How does one begin to decipher any urban landscape whose picture is constantly changing? Shanghai, “the most rapidly globalizing city in the world,” is a case in point. Four thousand years ago its location was submerged in the sea. Once evolved into dry land, the location became the site of a small fishing village. From that beginning there arose during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) a large walled urban-rural nexus at the center of a regional cotton market. Pivotally located on both the northern and southern overseas trade routes, well situated for inland trade up the Yangzi River (Yangtze or Chang Jiang), and in close proximity to the Grand Canal leading to Beijing, by the early nineteenth century Shanghai was one of the twenty largest cities in China and had grown to become one of the world’s leading ports, with shipping rivaling or surpassing that of contemporary London. At this point the city’s course as part of Chinese history converged with the strands of world history. At the conclusion of its first collision with Western powers (the First Opium War, 1839–42), China conceded Shanghai as a treaty port, a site the British coveted for its already developed harbor and its key location for both overseas and inland trade. North, outside the encircling walls of the old Chinese City, the territory was divided into foreign concessions in which citizens of nations with “most favored nation status” were exempt from Chinese legal jurisdiction (that is, they enjoyed “extraterritoriality”). At first, the leased concession areas were restricted chiefly to foreign nationals, but the lure of huge profits from leasing and selling commercial housing units to large numbers of native migrants and refugees proved irresistible, particularly during the period of the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64). Though such leasings and sales were still prohibited, Chinese residency and property ownership in the foreign settlements came to be accepted de facto. The ensuing lilong (literally, “lanes and alleys”) neighborhood housing pattern—rectangular city blocks in which commercially developed row units were arranged side by side along an interior network of main lanes and flanking rows of perpendicular alleyways—has been characterized as a transitional urban form between the traditional and modern.

The problem in comprehending the architectural and urban history of Shanghai, or any other city, lies in grasping the totality of an urban space in which architecture occupies a continuum that spans place, time, and manifold cultures. "Architecture" is a broader phenomenon, comprising a set of material and immaterial connections, uniting aesthetic concepts, social relationships, traditions and beliefs, and standards of taste, exoticism, and decorum. So even if it were possible to reconstruct the physical layout of every structure in a city at a particular slice in time, it would still be empty. We would be missing the
people along with their relationships with other people, things, and events in the city, nation, and world around them. These are the encounters and experiences that fill the emptiness with use and meaning and, together with the physical framework, constitute urban architecture. Yet it is never possible to know completely the innumerable relationships and interactions that make up a city’s architectural fabric or its continuous history, nor can anyone discern the countless ways a city is experienced and the perspectives from which it is seen. Any study of cities, metropolitan regions, and urban-suburban landscapes is necessarily incomplete. It can only present a selected picture of a particular place or situation. How one selects the elements of that picture is informed by one’s point of view, as well as influenced by one’s own cultural or social context, by the sources available, and by prior narratives. Every new study adds to the multiplicity of possible narratives and pictures, resembling the shifting image inside a kaleidoscope. Often the most significant architectural changes and interactions occur and are encountered at the intersections of different peoples, places, ideas, things, and times. Bearing this in mind, I explore in this article whether it is possible to conceive of an urban landscape as a kaleidoscopic mosaic of such encounters.

Shanghai, in its historiography and representation in architecture, art, and literature, has been the site of innumerable encounters. To examine such moments of interaction and change requires moving beyond considering Shanghai’s architectural and urban history as documented through standard narratives or chronologies of its enduring monuments and historical events. It will also be important to reconsider differing concepts of what is historically permanent. Is permanence to be found solely in material durability, or can monuments endure through the notion of imperishable words and memories? And what happens when cultures with dissimilar ideas of what determines architectural durability collide? It is important to recognize that encounters between different cultures, ideas, peoples, places, and times provoke multiple and often contradictory responses and interpretations. Such divergent responses to encounters proliferated after the establishment of a semicolonial state of affairs following the concession of Shanghai as a treaty port in the mid-nineteenth century. Later efforts to reclaim the city as Chinese revolved around the ongoing encounter with, and control of, water, which helped define and redefine Shanghai in the cultural imagination. In the twentieth century, this fundamental encounter with water, along with collisions between different cultural thought worlds, generated acculturative tensions that resulted in modes of adaptive, imitative, or reactive change. Acculturation resulting from contact between differing cultures produced dialectical tensions or dilemmas that often redefined each culture’s past, present, and future.

The early twentieth century saw the rise of a cosmopolitan Shanghai with the construction of neoclassical office and hotel buildings along the famed Bund on the east bank of the Huangpu River (Figure 1), including many that were designed by the architectural firm of Palmer and Turner;

Figure 1 The Bund, Shanghai, after 1937 (courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute)
Art Deco–inspired structures, such as the Park Hotel, the tallest building in the city from 1934 to the 1980s, which was designed by the Hungarian émigré architect László Hudek (1893–1958); parks for recreation, exercise, and military drills; and entertainment facilities ranging from dance halls and nightclubs to theaters and stadiums for racing horses and dogs. Yet behind the glamour there was a different world of gambling, gangs, brothels, and corruption. It was at this time that Shanghai gained its several reputations as the “Paris of the East,” the “Whore of the Orient,” and the “Demon City.”

