the political, economic, and ideological forces of any historical period. Architectural education, the professionalization of architecture, and research in Chinese architectural history, which all had their beginnings in Republican China (1912–1949), responded to the twin powers of state and capital and left an enduring imprint on the country's cityscapes, especially in such Republican strongholds as Nanjing and Shanghai. This article explores how state and bourgeois nationalism was made concrete through architecture and urban planning in the Republican period. In particular, it explores the tension between nationalism and modernism focusing on architects who catered to the Nationalist government and the bourgeois elite and the startlingly different built works in Nanjing and Shanghai.

KEYWORDS

Republican Architecture, Nationalism, 20th Century Visual Culture

That the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a radically new, largely Western-influenced visual culture in China seems self-evident.[1] Indeed, the results, omnipresent as well as intimate and palpable, impacted the Chinese from head to toe. Men's queues (pigtails) fell along with the Manchu dynasty, and women's feet were unbound and allowed to grow as nature intended. Young men and women began to favor Western fashion from fedoras to high heels. Instead of literati paintings, lithographic prints of advertisements called *yuefenpai* 月份牌 decked the walls of many homes along the coast. In print, traditional verticality eventually gave way to horizontality. The new nation state, the Republic of China (1927–1949), went through two flags. These are just a few examples. Suffice to say that it was aided by imported technologies and epistemologies, the new visual culture inscribed itself in every sphere of Chinese life. Conversely, as the country was continuously made over by reformers and revolutionaries, contending ideologies and visions were disseminated not only discursively but also enhanced and reinforced graphically and visually.

Arguably, one of the most visible and certainly most impressive manifestations of Republican visual culture is architecture, and at a more abstract level, urban planning. An understanding of 20th century Chinese visual culture, therefore, would not be complete without examining the country's built artifacts. The materiality of architecture means that it is also the most tangible embodiment of the political, economic, and ideological forces of any historical period. Architectural education, the professionalization of architecture, and research in Chinese architectural history, which all had their beginnings in Republican China, responded to the twin powers of state and capital and left an enduring imprint on the country's cityscapes, especially in such Republican strongholds as Nanjing and Shanghai.

Even before the Nationalist Party consolidated its power base in Nanjing in 1927, it insisted on a clearly discernible national style for public architecture. There was never any question that the mausoleum for the party's founder Sun Yat-sen needed to be built in what would later be called "the country's indigenous architectural manner" (*wu guo guyou de jianzhu xingshi* 吾国固有的建筑形式) when planning started two years earlier.[2] In 1926 the Nationalist administration of Guangzhou followed suit with an elaborate neo-Chinese style memorial hall in Sun's honor. With the launch of the Capital City Plan in 1929, the pattern would continue on a much larger scale in Nanjing. This emphasis on national style marked a significant departure from late Qing public architecture.[3]

In the aftermath of the revolution from empire to nation state, it was perhaps inevitable that architecture took a radical turn. After all, Sun Yat-sen sought to rally his countrymen with an explicitly anti-Manchu, racialist, battle cry to "drive away the Tartars and recover the Chinese Nation" (*quchu dalu, fu wo Zhonghua* 驱除鞑虏, 复我中华).[4] The task for the new nation, as Sun Yat-sen saw it, was to recover its cultural essence and fend off aggressive imperialist powers.

Chinese nationalism was by necessity conservative. With a long history of literary and print culture reinforced through centuries of empire-wide examinations, the Chinese had long been accustomed to thinking of themselves as a cohesive community. The issue facing the Chinese was not so much national becoming as national awakening. Between Manchu oppression and Western incursions, Chinese cultural identity was perceived as being under threat and in need of urgent preservation.[5]

Benedict Anderson has made a useful distinction between "a genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm, and a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations, and so forth."[6] Among the last unspecified category is surely architecture. Architectural nationalism in Republican China was largely state sponsored or imposed. Besieged by internal turmoil and external aggression, the Republic, which became a party state, was preoccupied with space, extending and maintaining its control over the entire national territory. Chinese architects had almost all renounced period style in favor of modernism or "internationalism" by the early 1930s. The overwhelming desire of the foreign-educated young architects was to be contemporaneous with their counterparts abroad, to be current.[7] This concern with time was not without its nationalist overtones, however, catching up with the West meant racing against time. This is one reason modernism in a sense became yet another period—albeit the latest—style for some Chinese architects. State architecture, on the other hand, was seemingly indifferent to time, being largely ahistorical in its borrowing of motifs from tradition. Architectural nationalism was conceived in spatial terms. That is to say, style was conceived as being prevalent within definable geographic boundaries—China vs. the West. That is why, with rare exceptions, nationalist architecture was generic rather than dynastically specific.[8]

Equally significant is the fact that the mishmash or quotation of traditional brackets, tiled roofs, and columns was not governed by what architectural historian Liang Sicheng (1901–1972) called the "grammar" of classic architecture. Behind the Chinese-seeming exteriors were Western spatial configurations. Modern building types derived from the West—auditoriums, schools, factories, and so on—were given "Chinese" facades. Republican "indigenous-style" architecture promoted by the state was, therefore, a hybrid. It was Western architecture with a Chinese or Chinese-looking face. Public buildings and monuments were more often than not Western-derived in plan, construction material, and technique. It is interesting to note that concrete replaced wood as the most important building material in the Republican period.

Architectural nationalism literally manifested itself in concrete.[9] The lack of concern with authenticity cannot be chalked up to the state of research in Chinese architectural history in the 1920s and 30s. Even after the landmark publications of field studies and detailed measured drawings of historic architecture by Liang and his colleagues at the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture (*Zhongguo Yingzaoshe* 中国营造社), there was little interest in recreating authentic or dynastically identifiable architecture.

