



The Griffin Plan for Shanghai, 1904-1906

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Abstract: An event in Yokohama in January 1906 – the accidental death of the Chinese trade commissioner to Japan, Huang Kaijia 黄开甲 (1860-1906)– seems to have ended one of the most intriguing city planning ventures of the early modern era. Two years previously, as Imperial Vice Commissioner to the St Louis Exposition, Huang Kaijia was almost certainly the ‘delegate from the Chinese government’ who commissioned the design of a ‘new city at Shanghai’ from the American architect and landscape architect Walter Burley Griffin (1876-1937). This paper reviews the testimony emanating from Griffin and his colleagues on which the claim for a Shanghai city plan from 1904-1906 is based; the modernising impulses in Shanghai at the time; and the broader context of ‘New China’ reforms initiated by the Qing Dynasty in the first decade of the twentieth century. From the available descriptions, the following details of the proposal can be established. First, the project was a Chinese initiative, not a ‘colonial’ venture associated with the Foreign Settlements. Second, the proposal involved ‘a modern city on a new site’ located ‘a few miles’ from the traditional walled city. Third, the project was conceived as an alternative to the ‘narrow streets, swarming tenements and insanitary areas’ of the ‘old city’ – and, indeed, included the proposal to ‘abandon the old city.’ Fourth, Griffin ‘drew the plans for the new Shanghai in detail.’ Based on archival research, critical review of contemporary newspaper accounts and recent scholarship on the ‘tradition vs modernity’ debate in Chinese historiography, the paper seeks to address the question, what does the fragmentary evidence of the ‘Griffin Plan for Shanghai’ tell us about innovation and change in urban thinking before the Chinese revolution of 1911; the continuity of ideas across the revolutionary divide; and the distinctive fusion of modernity and poetic power in the successor to the Shanghai scheme in the Griffin *oeuvre*, the winning entry in the Australian Federal Capital competition of 1911-1912.

Keywords: urban visions, cross cultural exchange, city planning, Shanghai

Introduction

An event in Yokohama in January 1906 – the accidental death of the Chinese trade commissioner to Japan, Huang Kaijia 黄开甲 (1860-1906)¹ – seems to have ended one of the most intriguing city planning ventures of the early modern era. Two years previously, as Imperial Vice Commissioner to the St Louis Exposition, Huang Kaijia was almost certainly the ‘delegate from the Chinese government’ who commissioned the design of a ‘new city at Shanghai’ from the American architect and landscape architect Walter Burley Griffin (1876-1937).

This paper reviews the testimony emanating from Griffin and his colleagues on which the claim for a Shanghai city plan from 1904-1906 is based; the modernising impulses in Shanghai at the time; and the broader context of ‘New China’ reforms initiated by the Qing Dynasty in the first decade of the twentieth century. Based on archival research, critical review of contemporary newspaper accounts and recent scholarship on the ‘tradition vs modernity’ debate in Chinese historiography, the paper seeks to address the question, what does the fragmentary evidence of the ‘Griffin Plan for Shanghai’ tell us about innovation and change in urban thinking before the Chinese revolution of 1911; the continuity of ideas across the revolutionary divide; and the distinctive fusion of modernity and poetic power in the successor to the Shanghai scheme, the Griffin Plan for Canberra.

The ‘Shanghai testimony’

When Griffin achieved fame as winner of the international competition for the Australian Federal Capital in 1912, a feature article in the *New York Times* reported that ‘his only other experience in planning a city’:

. . . was when he drew plans for the rebuilding of Shanghai, China, which, a few years ago, it was proposed to rebuild a few miles from its present site, with its narrow streets, swarming tenements, and insanitary areas. Mr. Griffin drew the plans for the new Shanghai in detail, but the scheme was abandoned.²



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To date, the plans have not been found – however, another article on Griffin’s success in the Canberra competition, published in *Engineering News* (New York), provides more details of the Shanghai commission:

Walter B. Griffin... also prepared a design for a new city at Shanghai, China, a few years ago, when it was proposed to establish a modern city on a new site, and to abandon the old city, which is largely an insanitary collection of native huts. The delegate from the Chinese government to the St. Louis Exhibition had plans prepared by Mr. Griffin, but owing to the death of the delegate on his return to China nothing was done toward carrying them out.³ tell us

The Australian writers – and Progressive Era activists – Miles Franklin (1879-1954) and Alice Henry (1857-1943), then resident in Chicago, interviewed Griffin in June 1912 and submitted an article to the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney which adds further details of the Shanghai project in relation to the ‘Federal Capital prize’:

It may be interesting to note that this is not the first foreign city designed by Mr Griffin. The Chinese Commissioner to the St Louis Exposition, authorised by his government to obtain a design for the rebuilding of Shanghai on a site somewhat removed from the present one, accepted the plans submitted by Mr Griffin. Owing, however, to the death of the Commissioner, and a change in the Government, this undertaking is still in abeyance.⁴

