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## GAMES OF HISTORY AND POLITICS – ARCHITECTURE OF GREAT CHINESE CITIES: SHANGHAI

### IGRASZKI HISTORII I POLITYKI – ARCHITEKTURA WIELKICH MIAST CHIN: SZANGHAJ

#### Summary

Since the beginning of the 20th century development of great Chinese cities has been influenced by foreign patterns. Houses of different types have been built among the traditional buildings. The areas of Shanghai “concessions” were built in a specific way. After the war Soviet influences were introduced. Nowadays international corporations outdo one another in the height and originality of their skyscrapers.

*Keywords: city centre, concessions, vernacular architecture, communication, scale, form, technique, construction*

#### Streszczenie

Od początku XX w. rozwój wielkich chińskich miast odbywał się pod coraz większym wpływem europejskich i amerykańskich wzorców. Wśród rodzimej tkanki miasta pojawiały się kamienice, apartamentowce, rezydencje. W Szanghaju, w szczególny sposób zabudowano tereny eksterytorialnych europejskich „koncesji”. Po wojnie wpływ wywarły radzieckie koncepcje urbanistyczne i architektoniczne. Obecnie międzynarodowe korporacje prowadzą swoisty konkurs wysokości i oryginalności form swych nowych siedzib.

*Słowa kluczowe: centrum miasta, koncesje, architektura rodzima, komunikacja, skala, forma, technika, konstrukcja*

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last 150 years Chinese-Western relations have seen both ups and downs. Until the outbreak of war with Japan in 1937 Shanghai – called “Paris of the East” – had been developed in line with European and American traditions. In the 1920s and 1930s political decisions contributed to the renaissance of traditional Chinese architecture. After the war culturally alien ideas and technologies were imported from the Soviet Union. After a decade of economic collapse during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and opening to the West since the end of the 20th century the city has again become a place with avant-garde architecture and urban development.

The aim of the paper is to show the changes that have taken place in Shanghai’s architecture against the background of political and social events at the end of the 19th century, the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

## 2. Shanghai during the time the Empire of China

The beginning of the 19th century was marked by contemporary ties being instituted between China and European culture, when contacts between the Middle Kingdom and Europe as well as America began to flourish thanks to sea trade.

In the beginning, Shanghai was not powerful, but as early as 751 AD it was an important centre and its development was driven by river and sea trade. The first plan of Shanghai dates from the 17th century and shows a city surrounded by circular fortifications and a moat with a free internal street layout following streams flows through them<sup>1</sup>. The fortifications were built around 1553 and followed the contour of even earlier defences. At that time the city was also a weaving and a craft centre as well as a significant administrative centre [8, p. 23].

The following centuries saw the development of Shanghai in the orbit of subsequent Chinese states. However, it was not a major port that was able to maintain contacts with the West. This role was played by Guangzhou (Canton) [6, p. 6–7]. Shanghai had specific urban development which was different from the system of Beijing *hutongs* [1, p. 9–21], which was further developed and consolidated by subsequent events. It was not until 1843, the year in which the Nankin Treaty was signed, that the port became an international trade centre and the “concessions”, where Europeans lived, were delimited in the vicinity of the old town<sup>2</sup>.

## 3. Shanghai in the international arena for the first time

In 1845, the Qing dynasty and *Queen Victoria’s* government signed the document titled *Land Regulations*, according to which Great Britain was granted a “concession” area of 55.4 ha south of what is now the waterfront area of Bund. This had an influence on the further development of the city, particularly its diversity of architecture with European

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<sup>1</sup> Shanghai Old City Wall and Dajing Ge Pavilion Museum – maps.

<sup>2</sup> Nanjing Treaty (1842) between Great Britain and Emperor of China assigned four ports open for foreign trade, Shanghai among them. Actually the Treaty marked the beginning of the colonization of China.

origin. It was the first estate for foreigners that was afforded extraterritorial rights in China. In 1848, an American settlement was established which soon came to be called the “Shanghai International Settlement” together with the British one. In 1899, the area was enlarged to 2234.7 ha. The French settlement was established in 1849 in an area with the size of as many as 743.7 ha in 1914<sup>3</sup>. German houses were built the latest in 1936.

South of the Yangtze River traditional urban development could be found in the form of *lilong* type streets. The name is derived from the social concept of settlement: “five households make a neighbourhood (*lin*), and five *lins* make a community (*li*)”, whereas *long* means “a small street”. Until 1876, there were as many as 105 settlement units called *li* [9, p. 75]. Initially, the settlement houses in that area were low and wooden [5, p. 1–27]. After social unrest in the first decades of the 20th century thousands of Chinese land owners sought shelter in the city in the concession area. The necessity to intensify the development contributed to the terraced houses common in English cities being adapted to the tradition of the Shanghai region. Houses built in this period are referred to as *shikumens*<sup>4</sup>. Over the decades, because of the diversified needs of dwellers and the rising prices of building plots, five types of *shikumens* came to be developed characterised by a high degree of functional diversity [14]. There were also different development styles: English and Dutch red-brick houses (Ill. 1), plastered, with balusters of terraces in French *lilongs* (Ill. 2) and a modernist, Bauhausian German complex [13, p. 368]. (Ill.3)

Until 1941, a mosaic of architectural solutions was created that synthesised the stylistics of the European architecture of the first half of the 20th century, whereas functional solutions of houses corresponded to Chinese tradition adapted to the needs of European communities. The urban development of concession areas was haphazard, created in a hurry and resulted from the layout of watercourses and a network of historical roads.