John Fitzgerald writes that "[n]ationalism came to China in characteristically hybrid form, blending the universal claims of progress and civilization with the particular claims of nations."[10] Following the military and diplomatic debacles in the mid- and late 19th century, China's position as the Middle Kingdom at the center of the civilized universe was no longer tenable. Shaken to its core, China could no longer continue to claim universal validity for its civilization. The cataclysmic encounters with the West and recently Westernized Japan finally persuaded the Chinese that the West had not only faster naval vessels and more powerful cannons but also better government. Through the tireless efforts of Yan Fu 严复 (1853–1921), Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858–1927), Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929), and others, China was "awakened" to Hegelian linear, progressive history and its monster child social Darwinism. The former places Europe at the forefront of progress and non-Western countries beyond the trajectory of self-conscious history, since they possess either incomplete or no objective and subjective rationality. The latter divides the world into "advanced" and "backward" races.[11] Traditional Chinese cosmology, Sinocentric and totalizing as the Enlightenment is Eurocentric and universalistic, had to be abandoned. This drastic change in worldview was a profound perceptual shift. Thus, from the world (*tianxia* 天下), China became a nation (*guojia* 国家).

To preserve the nation, China needed to wake up from centuries of slumber drawing on Western learning (Levenson 1958, p. 99–103). Enlightenment (*qimeng* 启蒙) was put at the service of national salvation (*jiuguo* 救国). Indeed, the doctrine of combining Chinese essence (*ti* 体) with Western know-how (*yong* 用) became an *idée fixe* for the country's elite, never mind that often the essence was only skin deep. Republican public architecture was a manifestation of this lingering desire to give modernity a Chinese face. Western technology, which was deemed advanced and universally applicable, was to be given a particular national form expressed in Chinese architectural vocabulary. There is, therefore, often a disparity between plan and elevation in Republican architecture, between Western building types and spatial configurations and "Chinese" facades.[12] This contradiction is also seen in Republican urban planning. The capital Nanjing was conceived according to "scientific" Beaux-Arts principles, but individual public buildings were more often than not in national style. From above the city, the bird's-eye view or the plan looked Western, but on the ground, the city seemed Chinese.

Superficial as it may have been, Republican "indigenous-style" Nationalist public architecture was highly effective. Indeed, its effectiveness derived, to a large extent, from its superficiality. Nationhood must not only be imaginable, but also visible. Big roofs and painted columns registered "Chineseness." Authenticity was beside the point and non-progressive, for Republican nationalism was also forward-looking. Far from being incongruous, the adoption of non-traditional materials such as concrete and Western plans satisfied the demand for progress.

NATIONALIST PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE IN NANJING

Perhaps no Republican monument is as politically and architecturally significant as the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum (1925–1929). Certainly no Republican monument is more visited, photographed, and lauded by critics or more popular with the public. It is also more telling about the contradictions in Republican Nationalist architecture than any other structure. Shortly after Sun Yat-sen's untimely death on March 12, 1925, the Nationalist Party decided to build a fitting tribute to its founder and "father of the nation" (*guofu* 国父). The twelve member funeral committee composed of prominent leaders of the Nationalist Party and members of Sun's family chose a site on the Purple Gold Mountains outside Nanjing and held an

open competition for the design of the mausoleum in May of that year. The brief stipulated that the memorial be made up of a ceremonial hall, a tomb, and a plaza in front of the ceremonial hall capable of accommodating fifty thousand pilgrims. Furthermore, the south-facing ceremonial hall must be at a grade of a 175 meters connected by stone steps to the foot of the slope. At the same time the committee stressed that although the mausoleum should be in Chinese style, the building materials must be stone and reinforced concrete rather than brick and timber. Four months later the jury awarded first prize to Lü Yanzhi 吕彦直 (1894–1929), a thirty-three-year-old architect who had spent part of his childhood in Paris and received his professional training at Cornell University. Second and third prizes went to two other young Chinese architects, Fan Wenzhao 范文照 (Robert Fan, 1893–1979) and Yang Xizong 杨锡宗 (b. 1889), also schooled in the Beaux-Arts curriculum in America.[13]

Drawing on Ming and Qing imperial tomb architecture, Lü's strongly axial plan is traditional both in its constituent elements and its arrangement. Visitors are directed through a memorial gateway (*paifang* 牌坊), the mausoleum gate, a stele pavilion, the ceremonial hall, and finally the burial chamber through 392 stone steps and eight terraces. Wang Yiting 王一亭 (1867–1938), the famous painter and one of the four members of the jury, was impressed by the grandeur of the architect's conception and deemed it reflective of Sun Yat-sen's personality and spirit. Other jury members were excited by the bell-shaped plan, praising it as an appropriate metaphor for Sun Yat-sen's role in awakening the nation and dubbing the design a "tocsin" (*jingshi zhong* 警世钟) or even "liberty bell" (*ziyou zhong* 自由钟), even though the architect admitted that the shape was coincidental and derived from the site. Through the media, the plan, invisible to the casual visitor, acquired an allegorical meaning. Even the strenuous effort demanded of the visitor to reach the ceremonial hall and burial chamber became a metaphor of Sun Yat-sen's call to the country to complete the unfinished revolution.

Neither the jury nor the public seemed to catch on to the design's references to Western architecture, for Lü's design not only drew on Chinese imperial tombs but also subtly incorporated European building types. Under the Chinese-style blue tiled-roof of the ceremonial hall, for instance, is a white granite structure similar to the Neue Wache in Berlin by the Prussian neo-classical architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Both feature a tripartite composition on the front and four corner risalits. Schinkel made clear that his design was based on the Roman castrum or fortified military structure, which was fitting for a guardhouse.[14] Schinkel added a pedimented Doric portico on the front. The central section of Lü's ceremonial hall is equally richly layered. Vertically, the blue-titled top portion of the three-bay mid-section forms a truncated lower part of the classic Chinese doubled-eaved hip-and-gable roof (*chongyan xieshanding* 重檐歇山顶). Below is an engaged traditional Chinese memorial gateway. Across the lintel over three bays are inscribed in gold Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People, *minzu* 民族 (nation), *minquan* 民权 (people's rights), and *minsheng* 民生 (people's livelihood). Recessed behind the engaged memorial gateway framing the entrances to the ceremonial hall are three arches with carved surrounds. The combination of a central prominent arch flanked by two small arches, however, has precedents in the 4th century Arch of Constantine, as well as Ming and Qing imperial tomb entryways.[15]

Behind the ceremonial hall is a circular burial chamber which is almost entirely Western-derived. A marble sarcophagus stands in a sunken crypt in the middle of the burial chamber, an arrangement that recalls Napoleon's tomb at the Invalides in Paris.[16] Placing a recumbent funerary statue of Sun Yat-sen atop the sarcophagus, again unprecedented in Chinese culture, further recalls the long-standing European tradition of imperial and aristocratic tombs. That Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum draws on not one but two imperial traditions is surely one of the greatest ironies of Republican visual culture. After all, Sun had repeatedly risked his life for the anti-Western imperialist and anti-Manchu feudal cause. Lü, however, justified his design for the burial chamber with the public's need to pay homage to the nation's founding father, who, therefore, must remain on view, rather than hidden deep in a burial mound in traditional Chinese manner.