In 1933, correcting the draft of a thesis on his life and work by University of Sydney architecture student Nancy Price, Griffin amended and authorised the following statement, which given its provenance can be considered an autobiographical note:

In 1906, following the St Louis World Exposition, there came through the medium of the Imperial Delegation, a possibility for a development involving the replanning of the Chinese city of Shanghai. Designs were prepared by him, but the whole project came to naught through the untimely death of the interested delegate on his return to China.⁵

Griffin’s wife, the brilliant architect and delineator Marion Mahony Griffin (1871-1961) – co-author of the Griffin Plan for Canberra and his colleague in the office of Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1904-1906 years – provided recollections of the Shanghai project in relation to Griffin’s early work in her memoir of their life together, written in the late 1940s:

Shortly after graduation he laid down a town plan for a city to be built in China for a Chinese client who unfortunately died before the work could be initiated. The underlying principles were clearly established here – the laws of distribution and occupation. This was Griffin’s first plan of a whole Municipality.⁶

Another colleague from Wright’s office in the 1904-1906 period, Chicago architect Francis Barry Byrne (1883-1967), who took over the Griffins’ American practice when they left for Australia in 1914, provided a somewhat similar recollection in a conversation with historian Mark Peisch in 1953:

Byrne said that c.1910 there was a project to move the city of Shanghai to a new site. Griffin submitted plans for the project but no record of these exist.⁷

Peisch went on to describe the Shanghai project as ‘an obscure and intriguing episode in Griffin’s career as a planner.’⁸ To this day, no plans have been found.

Although the timing and tenor of the various accounts, their mix of consistencies and inconsistencies, and the lack of any documentary evidence in support of the Griffin claim, must raise doubts about the Shanghai project,⁹ circumstantial evidence does support the possibility that the claim is correct.

The ‘Chinese client’

The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St Louis, Missouri was the first occasion that China was officially represented at a World’s Fair. The Chinese Pavilion, an elaborately decorated courtyard complex in late Qing style, was prominently sited near the eastern entrance to the Fair grounds. The large Chinese delegation was led by Prince Pu Lun 溥倫 (1874-1927), nephew of the Emperor and considered at the time to be heir to the throne.¹⁰ The key figure behind the Chinese presence in St Louis, however, was the Imperial Vice Commissioner, Huang Kaijia, who as a young man had been educated in the United States. There can be little doubt that Huang Kaijia is the



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‘delegate from the Chinese government’ who is purported to have had Griffin prepare plans for a ‘modern city on a new site’ at Shanghai.

In 1904, Walter Burley Griffin was a key member of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Studio in Oak Park, Chicago with some measure of freedom to undertake independent commissions.¹¹ Descriptions of daily life in the Wright Studio, recorded in the letters of draftsman Charles E. White jr., capture the enthusiastic response of Wright and his colleagues to the St Louis Fair.¹² For Griffin, the Fair undoubtedly provided lessons in the art of city building. As an ensemble, the major pavilions were deliberately designed to outclass the scale and magnificence of the Chicago Fair of 1893; their arrangement on a radial plan was considered an innovation in terms of City Beautiful principles; and the streets, terraces and public parks of the urban scene were infused with the practical realities of the City Efficient: mass transit, electric lights, modern sanitation.¹³ However, the design of the Fair was by no means an unqualified success – the expansion of the program to fill a 1200-acre site, double the size of the Chicago Fair, created an overwhelming spectacle. The vast array of Beaux Arts buildings, set among colonnades, fountains, cascades and statuary, confused the classical ideal with bombast and excess. The smaller state and national pavilions, designed to attract attention, were generally considered ‘pomposities or curiosities.’¹⁴

The symbolic purpose of the Fair was to celebrate the centennial of the ‘Louisiana Purchase’ – the acquisition by the United States, of the French territories stretching from the Mississippi to the Rockies, negotiated by treaty during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. Territorial expansion and national identity, material progress and the ‘march of civilisation’ were thus the *sine qua non* of the event, promoted in direct and subliminal ways.¹⁵ In this context, the Chinese Pavilion was a curious presentation of deep culture and elaborate artifacts, contained within a single-storey courtyard building, which was claimed to be a replica of Prince Pu Lun’s summer residence in Beijing, ‘gorgeous in scarlet, gold, ebony and blue.’¹⁶ Set behind a symbolic *pailou* gateway, the pavilion, partially built by American workmen and partially by Chinese artisans, appears to have been a conflation of Chinese motifs, rather than a replica of a significant Qing dynasty building.¹⁷ In its combination of timber screens, inlays, carvings and lattice work with somewhat awkwardly resolved roof forms and massing, the pavilion evoked more the superficial exoticism of Chinoiserie than the tectonics and symbolism of traditional Chinese architecture. In effect, the exhibit expressed the uneasy relationship of the late Qing regime to the modern world: a deeply traditional society seeking engagement with the west on its own terms, at the same time wracked with internal tensions and inconsistencies.