Apart from housing development a business district was created along the waterfront that was home to monumental buildings of various architectural styles in which banks, trade companies, clubs and hotels were found. Erected by European and American architects, they contributed to the city architecture being influenced by foreign styles [13, p. 310–317]. (Ill. 4. 5.) Subsequently even more magnificent residences were built<sup>5</sup> and state-of-the-art materials were used, often brought from Europe, e.g. cement for reinforced concrete structures of buildings [2, p. 85–86]. In some cases architects had no financial limits imposed, thanks to which the 19th century lavishness of façades and interiors remains astonishing to this day [10, p. 34].

In 1948, the concessions were terminated and their inhabitants left the People’s Republic of China.

#### 4. Return to the past

After 1912, on the ruins of the Empire of China, the Republic of China was established run by nationalists. This meant that in the 1930s apart from developing concession and

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<sup>3</sup> Data on development of the concessions from: Foreign Settlement in Shanghai, maps and areas data between 1855 and 1929, from: Shanghai Urban Exhibition Centre.

<sup>4</sup> Originally “shikumen” means “stone gate”, as houses’ entrances were built in such a way.

<sup>5</sup> Shanghai Urban Exhibition Centre, detailed photography and cadastral documentation of the changes within quayside.



- III. 1. Britttish Concession, street from 1924
- III. 2. French Concession, housing from 1903
- III. 3. German settlement from 1936
- III. 4. Bund, Glen Line Steamship Company Building, Palmer & Turner, 1921
- III. 5. Bund, Bank of Communication, C.H. Gonda, 1908
- III. 6. Shanghai Museum, Dong Dayou, 1935
- III. 7. Shanghai Library, Dong Dayou, 1935
- III. 8. Shanghai Exhibition Centre, Anderlev, Jislova, 1955
- III. 9. Skyline of Pudong District

waterfront areas architecture was created in the national form inspired by the Kuomintang Party in power. In 1927, a plan of Greater Shanghai was prepared covering 6538 km<sup>2</sup>.

On the edges of the city there are fragments of the interesting urban planning scheme and the administrative and cultural centre that were started. The architect Dong Dajou, educated in the USA, created a monumental complex designed in the shape of a cross. This was supposed to serve as a counterbalance to the role played by the concessions in the city [10, p. 267]. Public buildings, including administration buildings, were supposed to be constructed close to the main square that constituted the heart of the district. Up to now the following buildings have been preserved: a museum, the seat of government, and a library – all maintained in the new “national” Chinese style. (Ill. 6., 7.) The main housing estate streets led radially from the centre, which made it possible for the residential district to develop and link to the existing road network [10, p. 266]. The concept was soon abandoned due to the historical events that followed.

After World War 2 in the new political system ties with the West were severed. Another city plan was developed after 1946 under Communist rule. Shanghai was to serve as one of China’s largest industrial centres and within 50 years it was to have a population of 15 million (in 2013 it had 23.9 million inhabitants [15]). The 1927 plan was abandoned but the development concept which consisted in creating satellite towns was continued and a plan for developing the metropolitan area of Shanghai was prepared [7, p. 39]. In Shanghai only one monument building was created that represented socialist realist architecture: (Ill. 8) the Shanghai Exhibition Centre – Sino-Soviet Friendship Mansion built in 1955 and decorated in an eclectic Chino-Russian way [12, p. 26–49].

Another political change in the form of the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s stopped the city from developing for 10 years and caused a considerable influx of people.

## **5. Shanghai in the international arena for the second time**

The opening up policy conducted since the 1970s by the Chinese government and its attempt to adopt a “third road” policy consisting in combining central planning and private entrepreneurship [3] contributed to another economic and construction boom visible since the 1990s. This was facilitated by the economic slowdown in Europe and America and the search for new market and production outlets.

The changes that have taken place to Shanghai’s streets and skyline have become part of the global trends of architectural and urban solutions. The “Urban Master Plan for the Years 1986–1999” provided for integral satellite towns being created that combined all the functions and specialised production that determined urban development [4]. At that time the following were constructed in the city: the main train station, the first underground lines, two new bridges (crossing the Huangpu), a ring road and exit roads from flyovers and over 130 residential districts. The Hongqiao airport was also modernised. The architecture bureaux that have been designing for Shanghai since the 90s include all the great names: Foster+Partners, gmp von Gerkan, Goettsch Partners, Heatherwick Studios, Knippers Helbig Advanced Engineering, Kohn Pederson Fox Associates (KPF), Michael Graves, Marg and Partners, Marshall Strabala Architect, Miralles Tagliabue Architects (EMBT), MVRDV, Nikken Sekkei, Paul Andreu Architects, Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Richard Rogers, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), Slade Architecture, and Zaha Hadid Architects [16]. In

the Pudong district in the former industrial east river bank a financial centre has been created since 1990s with the tallest and most interesting world skyscrapers: Shanghai Tower, 632 m in 2015; Shanghai World Financial Center, 492 m in 2008 and Jin Mao Tower, 421 m in 1999 and others as well as the new Pudong airport. (Ill.9).

The turning point in the way the city was perceived and developed was EXPO 2010, organised by the city of Shanghai. It led to investments in the centre, expansion of the underground, building a system of flyovers and creating a new district the part of which were EXPO-related investments.

One of the main guidelines of the current General Plan of Shanghai for the years 1999–2020 is to reclaim post-industrial areas in the city centre and to create green areas along numerous watercourses and the Huangpu River [17].

## 6. Recapitulation

For the last 150 years Shanghai's spatial development has been dependent on the varying political configurations at home and abroad; it has been shaped by wars, political alliances and ideology. China has established mutually significant ties with the West twice: in the 1840s and in the 1980s. Twice, it has severed the ties with the world for political reasons. In the 1920s the country created its own code of national architecture and adopted imported design styles in the post-war period. All these changes have left their mark on the contemporary space of Shanghai.

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