The question of visibility then is of great importance. If imperial authority and power derived in part from its invisibility and, therefore, inscrutability behind the Forbidden City, in the Republican age of mechanical reproduction the mystique of the father of the nation was perpetuated through countless photographs and prominently displayed portraits. Sun Yat-sen's

likeness is preserved by not one but two marble statues at the Mausoleum. Panting for breath from ascending the 390 steps, the visitor, much like the pilgrim arriving at the Cathedral of St. James at Santiago de Compostela with its monumental staircase, contemplates Sun Yat-sen's effigies and renews his faith in the Republican nationalist cause; hence the extra expense on the sculptural program and the architect's direct involvement in it.[17] Unlike Ming and Qing emperors resting in underground tombs, Sun Yat-sen becomes a cult figure carefully displayed for the veneration of an entire nation. The mausoleum, therefore, provides a hallowed, quasi-intimate inner sanctum at the end of a long architectural procession for the nascent republic to pay respect to its founder.

The response from laymen and experts alike proves the effectiveness of Lü's design. The blend of Chinese and Western architectural elements is so seamless the mausoleum is almost unanimously hailed as a symbol of Chinese national revival. Whether one dwells on the Chinese or Western elements seems in part a matter of Gestalt psychology. Jury members, the media, and the public automatically latch on to what looks familiar, the tiled roofs, the bracket systems (*dougong* 斗拱) and so on, and ignore or fail to perceive what is less familiar.[18] Critics who are well versed in Western architecture gloss over the mausoleum's relationship to the Beaux-Arts tradition. A Chinese architectural historian calls the mausoleum a great achievement (*fengbei* 丰碑), a perfect piece of memorial architecture, and the greatest work in Chinese national style of the 1920s and 30s. While acknowledging the "Western massing" of the lower part of the ceremonial hall, his lengthy description and analysis of Lü's design focus on its creative reinterpretation of Chinese tradition.[19] Liang Sicheng 梁思成, the foremost authority on Chinese architectural history who was also steeped in the Beaux-Arts tradition, was more ambivalent. He points out that the mausoleum contains "a heavy dose of Western elements," yet he went on to describe Lü's work as "the first shot (*haoshi* 嚆矢) at applying classical Chinese style to new architecture" and "a symbol of our nation's renaissance."[20]

If nations are united by common memories and collective amnesia, as Ernest Renan points out, they are also reinforced by common perceptions and communal selective vision.[21] At the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, a careful selection of Sun's loftiest ideals is inscribed in gold on each building along the processional route, *Bo'ai* 博爱 (Fraternity) on the memorial gateway, *Tianxia wei gong* 天下为公 (The world is for all) on the mausoleum gate, and in the stele pavilion on the stone slab, simply the words, "Here the Chinese Nationalist Party Laid Premier Sun to Rest on June 1 in the 18th Year of the Republic." The funeral committee concluded that words were inadequate to summarize Sun Yat-sen's thoughts and accomplishments, thus inviting comparison with the wordless stele of Empress Wu Zetian (AD 624–705). The longest text at the mausoleum is Sun's "Platform for National Construction" (*jianguo dagang* 建国大纲) reproduced in its entirety on the wall behind Sun's marble statue in the ceremonial hall. What is left out, and thus forgotten, at the mausoleum is the messy reality of the Republican revolution and the inchoate, even contradictory nature of Sun's Three Principles of the People.[22]

BETWEEN STATE AND POPULAR NATIONALISM: BUILDING A MODERN CHINA

When the young men who would later become prominent members of the first-generation of professionally trained architects, Lü Yanzhi and Liang Sicheng among them, left for the United States in the early 1920s, their participation in the Republican nation-building project was all but assured. Many had been groomed at Tsinghua for studies in America supported by the Boxer Indemnity Fund. Having had their minds opened at Tsinghua and the United States, their professional successes upon their return to China also depended to a significant extent on state patronage.

Of course, the dichotomy between state and popular nationalism is far from ironclad. As opinion makers, the educated elite influenced the public and helped set state agendas. Co-opted by the state, they helped implement a particular brand of nationalism. They were the third term through which popular and state nationalism converted to each other. Historians point out that by the 1920s, the two had converged. Insomuch as "popular" opinion can be gauged on what modern Chinese

architecture should be like, the call was for a new architecture that was both modern and recognizably Chinese, although it was not clear just how the synthesis would be achieved.[23] "Indigenous style" public architecture in the Republican period perhaps could have not been the result of "a genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm" for the simple reason that the populace did not build; the state did. Therefore, a case could still be made that official Republican architecture was the result of "a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of the nationalist ideology," an ideology that many architects may or may not have shared at various points in their careers.[24]

It is telling that when state intervention was absent or less intrusive, architects often eschewed overt nationalism. When Liang Sicheng and his wife Lin Huiyin 林徽因 (1904–1955), two names inextricably linked to classic Chinese architecture, received commissions from Peking University to design a geology building and a dormitory (1934–35), the results were clean and modern, without any traditional Chinese stylistic references.[25] In his preface to *A Pictorial History of Chinese Architecture*, which he wrote in English in 1946, Liang emphasizes the modular nature of traditional Chinese architecture[26] and its parallel with European Modernist construction:

> The Chinese building is a highly "organic" structure… Though it is questionable how much longer its lifeblood can be kept flowing, throughout […] thirty centuries the structure has retained its organic qualities, which are due to the ingenious and articulate construction of the timber skeleton where the size, shape, and position of every member is determined by structural necessity. Thus the study of the Chinese building is primarily a study of its anatomy…
>
> Now, with the coming of reinforced concrete and steel framing, Chinese architecture faces a grave situation. Indeed, there is a basic similarity between the ancient Chinese and the ultramodern. But can they be combined? Can the traditional Chinese structural system find a new expression in these new materials? Possibly. But it must not be the blind imitation of "periods." Something new must come out of it, or Chinese architecture will become extinct.[27]

No less a patriot than his father the reformer Liang Qichao, Liang Sicheng's interest in his native building tradition was driven by a desire to put his country on a "parallel and comparable" footing with the West, to quote a phrase from Benedict Anderson.[28] Fascinated by Western architectural history while a student at the University of Pennsylvania, Liang was asked by his professor about *Chinese* architectural history. Liang replied that nothing much had been written on the subject apart from a few general surveys by Western and Japanese art historians.[29] It was largely through Liang's leadership at the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture that Chinese architecture acquired depth, nuance, and temporality with datable features, in other words, a history.[30] The potentially most productive discovery of Liang's research, however, is not its antiquity but its convergence with, as he puts it, "ultramodern" Western practice. Liang was to reiterate the importance of studying Chinese structural and spatial configurations as a way to bridge modernity and tradition.

For obvious reasons, much more than artists, architects are beholden to their clients. "Unlike the novel, the poem, the play, the painting, the print, or even most sculpture, architecture can scarcely exist without patronage."[31] Responding to the dictates and wishes of the client, Republican architects churned out more or less convincing designs in various styles. Trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition, the first generation of professionally schooled Chinese architects skillfully dressed up Western plans with Chinese roofs, brackets, and columns when necessary.[32] An example of this kind of superficial and less successful adaptation is Lü Yanzhi's Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in Guangzhou (1926), for underneath its "Chinese" skin is an octagonal auditorium similar in its centralized plan and function to the much bigger Royal Albert Hall (1871) in London built by Queen Victoria for her beloved consort.[33] Despite the traditional blue glazed ceramic tiled roofs and vermilion columns, the exterior composition of the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall has no Chinese historical precedents.

Although the most articulate, Liang was not alone in expressing doubt over Republican indigenous architecture. By the early 1930s, many Chinese architects began to reject revivalist architecture in their writings and practice. Although trained in the Beaux-Arts system, they were acutely aware of architectural trends abroad, particularly in Europe. Their education had facilitated their practice of "adaptive architecture," for Chinese classicism and Beaux Arts had much in common: both favored formality, symmetry, and monumentality in general. Furthermore, the Beaux-Arts curriculum emphasized front elevations and national styles. In the 1920s and 30s, however, a new movement started to gather force in Europe, a movement later christened "the International Style" in America. Responding to the universalistic aspect of modernism, Chinese architects began to diverge from state nationalism.

Fan Wenzhao (Robert Fan), for instance, graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Class of 1921, went through numerous revivalist styles before embracing modernism. One of his first projects, the Shanghai YMCA building (1927), a collaboration with two other architects, was essentially Beaux Arts in overall composition with certain Chinese details. His Nanking Theatre (1928), dubbed the Chinese Roxy by the *New York Times*, was a fluent exercise in Western neoclassicism. His design for the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum combined various elements of Chinese religious and memorial architecture and won second place at the official competition.

However, in 1933, a young American, Carl Lindholm, "a disciple of Le Corbusier, Gropius, and Frank Lloyd Wright," joined his firm. Fan held a press conference to introduce Lindholm to the Shanghai press. Fan's PR move was a great success. Major newspapers such as *Shenbao* 申报 and *Shishi xinbao* 时事新报 gave extensive coverage of Lindholm's advocacy of the International Style and Robert Fan and Lindholm's collaborative designs.[34] That same year another young architect joined the firm as a partner. A new graduate of Columbia University, Wu Zi'ang (1908–1987) allegedly introduced Robert Fan to all the latest trends in New York. The following year Robert Fan published an article in which he criticized his plan with its "hodgepodge of Chinese formulas" for the Sun Yat-sen Memorial and appealed to his colleagues to avoid his mistake and called for a "completely new" architecture that totally broke away from ossified traditionalism. A building must be, he continued, designed from within, not from without. A design must be "scientific" before it could be "beautiful." Fan traveled to Europe in 1935 and returned from his trip even more committed to modernist architecture. His apartment buildings and the Majestic Theatre reflect his new enthusiasm for modernism.[35]

BOURGEOIS NATIONALISM AND MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE IN SHANGHAI

Besides the Nationalist government in Nanjing and Western capital in a few treaty ports, the most important architectural patrons in the Republican period were the banking and industrialist classes in Shanghai. Although not as high-profile as Nationalist public architecture, the built legacy of the Shanghai capitalist class, which includes industrial, commercial, and residential architecture, is far more extensive. Certainly in quantitative terms, Shanghai bankers and industrialists contributed far more to the built environment of Republican China than the Nationalist government. Shanghai's modernist architecture before 1949 is indebted almost exclusively to the city's *grande bourgeoisie*. The influence of Shanghai capitalists extended, of course, beyond architecture. Arguably, as a class they were more responsible than any other for Republican visual culture in fields such as publishing, advertising, and film. To a significant extent, Republican visual culture was synonymous with bourgeois culture. No understanding of Republican architecture would be complete without considering Shanghai bourgeois architecture, which served as a foil to state nationalist architecture.

The Nanjing government depended on Shanghai capitalists to finance its endless military campaigns. Financially exploited and politically thwarted, Shanghai capitalists found themselves defeated time and again by the highhanded tactics of the perennially bankrupt Nationalist government in need of ever more funds.[36]

Although Shanghai capitalists actively participated in the nationalist movement, their nationalism was moderated by economic pragmatism. Often living and working in close proximity with their Western competitors in the concessions, Shanghai capitalists also experienced modernity in different temporal and spatial terms. Modernity was not something to be found exclusively elsewhere beyond the borders of China in the West and Japan; Shanghai was modern. If the rest of China was behind Europe, in many respects Shanghai was contemporaneous with it.[37] For China to stand among the nations of the world, it had to be, first of all, modern. In semi-colonial Shanghai, the "universal claims of progress and civilization" were negotiated with "the particular claims of nations" in ways that set the city apart from the rest of the country. The difference was clearly visible in its architecture.