The conservative East Coast journal, *American Architect & Building News* dismissed the Chinese pavilion with the comment, ‘China is still clinging to the past in her exhibit of a summer palace of a nobleman,’¹⁸ but to the progressive architects of Chicago, sympathetic to the spirit and forms of non-western architecture, it was undoubtedly fascinating, and almost certainly prompted the initial contact between Walter Burley Griffin and Huang Kaijia. The treasures in the Chinese Pavilion restricted access to individuals presenting a card, or small groups and it could have been in this context, that Griffin as a visitor to the Fair, met Huang Kaijia.¹⁹ There is another possibility – the American architect for the pavilion, Charles H. Deitering was a classmate of Marion Mahony at MIT in the 1890s,²⁰ it could have been through Deitering that Griffin had the opportunity to meet Huang Kaijia. How the contact led to the commission to design a ‘modern city’ for Shanghai, and whether the commission had any basis in reality, are not known. Huang Kaijia was a protégé of the leading moderniser in Shanghai, the industrialist Sheng Xuanhuai 盛宣懷 (1844-1916), a powerful force in the Qing Dynasty’s ‘self-strengthening’ (*zhiqiang*) movement in the nineteenth century. His many official posts included Director-General of the Imperial Railway Administration, where Huang Kaijia served as Secretary in the 1890s.²¹

As a boy of 12, Huang Kaijia had been selected to study in the United States as a member of the ‘Chinese Educational Mission’, an experiment initiated during the reign of Emperor Tongzhi 同治帝 (1856-1875), which sent annual contingents of thirty students to the United States for a period of fifteen years to gain a western technical education, then return to China as experts in the service of the Imperial Government.²² The experiment was cut short in 1881, when its promoters lost influence at the Qing court and the students, then numbering over a hundred, were recalled. Huang Kaijia, who attended middle school and high school in Hartford, Connecticut, had just completed his sophomore year at Yale. He returned to Shanghai. As he later recalled, his American experience cost him twenty years of struggle ‘to make a breach in the wall of Chinese conservatism’²³ but with many other classmates from the Chinese Educational Mission, he gained the patronage of Sheng Xuanhuai and involvement in the first telegraph and railway ventures in China. He subsequently entered the diplomatic service and was a member of the Chinese embassy to the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902; served as Vice Commissioner to the St Louis Fair in 1903-1905; and as a Trade Commissioner to the United States later in 1905.²⁴



Indeed, he made three trips to the United States in the period 1903-1905, June 1903 to January 1904 overseeing construction of the Chinese Pavilion at St Louis; April 1904 to January 1905, touring the United States with Prince Pu Lun until June 1904 and carrying out his official duties at St Louis until the New Year.²⁵ He subsequently returned in August 1905 as a Trade Commissioner concerned with the rights of Chinese merchants and students to enter the United States under controversial provisions of the US immigration laws, and a boycott of American goods by Shanghai merchants these had induced.²⁶ He returned to China in October 1905. The details of his death are recorded in the alumni archives at Yale:

After reaching China he suffered from nervous exhaustion and spent three months in a hospital in Peking, going thence by advice of his physician to a health resort in Japan for the winter months. His death was due to a distressing accident. On the morning of January 24 he entered a bath room where there was a charcoal stove with a kettle of hot water. Overcome by the charcoal fumes, he fell against the stove, overturning it and being badly burned from the shoulders to the knees by the water and coals. Though found immediately and given the best medical attendance, he was unable to stand the shock and died at the Yokohama General Hospital, after twenty hours of intense suffering.²⁷

This sequence of events supports the many statements emanating from Griffin and his colleagues that nothing was done towards carrying out the plan for Shanghai 'owing to the death of the delegate on his return to China.'

The dates of Huang Kaijia's sojourns in the US suggest that if the 'Shanghai testimony' is correct, Griffin embarked on his first venture in city planning sometime between April 1904 and October 1905. Griffin left Wright's office to establish his independent practice in the second week of January 1906,²⁸ it is possible he entertained hopes for the Shanghai project at that time²⁹, only to learn of Huang Kaijia's death within a month.³⁰

Modernising impulses in Shanghai in the period 1904-1906 were certainly consonant with preparation of a city plan. In 1905 the population of Shanghai had passed one million, with approximately half in the Chinese city and half in the foreign enclaves,³¹ the British-dominated International Settlement and the French Concession. The International Settlement had long been administered by its own civic entity, the Shanghai Municipal Council, established in 1854.³² In 1905 the Chinese city – dating from 1074³³ – was the first in China to achieve municipal self-rule with an alliance of local gentry and merchants granted authority by the Qing Dynasty to establish the Shanghai City Council.³⁴ This notable shift in governance may have some bearing on the commission Griffin received to prepare a plan for 'a modern city on a new site.' As Mark Elvin has commented, 'the Shanghai City Council was an impressive attempt by a still cohesive and self-confident traditional Chinese social order to adapt itself to modern Western ideals of democracy and of organizational and technological efficiency . . . the influence of the modern West was apparent in almost every aspect of the Council's work.'³⁵ The links between the modernizing impulse in Shanghai; the formation of the Shanghai City Council; the presence of a Shanghai-based, American-educated envoy at the St Louis Fair; the 'model city' ambitions of the exposition; an enthusiastic young American with 'model city' ideas; and a city plan for Shanghai may be tenuous, but they are certainly plausible.

Huang Kaijia was one of the 'earnest reformers' of the city.³⁶ As Secretary of the Imperial Railway Administration, he was involved in the first sustained railway venture, construction in 1898 of a line from the Zhabei district of Shanghai on the northern outskirts of the International Settlement twelve miles north to a deep-water port at Wusong on the Yangzi River (this replaced a line built by the British without permission, notoriously dismantled in 1877³⁷). There is a newspaper account of Huang Kaijia accompanying Sheng Xuanhuai and the Managing Director of the railway Zhu Baokui on an inspection of the line a day before its official opening.³⁸ Zhu Baokui 朱宝奎 (1862-1925) was another member of the Chinese Educational Mission who had studied in the United States, he subsequently served as Managing-Director of the Shanghai-Nanjing Railway in its planning phase, 1903-1905 with two other members of the Chinese Educational Mission (CEM) on its board, Liang Dunyan 梁敦彦 (1858-1924) and Tang Rongjun 唐荣俊 (the latter became General-Manager of Jardine Mathieson, the formidable British trading company). A fourth member of the CEM, Zhong Wenyao 钟文耀 (1861-1945) took over as Managing-Director of the Shanghai-Nanjing Railway on the opening of the first section to Nanxiang in November 1905 as it extended up the valley of the Yangzi. Liang Dunyan, Zhong Wenyao and Huang Kaijia had been hosted by the same family in Hartford, Connecticut and were classmates throughout their US education from middle school and high school in Hartford to Yale. In the 1903-1905 period, the CEM network extended into the centre of provincial power with Liang Dunyan on the staff of Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837-1909), Viceroy of Liangjiang Province at Nanjing, whose dictum – "Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application" – proclaimed in his 1898 reformist treatise *Exhortation to Study*, struck the keynote for the era. The



CEM network also included Liang Pixu 梁丕旭 (1864-1917) – Sir Chentung Liang Cheng – Chinese Ambassador to the United States, 1903-1907.³⁹ The strength and influence of this inter-connected group,⁴⁰ together with Huang Kaijia's connections to the Manchu Court at Beijing evidenced by his Imperial appointments, provide support to the proposition that Huang Kaijia was 'authorised by his government to obtain a design for the rebuilding of Shanghai on a site somewhat removed from the present one.'⁴¹

The Griffin Plan

The physical form of Griffin's Shanghai Plan is not known, but from the available descriptions, the following details of the proposal can be established. First, the project was a Chinese initiative, not a 'colonial' venture associated with the Foreign Settlements. Second, the proposal involved 'a modern city on a new site' located 'a few miles' from the traditional walled city. Third, the project was conceived as an alternative to the 'narrow streets, swarming tenements and insanitary areas' of the 'old city' – and, indeed, included the proposal to 'abandon the old city.' Fourth, Griffin 'drew the plans for the new Shanghai in detail.'⁴² Fifth, as Marion Griffin recalled, 'the underlying principles were clearly established here – the laws of distribution and occupation,'⁴³ in other words, the integration of transport and land use: the site for the new city was almost certainly linked to the new rail lines extending west to Nanjing or north to Wusong from North Station at Shanghai, most likely the latter, with a tramway connection from the West Gate of the Old City to North Station through the International Settlement, planned since the 1890s, under construction in 1904.⁴⁴