The most marked characteristic of Shanghai bourgeois architecture was its lack of overt nationalism. One may begin with the headquarters of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce. Designed in 1913 by the British firm Atkinson & Dallas in Shanghai, its most prominent feature was the entrance gate, clearly patterned after the Arch of Titus. Founded in 1902, the Chamber of Commerce was the most powerful bourgeois organization in the city. For a time, the Chamber of Commerce assumed in the city's Chinese quarters quasi-governmental functions of road construction, street lighting, and refuse collection, in emulation of the municipal administrations of the concessions. The General Chamber of Commerce even established a militia. In 1905 it helped the inauguration of an elected city council in the Chinese section, the first such body in Chinese history.[38]

The Chamber of Commerce was built before May 4th nationalism swept over the country in 1919. It is interesting that in 1925, the same year that Lü Yanzhi designed the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, he also worked on the headquarters of the Shanghai Bankers Association, another august bourgeois institution in the city, but in Western classic-revival style with four prominent Corinthian columns.[39] The importance of the organization could be seen through one statistic: the 26 member banks of the Association controlled over three-fourths of the total assets of all modern Chinese banks in 1932.[40]

In addition to these two examples of bourgeois institutional architecture, Shanghai capitalists also left a rich legacy of industrial, commercial, and residential architecture. Beginning in the 1930s the bourgeoisie increasingly turned to Art Deco and other modern styles instead of European revivalism. Banks, hotels, cinemas, apartment buildings, and villas were built in the latest, most up-to-date manner. Some of Shanghai's most iconic buildings, among them the Joint Savings Bank/Park Hotel, and the Grand Theatre, two Art Deco structures by the Hungarian architect László Hudec (1893–1958), date from this period. Business tycoons such as Wu Tongwen 吴同文 (1908–1966), the king of dyes, Rong Desheng 荣德生 (1875–1952), the textile magnate, and Yao Naizhi 姚乃炽 (1900–1997), heir to a cement fortune, lived in modern-style villas designed by the city's resident foreign and Chinese architects.

One, therefore, detects a curious phenomenon in Republican architecture, a schizophrenic split between Nanjing and Shanghai. The same architects simultaneously executed radically different designs in the two cities. Architects like Xi Fuquan 奚福泉 (1903–1983), Zhao Shen 赵深 (1898–1978), Chen Zhi 陈植 (1902–2002), and Tong Jun 童寯 (1900–1983) served up Chinese decorative motifs, Chinese roofs, columns, and brackets to suit the Nanjing government's agenda, whereas for Shanghai's industrialist and professional classes they built cool, sleek, modernist structures. Xi Fuquan, for instance, designed a thoroughly modernist sanatorium in Shanghai in 1934, a year after Alvar Aalto's famous example in Paimio, Finland. When he received commissions to design the National Museum of Art and the National Grand Assembly Hall in Nanjing, however, he added Chinese decorative motifs to the facades. Operating as commercial architects, young professionals trained abroad, like the partners at Allied Architects, had much in common with the cosmopolitan Shanghai capitalists in background, outlook, and education. These architects often secured commissions through family connections with the city's upper bourgeoisie.

One also sees the divide between Nanjing state-sponsored nationalism and Shanghai capitalist-endorsed modernism play out in the work of the Allied Architects. The biggest Chinese architectural firm in Shanghai and the second largest in the country, it was founded in 1932 by three graduates of the University of Pennsylvania, Zhao Shen, Tong Jun, and

Chen Zhi. Until it folded two decades later, the firm was active not only in Shanghai, but also in Nanjing and the interior. Although all were products of the Beaux Arts system, the partners "agreed to reject the (Chinese) big roof."[41]

The firm made news in Shanghai with its modern-style banks and cinemas. One of its first projects, Hengli Bank (1933), was described as "completely in the latest German and Dutch style."[42] The facade of the Metropol Cinema (1933) featured eight vertical neon-lit concrete and glass bands, and the interior was equally streamlined. The Chekiang First Commercial Bank (1948) was a handsome eight-story structure faced with dark brown brick. White stringcourses ran along the main façade, while verticality was emphasized on the narrow secondary north facade. The firm received the crucial bank commissions from the city's dominant Zhejiang financial clique through Chen Zhi's family connections.

The Allied Architects' Nanjing projects were much more complicated affairs. Most were for the Nationalist government. The Foreign Ministry building, for example, represented a compromise between the firm's commitment to modernism and the government's demand for explicit nationalism. The overall composition was remarkably conservative in that it was tripartite both horizontally and vertically. The ground floor was meant to evoke the *xumi* 须弥 podium associated with Buddhist sculpture and architecture. The roof was indeed flat, but the cornice re-created the traditional wooden bracket system. The interior had colorful painted ceilings and vermilion columns in the Qing manner. All these elements satisfied the client's wish for a modern yet clearly Chinese building befitting its function as a symbol of the new Republic.[43] In the Foreign Ministry Building, the essentially Beaux Arts scheme eschewed the full-blown Chinese revivalism of an earlier design by the celebrated Chinese architect Yang Tingbao 杨廷宝 (1901–1982), a fellow graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, but was a far cry from the firm's work in Shanghai.[44]