Although the detailed plans have been lost, the descriptions of Griffin's Shanghai scheme are infused with progressive notions of modernity and urban reform. In this, they are consistent with accounts of the emergence of a 'New China' in the first decade of the twentieth century – a period of change that followed reforms mandated by the Qing Court in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion.⁴⁵ The vision of a new Shanghai implied by the Griffin plan, suggests the desire to develop a stronger and more assertive Chinese city to challenge the power and influence of the Foreign Settlements. At the same time, the failure to pursue the idea, interpreted structurally, rather than as an outcome of contingency and chance, can be seen as an expression of the 'agonism' that Theodore Hutters has argued, lies at the centre of the modernising impulse in the last years of the Qing dynasty – a 'discourse of anxiety' in which receptivity to new ideas was met by 'a countervailing tendency to shut off alternatives even as they were being advanced . . . because most of the new ideas . . . either did in fact come or were taken as having come to China from the modern West.' The combination of dynamic change and a 'pervasive sense of impasse' was grounded in:

the fear that adapting too easily to alien ways would result in irreparable damage to the very set of institutions that reform was designed to save – that is, a Chinese culture whose continuity as a unified whole could be traced back thousands of years The period . . . is thus fraught with an anxiety growing out of a central paradox . . . a paradox virtually unique to East Asia in the modern world wherein a nation was obliged, under an indigenous government, to so extensively modify its culture to save it, that questions inevitably arose as to whether the resulting entity was that which was intended to be saved in the first place.⁴⁶

The long-accepted view that 'traditionalism' in turn-of-the-century China was replaced by nationalism, with all its emotive power and explosive content,⁴⁷ is challenged by Hutters in a critical study of Chinese literature and intellectual currents in the years 1895-1919. This study draws upon the work of Prasenjit Duara to define Chinese discourse across the revolutionary divide as a movement which claimed both 'descent and dissent from past cultural practices' – a movement whose inner tension was its defining characteristic.⁴⁸ The paradox of 'at once identifying with and resisting the past', which characterized late nineteenth and early twentieth century China, meant that 'the need to establish a new nation . . . made the need to cherish that nation's history and traditions all the more insistent, even as they simultaneously needed to be denied.'⁴⁹

The Griffin plan for Shanghai, predicated on abandoning the old city, and building a 'modern city on a new site' clearly denied Chinese history and traditions – whether it demonstrated any 'Chinese' tendencies cannot be conclusively established. The origins of the Griffin project in the heady atmosphere of the St Louis Fair, at the height of the City Beautiful movement – and at a time when Chinese traditions of city building were little known in the West⁵⁰ – suggest that the scheme was an exercise in American 'civic art'. At the same time, the creative fusion of exotic motifs in Griffin's architecture, strongly evident in his earliest civic projects and fully developed by the time of the Canberra plan,⁵¹ together with the subtle power of his landscape ideas,⁵² suggest that the scheme



could have demonstrated an imaginative engagement with 'Chinese' principles of site planning and architectural expression.⁵³

The Legacy

The tumult and dislocation which overwhelmed China in the years following the 1911 Revolution have long been represented as a break between the cultural world of the late Qing and early Republican periods. Recent scholarship, however, has searched for evidence of continuity in the Chinese experience,⁵⁴ and in the practical realm of city planning, the possibility that the Griffin Plan was not lost in 1905, but survived to inform planning proposals for Shanghai in the 1920s must be considered.

The Greater Shanghai Plan, initiated by the re-constituted 'Special Municipality' of Shanghai in 1927-1929, featured an impressive new town and civic centre, located on a new site at Jiangwan, north-east of the existing city, linked by rail and road connections to the deep-water port at Wusong. The tantalizing question is whether this move to establish 'a modern city on a new site' drew upon Griffin's ideas of 1905 in any way. The siting, scale and strategic significance of the 'Greater Shanghai Plan' demonstrate a remarkable grasp of city planning principles in terms of transportation and land use, civic presence and symbolic power.⁵⁵ The 'city beautiful' aspects of the scheme, organised around a cross-axial alignment of ceremonial spaces; the central significance of the 'civic centre'; the geometric array of urban districts, combining streets and blocks in grid and radial patterns; the inflection of the street pattern with respect to the subtle topographic relief and river systems of the deltaic landscape; the integration of parks, park systems and greenbelts; the separation of industrial and residential districts; the efficient alignment of railways and arterial roads, interconnecting the new and old city, the port and the larger metropolitan region – reflect ideas developed in many city plans of the era. The 1911 Griffin Plan for Canberra, however, was a 'new city' plan in which these ideas appeared with clear and compelling force. Did Griffin's Shanghai Plan of 1905 contain similar ideas? Despite the death of its advocate, Huang Kaijia in 1906 and the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911/1912, did this plan survive in the archives of the Shanghai municipal authorities to inform the city planning initiatives of the late 1920s?

Regardless of the fate of Griffin's Shanghai Plan, the origin of the commission at the St Louis Fair of 1904 indicates that the notion of a 'modern' city was at least considered during the last years of the Qing Dynasty, and represents a significant departure from the cosmological tradition of walled city formation, which had distinguished Chinese spatial strategies for millennia.⁵⁶ This approach to city building, with its basis in the legitimation of imperial power, had been manifest as recently as the 1880s with the establishment of the walled city of Taipei as the prefectural capital of Taiwan.⁵⁷ However, the 'modern' dimension of twentieth century city planning – rational land-use, efficient transportation, advanced municipal engineering and infrastructure, regularised land parcels and land tenure, unbounded possibilities for expansion – did not foreclose the possibility of a symbolic, 'cosmological' dimension to urban life, and the belief that a harmonious society has some correspondence with harmonious patterns of city space. Griffin's Canberra Plan is redolent with these associations.⁵⁸ The question raised by his earlier planning proposals for Shanghai is whether the challenge of designing a city in China contributed to Griffin's spatial symbolism, in which the physical location of functions and land uses transcend utilitarian concerns to yield a deep sense of 'rightness' and inner purpose, so that in the flux of everyday life, civic ideals are fused with concrete experience.⁵⁹ In Griffin's Canberra scheme, the rational distribution of city functions was combined with a set of design strategies – the parallel alignment of government buildings, the pagoda-like form of the crowning ceremonial structure, the mandala patterns of the various centres, the axial alignments on surrounding mountains, the balanced irregularity of 'naturalistic' landscape, the still presence of the central lake – to evoke the timeless qualities of an ancient capital.⁶⁰

In the absence of Griffin's detailed plans for a New Shanghai, the fusion of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in his 'New China' project can only be inferred from his other work, beginning with his adaptations of Japanese architecture around 1900,⁶¹ and culminating in 1911 with the imaginative architectural proposals for Canberra, developed in association with his wife, Marion Mahony Griffin. In the drawings submitted for the Australian Federal Capital competition, the temple-like ensemble of ceremonial courtyard buildings, arrayed in the Canberra landscape, demonstrate a fascinating synthesis of architectural traditions and new constructional systems at the scale of the modern city.⁶²

Conclusion



The funeral of Huang Kaijia was held ‘at the deceased’s residence’, Bluff no.184 in the Yamate District, Yokohama on 14 February 1906, his memorial tablet inscribed with the words ‘revered by his sovereign as a loyal servant.’⁶³ In Shanghai, the *North China Herald* eulogised ‘a man of sterling integrity and probity,’ noting with regret that ‘his brilliant talents, from which so much was hoped to push on the progress and enlightenment of his country . . . have, alas! been lost China.’ Western notions of progress and enlightenment nevertheless stood in contrast to deep Chinese traditions, memorably captured in descriptions of Huang Kaijia’s position in the hierarchy of the Qing Dynasty: ‘Metropolitan Officer of the 4th grade, with the brevet 2nd rank red button and peacock’s feather.’⁶⁴ Whether this servant of the emperor had the rank and network connections to push forward plans for ‘a new city at Shanghai’ will never be known, certainly with his death, no more than the barest traces of the scheme managed to survive.

Whether real or ideal, the Griffin Plan for Shanghai of 1904-1906 stands as the first attempt to design a ‘modern city’ for China. The project remains a mystery in its physical details, but as an idea it resonates with creative tension between modern and traditional approaches to city building, and thereby occupies an imaginative space in twentieth century urbanism. This is the imaginative space defined by Prasenjit Duara, which at once claims ‘descent and dissent from past cultural practices’ – an historical condition whose inner tension is its defining characteristic.⁶⁵ For an object lesson in this approach, we need look no further than the mysterious fusion of rationality and poetic power in the successor to the Shanghai scheme, the Griffin Plan for Canberra \ as presented in the original competition drawings of 1911: ink-and-watercolour on linen, emblazoned with gold, culminating in the magnificent perspective from the heights of Mount Ainslie drawn by Marion Mahony across three horizontal panels – designed to unfold like a Chinese screen.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Endnotes

¹ In all historical accounts, Huang Kaijia was known by versions of his Cantonese name, Wong Kai Kah, or Wong Kai-kah; Pinyin romanization for Chinese names is adopted in this paper.

² ‘American designs splendid new Capital for Australia,’ *New York Times*, 2 June 1912, 39.

³ *Engineering News*, 4 July 1912, 23-24; see also Wernecke, ‘Der Wettbewerb um einem Bebauungsplan für die Bundeshauptstadt von Australien,’ 75 based on the above sources.

⁴ Henry & Franklin, ‘Walter Burley Griffin,’ 3; Franklin, 1912 Pocket Diary, entries for 4, 5, 6 & 7 June. Franklin Papers, MS 364/2, CY 2153, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

⁵ Price, Walter Burley Griffin, p.8.

⁶ Griffin, *The Magic of America*, IV: 16, 59, 290.