Tong Jun, perhaps the most scholarly of the three partners, wrote in 1946 about the difficulty of creating modern yet distinctly Chinese architecture. He saw the Chinese women's *qipao* 旗袍 as an apt analogy for this ideal synthesis. The *qipao*, he wrote, was "practical and beautiful without being devoid of local color."[45] An ethnic Manchu himself, Tong neglected to point out that although completely sinicized by the 20th century, the form-fitting *qipao* was actually Manchu in origin, and with its stiff, high collar and high slits, was far from practical for working women. Tong lamented that Chinese architects had yet to re-create in architectural terms what their wives had achieved with their dress. Instead, all too frequently they resorted to "cubism and Hollywood backdrops." He was equally critical of officials who had a "feudal" taste for Chinese palace-style public buildings. To superimpose a big roof on top of Western walls as an exemplar of modern Chinese public architecture was a copout, facile and ultimately unsatisfactory. "If the palace style roof was blown away by a hurricane, pray tell where the Chinese character would reside in what's left standing? What we hope for is public architecture that is recognizably Chinese without tiled roofs, bracket systems, and stone podiums."[46] Tong Jun reminded the reader that it was Western architects who came up with the pseudo-solution of applying superficial Chinese motifs, heavy Chinese roofs in particular, atop "piles of Western walls" in their designs for missionary universities. Tong argued that Western architects, however well-meaning they were, had no appreciation for the essence of Chinese architecture. In his view, "this kind of style should become obsolete in Chinese public architecture in the future."[47]

Tong proved to be prematurely optimistic, as his own firm fell short of the lofty goal of achieving a modern yet Chinese architectural language. Like the firm's foreign ministry building, the Allied Architects' Sun Yat-sen House of Culture and Education in Nanjing was in modified Chinese style without the big roof. Its projects in Shanghai were unabashedly Western modernist. Few architects, if any, in the Republican era succeeded in forging a truly Chinese design philosophy based on local exigencies.

Perhaps no architect experienced the tension between official promotion of nationalism and private espousal of cosmopolitan modernism more acutely than Dong Dayou 董大酉 (1899–1973), "official" architect of Shanghai under the Nationalist government. Educated at the University of Minnesota (M.A. in architecture, Class of 1925) and Columbia (graduate courses in art history and archeology), upon returning to China in 1928, Dong started his practice in Shanghai. Unlike most Chinese architects of his generation, Dong received a critical boost from the government from the very

beginning of his career. His reputation during the Republican era was built almost entirely on a series of municipal commissions in Shanghai. Dong, therefore, loomed large in the Nationalist conservative cultural landscape in the Western-dominated metropolis.

To contain the International Settlement and the French Concession and create a new city center to rival the foreign-controlled areas of Shanghai, the Nationalist government drafted an ambitious master plan for the development of greater Shanghai in 1930. The first phase of the plan called for a new port, traffic arteries, and municipal facilities.[48] A competition was held for the design of a new city hall. The city government directed Dong Dayou, consultant to the Commission on the Construction of Shanghai City Center (*Shanghai shizhongxin quyu jianshe weiyuanhui* 上海市中心区域建设委员会), to revise the winning entry by Zhao Shen 赵深 and Sun Ximing 孙熙明. The brief of the competition stipulated rather vaguely that the city hall be designed in Chinese style, and that it embody Chinese culture:

> Architectural style is where a country's cultural spirit resides. Therefore, each country's architecture expresses its unique national character. In recent years Chinese architecture has shown a tendency to be taken over by Europe and America, which must be corrected with great effort in order to fulfill our duty to promote our country's culture. Municipal architecture must be in Chinese style to set an example for the people of Shanghai.[49]

In other words, the government's nationalism was both reactive and corrective. It sought to remake Shanghai in the image of Nanjing.[50] The resulting design by Dong Dayou was a mix of Chinese imperial architectural motifs. The city hall (1933), library (1935), and museum (1935), the last two also designed by Dong, were impractical, difficult, and hugely expensive to build, but their influence was long lasting.[51]

Chinese revivalism, however, never caught on in Shanghai. Looking quaint and anachronistic today on the edge of the city, the city hall, library, and museum were turned over to several educational institutions in the 1950s. Ironically, after achieving great fame with his group of public projects, to which one must also add the municipal stadium completed in 1935, Dong Dayou built a streamline Art Deco or Art Moderne house for himself in the same year. In contrast, the Nationalist mayor of Shanghai, Wu Tiecheng 吴铁城 (1888–1953), an ardent promoter of architectural nationalism, put his preaching into practice, asking Dong to design a Chinese-style mansion for himself.

Beginning in the late 1940s, Shanghai modernism became more sophisticated. A new generation of architects affiliated with the Bauhaus-inspired curriculum at the city's St. John's University came of age. A couple of their designs pointed the way toward a new type of architecture with a more subtle understanding of tradition and modernity, of the kind that Tong Jun and Liang Sicheng had called for. For instance, Li Dehua 李德华 (b. 1924), a graduate of St. John's University, worked on the villa for Yao Naizhi, the playboy son of the Shanghai cement king. The suburban house featured spaces at different grade levels. Interior and exterior flowed into each other.[52] The house is often cited as one of works in China influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright. Li Dehua went on to design a faculty club for Tongji University in 1956. Li drew on vernacular courtyard houses without explicitly quoting from them. The original program, which called for "a social room, a billiard room, a ballroom, a reading room, and a bar-cafeteria," was essentially modern, Western-derived, but realized through Chinese garden-house sensibilities.[53] In other words, one began to see the reversal of Republican official architecture. Whereas Nationalist monuments looked Chinese on the outside but were essentially Western on the inside, Shanghai modernist architecture began to incorporate traditional Chinese elements on the inside, a far more subtle and organic approach that is increasingly characteristic of contemporary non-commercial Chinese architecture.

ENDNOTES

[1] Broadly conceived, visual culture includes "an enormous variety of visible two- and three-dimensional things that human beings produce and consume as part of their cultural and social lives" ranging from art and design to facial expressions, fashion, and tattooing." See Malcolm Barnard. *Approaches to Understanding Visual Culture*, p. 2.

[2] Specifically, the mausoleum was to consist of a funeral mound (*ling* 陵) and a memorial hall (*jitang* 祭堂). See Lai Delin. *Minguo lizhi jianzhu yu Zhongshan jinian*, p. 101.