⁷ Peisch, ‘Conversation with Barry Byrne, (typescript), 3. Peisch Papers, MS 1979.009.0001, MB 1, Folder 21. Avery Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁸ Peisch, *Chicago School*, 95.

⁹ Harrison, *Walter Burley Griffin, Landscape Architect*, 21; Kaiser, ‘The China connection – Walter Burley Griffin and Shanghai’; Griffin materials in Australian and US public collections do not include the Shanghai plans; and to date, reference to the project has not been found in the reports from Prince Pu Lun and Huang Kaijia in the Ministry of External Affairs Collection, Institute of Modern History Archives, Academia Sinica, Taipei (I am indebted to Ju Xizhe for searches of the on-line materials from this collection).

¹⁰ Fairbank & others, *The I.G. in Peking*, p.1401, n.3; *St Louis Republic*, 8 May 1904, 25.

¹¹ Griffin’s independent commissions undertaken while working for Wright included the Campus Plan for the Eastern Illinois State Normal School, Charleston, Illinois (1901) and the William H Emery House, Elmhurst, Illinois, (1903) – Peisch, *Chicago School*, 45-46, 96.

¹² Smith, ‘Letters, 1903-1906, by Charles E. White,’ 105, 107.

¹³ Schuyler, ‘The Architecture of the St Louis Fair,’ 385-395; Stevens, ‘General Plan of the Exposition,’ 1129-1131.



- ¹⁴ Pomeroy, 'The Louisiana Purchase Exposition: a comparison and criticism,' 1164.
- ¹⁵ Christ, 'The Sole Guardians of the Art Inheritance of Asia,' 675-709.
- ¹⁶ Lowenstein, *Official Guide to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition*, 127.
- ¹⁷ Planning and dispatch of the Chinese exhibit were overseen by Sir Robert Hart (1835-1911), who served the Qing Dynasty as Inspector-General of the Imperial Maritime Custom Service for almost sixty years. Plans for the Chinese Pavilion were prepared in Shanghai by British architects Atkinson & Dallas, but proved inadequate. The project was re-documented in St Louis by architect Charles H. Deitering (1870-1938) based on models sent from China – Fairbank & others, *The I.G. in Peking*, 1401; *World's Fair Bulletin*, August 1903, 3; *St Louis Republic*, 17 October 1903, 2; 3 November 1903, 4; *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 5 July 1938, 17 – see also, Dirlik, 'Architectures of global modernity,' 40-42.
- ¹⁸ 'Impressions of the St Louis Fair,' *American Architect & Building News* 86, no.1501, 1 October 1904, 3.
- ¹⁹ 'Must have a card to visit Chinese Pavilion at Fair,' *St Louis Post Dispatch*, 17 January 1904, 16; Barnard, 'Wonderful Chinese Palace at the Fair,' 2 July 1904, 5.
- ²⁰ Anon, 'Register of Former Students,' MIT, 130, 194, 643.
- ²¹ Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization*, 58-96; *North China Herald*, 8 August 1898, 257-258
- ²² LaFargue, *China's First Hundred*, 13.
- ²³ *Hartford Courant*, 8 February 1908, 8.
- ²⁴ LaFargue, *China's First Hundred*, 90-91.
- ²⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1903, 4; *San Francisco Call*, 16 January 1904, 14; 18 April 1904, 1-2; 26 January 1905, 16; for Prince Pu Lun's departure, see *St Louis Republic*, 12 June 1904, 52; *New York Times*, 16 June 1904, 15.
- ²⁶ *San Francisco Call*, 16 August 1905, 5; 9 October 1905, 2; Reid, 'Taft's telegram to Root, July 1905,' 70; see also Wong Kai Kah, 'A menace to America's oriental trade,' 404-414.
- ²⁷ Johnston & Sherman, *Yale 1883: the book of the class*, 246-247.
- ²⁸ Letter, Frank Lloyd Wright to Walter Burley Griffin, 13 January 1906, Griffin Family Collection; First National Bank of Dwight Collection, MS 1969.1, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago (Griffin's last letter in project sequence dated 5 January 1906); Smith, 'Letters, 1903-1906, by Charles E. White,' 110.
- ²⁹ This may account for Griffin recollecting in 1933 that the date of the project was 1906 – Price, Walter Burley Griffin, p.8.
- ³⁰ 'Wong Kai Kah dies in Japan,' *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 6 February 1906, 3.
- ³¹ Leung, *The Shanghai Taotai*, 195.
- ³² Li Yingchun, Planning the Shanghai international settlement, 22-27.
- ³³ Johnson, *From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858*, 70.
- ³⁴ 'A Chinese municipal council,' *North China Daily News*, 17 October 1905, 5.
- ³⁵ Elvin, 'The administration of Shanghai, 1905-1914,' 260-61.
- ³⁶ 'Funeral of Wong Kai Kah,' *Hartford Courant*, 19 March 1906, 2.
- ³⁷ Pong, 'Confucian patriotism and destruction of the Woosung Railway,' 647-676; ironically Sheng Xuanhuai organised the destruction.
- ³⁸ 'The Woosung Railway,' *North China Herald*, 8 August 1898, 257-258.
- ³⁹ *North China Herald*, 12 March 1903, 489; *The Times* (London), 1 September 1905, 9; *Page's Weekly*, 7, no.63, 1042; *Hartford Courant*, 6 August 1929, 6; CEM Biographical Profiles, *Chinese Educational Mission: Connections, 1871-1881*, <http://www.cemconnections.org/>
- ⁴⁰ 'An Interesting Reunion,' *North China Herald*, 10 December 1902, 1232.
- ⁴¹ Henry & Franklin, 'Walter Burley Griffin,' 3.
- ⁴² *New York Times*, 2 June 1912, 39; *Engineering News*, 4 July 1912, 23-24.
- ⁴³ Griffin, *The Magic of America*, IV: 16.
- ⁴⁴ Shanghai Municipal Council, *Annual Report 1898, 277; Annual Report 2003*, p.200.
- ⁴⁵ Wright, 'Introduction: the rising tide of change,' 1-3; Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912*.
- ⁴⁶ Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, 2, 7-8.
- ⁴⁷ Wright, 'Introduction: the rising tide of change,' 3-4; Levenson, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*, 108.
- ⁴⁸ Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, 9; Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 66-67
- ⁴⁹ Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, 9, 10.
- ⁵⁰ Boerschmann, 'Chinese architecture and its relation to Chinese culture,' was the first significant English-language account of Chinese city formation. Although it carries dates of 1911 and 1912, it was not released until January 1913, see: *Washington Herald*, 11 January 2013, 8. Contrary to Proudfoot, *Secret Plan of Canberra*, 62-63 and Kögel, *Grand Documentation*, 33 this paper could not have influenced the Griffins' entry in the Australian Federal Capital competition, which was prepared September-December 1911.
- ⁵¹ For example, the Clark Memorial Fountain, Grinnell, Iowa, 1910; the project for a State Fair Exhibition Building for the Universal Portland Cement Company, 1911; and the architectural elements of the Griffin entry in the Australian Federal Capital Competition, 1911-1912 – Kruty, *Walter Burley Griffin: architectural models of projects and demolished buildings*, 22-26; Vernon, *A Vision Splendid*.
- ⁵² Griffin's knowledge of *feng shui* has been inferred from 'water' and 'mountain' relationships in the Canberra Plan, most provocatively in Proudfoot, *Secret Plan of Canberra*, 19-21, 56-65 – but to date, no documentary evidence has been found to support this assertion.
- ⁵³ A further dimension to Griffin's 'Chinese' interests is provided by his later involvement with leading members of the Chinese community in Melbourne, Australia which resulted in a number of significant commissions, most notably the Chinese Nationalist Club in Little Bourke Street (1921); the Cheong and Moon Houses, Castlecrag, NSW (1921-1922); and the Blue Hills garden suburb, East Croydon, Victoria (1921). The architectural projects, in particular, indicate Griffin's attempt to suggest 'difference' through the deployment of imaginative geometric elements, rather than direct borrowing of Chinese motifs, Turnbull & Navaretti. *The Griffins in Australia and India*, 176-177, 182-183, 188.
- ⁵⁴ Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, 11, 178; Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, 79-96.
- ⁵⁵ MacPherson, 'Designing China's urban future,' 39-62; Balfour & Zheng, *Shanghai*, 75-77; Zhang Bing, 'The evolution of strategic planning in Shanghai, 1927-1949,' 12-16; Chan & Zhang, *Shanghai Jindai Jianzhu Shigao*, 14-18.
- ⁵⁶ Wright, 'The cosmology of the Chinese city,' 33-73.
- ⁵⁷ Allen, 'Reading Taipei: cultural traces in a cityscape,' 1-3.
- ⁵⁸ Weirick, 'The Griffins and modernism,' 8-10; Zhang, 'Canberra,' 54-61.
- ⁵⁹ Weirick, 'Spirituality and symbolism in the work of the Griffins,' 68.
- ⁶⁰ Muller, *The Esoteric Nature of Griffin's Design for Canberra*.
- ⁶¹ Harrison, *Walter Burley Griffin, Landscape Architect*, p.18.
- ⁶² Weirick, 'Spirituality and symbolism in the work of the Griffins,' 71.
- ⁶³ *Hartford Courant*, 19 March 1906, 2.
- ⁶⁴ 'A loss to his country,' *North China Herald*, 30 January 1906, 227.
- ⁶⁵ Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 66-67, 81; Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, 9.



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