[3] Once forced to accelerate the pace of modernization, the recalcitrant Manchu court began a systematic reform program, which was to culminate in the transformation of the empire into a constitutional monarchy along Prussian and Japanese lines in 1907. The European-inspired edifices which housed the newly (re)constituted naval and army ministries, the supreme court, and the prime minister's office "proved" to the court's increasingly skeptical and restless critics—since seeing is believing—that it was finally committed to change. The most striking symbol of the new polity was to be a grandiose parliament building in German neo-Renaissance style. Designed by the German architect Curt Rothkegel (1876–1946), it was planned to be twice the size of the Reichstag in Berlin with three domes representing the Manchu dynasty and the bicameral legislature. The revolution of 1911 put a stop to the construction of the parliament building despite the fact that the foundation had already been laid and nearly a fifth of the planning and building costs had already been incurred. See Torsten Warner. *German Architecture in China: Architectural Transfer*, p. 35–41. All the provincial assembly buildings were also in European style.

[4] In his essay "On China's Weakness" Liang Qichao lamented that "most astonishing" was the inability of the Chinese to give a name to their country. See John Fitzgerald. *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*, p. 117.

[5] Much of Benedict Anderson's seminal book focuses on national becoming in creole North and South America, polyglot Europe, and their colonial possessions in Asia and Africa. China is largely absent in his discussion. If print capitalism is crucial to the spread of nationalism as Anderson insists, then omission of China, which claims to have invented the technology, is curious indeed. Print, of course, not only makes it possible to think the nation but also reinforces it. However, throughout Anderson's book the emphasis is on the emerging moment of nationalism as made clear by the title of his book. See Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*.

[6] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*, p. 114.

[7] For the purposes of this article modernism corresponds to the Chinese term *xiandaipai* 现代派 and includes not only what one might call "high modernist architecture" typically associated with Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Walter Gropius, but also Art Deco.

[8] For a useful discussion of time in Republican modernism, see Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, p. 53–72.

[9] For a history of concrete in China, see Zhang Yanmou, *Zhongguo shuini fazhanshi*. Concrete was introduced to China during the Self-Strengthening Movement during the late Qing.

[10] Here Fitzgerald draws on Conor Cruise O'Brien's work on nationalism. See John Fitzgerald. *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*, p. 25.

[11] See Fitzgerald's *Awakening China* on the prevalence of that trope in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The metaphor of social Darwinism being the monster child of Enlightenment rationality belongs to Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, p. 20.

[12] Besides official desire for an overt national style, Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan posit a technical hypothesis for the emphasis on form: Chinese architects were "generally familiar with shape and appearance of traditional buildings but not with their essential spatial characteristics." Chinese architects may also have found it difficult to adapt traditional spatial arrangements to modern programs. See Peter Rowe and Seng Kuan, *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China*, p. 208.

[13] For a study of what he calls "ritual architecture" and monuments of Sun Yat-sen in Republican China, see Lai Delin. *Minguo lizhi jianzhu yu Zhongshan jinian*.

[14] See Martin Steffens, *K. F. Schinkel*, p. 25.

[15] Architectural historian Lai Delin compares the ceremonial hall with the Arc de Triomphe. See Lai Delin, "Yuedu Lü Yanzhi," 2004. The single arch Parisian monument is based on the Arch of Titus.

[16] Trained in the Beaux Arts tradition, the architect Lü Yanzhi (1874–1929) would have certainly been familiar with European memorial architecture. For the possible influence of Napoleon's tomb on Lü's design of the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, for instance, see Peter Rowe and Seng Kuan. *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China, p. 69.*

[17] The statues in the ceremonial hall and burial chamber are by a French and Czech sculptor respectively.

[18] Interestingly, the opinion of the fourth member on the jury, that of a German architect, was not reported.

[19] Yang Bingde. *Zhongguo jindai zhong xi jianzhu wenhua jiaorong shi*, p. 304–311.

[20] Liang Sicheng. *Liang Sicheng wenji*, p. 215.

[21] Ernest Renan. "What is a Nation" in *The Poetry of the Celtic Races*, p. 67.

[22] Marie-Claire Bergère. *Sun Yat-sen*, p. 354.

[23] In 1919 Sun Yat-sen founded *Reconstruction* magazine. Quoting Fu Sinian, Fitzgerald cites the founding of *Reconstruction* as the point of convergence. On discussions about ideal modern Chinese architecture in the "popular," i.e., urban middle-class, media and architectural journals, see Lai Delin, "'Kexuexing' yu 'minzuxing'—jindai Zhongguo de jianzhu jiazhiguan (shang)," p. 52–53.

[24] See for instance, Lü Yanzhi's insistence on Chinese national architectural style in his plan for the Republican capital Nanjing, quoted in ibid. p. 57.

[25] Their work for Peking University was not their first foray into collegiate architecture. In 1930, Liang entered into a partnership with Chen Zhi, Tong Jun, and Cai Fangyin. One of the firm's commissions was a box-like auditorium and library building for Jilin University. The elevations are heavily rusticated with only a few awkward decorative Chinese details: *chiwei* ("bird tails") on the front entrance and *dougong* on the back elevation. Although predominantly gray and white and, therefore, rather subdued in its color scheme, the lobby was an elaborate pastiche of Chinese motifs including a staircase with Chinese banisters and more brackets on the beams.

[26] See Liang's explanation of the central concept of *cai* or *chi,* meaning a standard-sized piece of timber or a unit for measurement, which he renders as "modules" in the Song dynasty architectural "grammar,"*Yingzao fashi* 营造法式. Liang Sicheng. *A Pictorial History of Chinese Architecture*, p. 15.

[27] Ibid. p. 3.

[28] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*, p. 192.

[29] See Wilma Fairbank. *Liang and Ling: Partners in Exploring China's Architectural Past*, p. 25. See also Liang's own account in Lin Zhu, p. 29. Liang consulted Ernst Boerschmann's book of photographs of Chinese building types, Osvald Siren's *Walls and Gates of Peking* and *The Imperial Palaces of Peking*, Tokiwa Daijo and Sekino Tai's work on Chinese Buddhist monuments, see *ibid*. p. 29–30. It was during Liang's studies in the US that his father sent him the recently rediscovered Song dynasty building manual *Yingzao fashi*.

[30] On the importance of history writing to rising nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.197. The early part of the Republican period saw the emergence of all types of histories, literary, artistic, and architectural.

[31] Richard Williams. "Architecture and Visual Culture," p. 107.

[32] The skillful linking of historical architectural details or *agrafes* was a hallmark of Beaux-Arts training.

[33] Both the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall and its Victorian counterpart suffer from poor sightlines and problematic acoustics. For a description of the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, see Yang Bingde, *Zhongguo jindai zhong xi jianzhu wenhua jiaorong shi*, p. 311–2. The problem with the halls ultimately derives from the conflicting— monumental vs. utilitarian—demands placed on them.

[34] Lai Delin. "'Kexuxin yu 'minzhuxin'—jindai Zhongguo de jianzhu jiazhiguan," p. 59.

[35] Most Chinese accounts of Robert Fan's conversion to modernism are based on Wu Jiang's book, *A Century of Shanghai Architectural History, 1840–1949*, p. 153–5. Wu Jiang, architectural historian and former deputy director of Shanghai's Urban Planning Bureau, is a grandson of Wu Zi'ang. It is also interesting to remember that Philip Johnson christened the new modernist architecture "the International Style" in 1932, in association with the exhibition of European modernist architecture at the MOMA in New York. Modernism was, therefore, the "latest," from the China-American point of view, the most cutting edge form of architecture. The Majestic actually shows significant traces of Art Deco.

[36] See the important study by Parks Coble on the Shanghai capitalists and the Nationalist government. Coble shows that far from being close allies of the Shanghai economic elite, the KMT suppressed the capitalists' political aspirations through control of their organizations and seized many of their financial and industrial enterprises in order to fill the state coffers.

[37] See Yaohua Shi. "Reconstructing Modernism: Narratives of Chinese Modernist Architecture," *Passim*.

[38] Wang Yiting, who was to serve on the jury on the competition the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, was one of the directors of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce.

[39] Lü was the building's project architect. For the building's attribution, see Lai Delin, "Yuedu Lü Yanzhi," p. 78. For a brief description and photograph of the structure, see Luo Xiaowei, *A Guide to Shanghai Architecture*, p. 87.

[40] Coble, *The Shanghai Capitalists and the Nationalist Government 1927–1937,* p. 18.

[41] Chen Zhi. "Jinian Tong Jun xiansheng danchen yibai zhounian," p. 4.

[42] Quoted in Luo Xiaowei. *A Guide to Shanghai Architecture*, p. 83.

[43] On the Foreign Ministry building, see Yang Bingde, *Zhongguo jindai zhong xi jianzhu wenhua jiaorong shi*, p.327–330; Charles Musgrove, "Building a Dream: Constructing a National Capital in Nanjing, 1927–1937," p. 150–1; and Peter Rowe and Seng Kuan, *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China*, p. 81.

[44] In December 1929, the National Capital Planning Office published the *Capital City Plan*, which, among other things, recommended that government buildings be built in modified classic Chinese style. See Charles Musgrove, "Building a Dream: Constructing a National Capital in Nanjing, 1927–1937," p. 147, and Lai 1995: p. 57–8.

[45] Tong Jun."Wo guo gonggong jianzhu waiguan de jiantao," p. 8.

[46] *Ibid.,* p. 8.

[47] Tong's article first appeared in 1946 in the journal *Gonggong gongcheng zhuankan*. It was reprinted in 2000 in the journal *Jianzhushi*. American architects Henry K, Murphy and Harry Hussey, along with the Englishman Fred Rowntree, are credited as pioneers of this type of style. To downplay their foreign character, Christian missionary organizations hired Murphy, Hussey, and Rowntree to design Chinese-

style buildings for missionary university campuses (Yang Bingde. *Zhongguo jindai zhong xi jianzhu wenhua jiaorong shi*, p. 260–86; Lai Delin. *Jindai zhejianglu*, p. 54–5). For Murphy's career in China, see Jeffrey Cody, *Building in China: Henry Murphy's "Adaptive Architecture," 1914–1935*. See also Harry Hussey, *My Pleasures and Palaces: an Informal Memoir of Forty Years in Modern China*. Both Lü Yanzhi and Dong Dayou worked as Murphy's assistants before breaking out on their own. See Lai Delin. *Jindai zhejianglu*, p. 55.

[48] See Wu Jiang, *Shanghai bainian jianzhushi*, p. 168–70 and Peter Rowe and Seng Kuan, *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China*, p. 50–3, also Kerrie MacPherson, "Designing China's Urban Future: the Greater Shanghai Plan, 1927–1937."

[49] Yang Bingde. *Zhongguo jindai zhong xi jianzhu wenhua jiaorong shi*, p. 323.

[50] For a study of urban planning and construction in Nanjing, see Charles Musgrove, "Building a Dream: Constructing a National Capital in Nanjing, 1927–1937," p. 139–60.

[51] As Yang Bingde points out six decades later, the West Train Station in Beijing was built with similarly elaborate Chinese roofs and watchtowers, albeit on top of a massive multistory concrete box. See Yang Bingde. *Zhongguo jindai zhong xi jianzhu wenhua jiaorong shi*, *p.* 325–6. Dong Dayou was criticized for the cost overruns associated with the construction of the group of municipal projects. On the high costs of nationalist architecture in general, including the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, and Nationalist municipal buildings in Shanghai, see also Lai Delin, *Jindai zhejianglu*, p. 58–9.

[52] The design is variously attributed. Apparently, the real architect of the house was Richard Paulick (1903–1979), a German then in exile in Shanghai, who had worked at the Bauhaus with Walter Gropius. Since he did not have a license, the design was signed off by Wang Minxin and Wang Minyong of Yah Tai. Paulick was assisted by Li Dehua. Paulick played a prominent role in the rebuilding of East Berlin after WWII. His name became associated with Socialist Realism and the iconic Karl Marx Allee.

[53] See Luo Xiaowei. *A Guide to Shanghai Architecture*, p. 242. The description of the club is based on the account by Li Dehua himself, who was responsible for the English version of the bilingual guide to Shanghai architecture.

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