Subsequent factory building in the Japanese concession spurred urban industrialization, but the city’s fortunes collapsed under Japan’s military occupation, from 1937 to the end of World War II in 1945. Afterward, foreign presence and commerce gradually withdrew as civil war engulfed China and Communist dominion loomed.

The seeds of revolution had been sown with the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai in 1921, and after the Communist victory in 1949 contact with the outside world was largely severed for many decades. In a way, China’s history was forcibly separated from world history after the takeover, and during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) the Communist leadership even attempted to cut China off from much of its own history. Under Communist rule, industrial production and collective ownership became the priorities, and the government redirected the significant revenues and resources that were still being generated in Shanghai and other cities to other sectors of the country. Because of increased demand for housing and limited funding for new urban development, many of the city’s residential quarters, lilong neighborhoods, and foreign-style structures along the Bund were left in place. Buildings were repurposed, and housing shortages were addressed, in large part, through work-unit (danwei) allocation of available units and by densification. Economic reforms initiated in 1978 led to privatization and commodification of the building stock, creating a booming real estate market. In 1992 Deng Xiaoping reenvisioned Shanghai as the “Head of the Dragon,” leading the rest of the country to prosperity. New urban-rural land use plans were devised, including in 2006 the 1-9-6-6 Model that postulated Shanghai as the Central City surrounded by nine new satellite cities functioning as administrative centers, sixty new towns, and six hundred central villages. With Shanghai having the highest urbanization rate in China, the outlying settlements were intended to decrease density in the core urban area while providing revenue to the urban center through the government’s conversion of formerly “non-priced land to create a lucrative land-lease market.”

Figure 2. West of the Huangpu River, the Bund, Shanghai, 2012 (author’s photo)
With the construction of the new Lujiazui financial district in Pudong (literally “east of the Huangpu River”), opposite the Bund, new symbols of Shanghai’s ascendancy as the “head of the dragon” rose skyward (Figures 2, 3). Among these were the Oriental Pearl Tower (1994) by the Shanghai Modern Architectural Design Company; skyscrapers vying for the title of China’s tallest building, including the Jin Mao Tower (1999) chiefly designed by the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; the Shanghai World Center (2008) by Kohn, Pederson, and Fox, with its headquarters in New York City; and, currently under construction, the Shanghai Tower by Gensler in San Francisco. As viewed from the Bund, these tall structures have created a new and iconic skyline that has become the image of Shanghai and China around the world. It is no surprise that they also provoke questions about modernity and cultural identity in present-day China. Do these towers indicate China’s achievement of modernity? Designed primarily by foreign “starchitects,” are the skyscrapers really Chinese, or do they represent China’s eager participation in a powerful globalizing trend? These are questions I will return to later. Less spectacular than the new skyline but equally impressive has been the construction of thirteen subway lines since 1995 (with another nine planned); high-speed rail; seawalls, floodgates, and reservoirs; a new international airport; and ring roads, bridges, and tunnels connecting the ever-growing megalopolis.

The 1986 Master Plan for Shanghai called for the return of the city to economic and cultural prominence as an international metropolis by 2020. A decade before this deadline, on the heels of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Shanghai Expo 2010 showcased the dragon’s achievements not only to the world, but to overwhelming numbers of domestic visitors (Figure 4): 94.2 percent of the estimated 73 million Expo visitors were native Chinese. Therefore it can be argued that Expo 2010 not only left a legacy of local development and the physical transformation of Shanghai, but also showcased China’s arrival on the global stage to a native audience. In many ways the struggle to confirm Shanghai as the “head of the dragon” in the minds of both global and domestic audiences parallels the struggle of contemporary Chinese art to establish its place in the international arena. Some artists residing inside China now produce for the outside international market. Some who had chosen to live and work outside China are now returning to influence the art scene inside China. Whether “inside out” or “outside in,” how one encounters and perceives what is culturally Chinese or foreign, what is traditional or modern, what is regional or global, depends on where one stands in the cultural landscape.
increasing interchange among world cultures, art and architecture are judged differently, depending on the cultural perspective of the viewer. The sociologist Xuefei Ren has observed that architecture and buildings seen in a world, or transnational, context are “subject to multiple—and often contradictory—interpretations and are invested with different meanings by both local and translocal actors. These competing interpretations form a critical element of transnational architectural production.”

(Im)perishable Monuments

Above I have offered the briefest of reviews of Shanghai’s long and ever-changing physical and visual history. How then to assess an urban space whose only constant appears to be change? One rather straightforward approach to reconstructing a city’s history entails a step-by-step analysis of the development of its architecture, a task infinitely more challenging for a city than for a single building, though in many ways it gives rise to a similar set of problems. If we take an entire city as our subject, and attempt to reconstruct its history by identifying a series of durable monuments as representative markers of its urban and social space over time, two important questions come to mind. First, how are the particular monuments to be selected? In other words, what criteria or points of view are to be used to determine which monuments are “representative” and hence will be the focus of the narrative, and what alternatives will be omitted from consideration? Second, what defines a durable architectural monument? Construction from lasting materials? Physical longevity is not always and everywhere the definition of durability. Architecture’s connection to memory and the word (wen) is a conception found in many cultures, but rarely is it so heavily emphasized as in traditional Chinese attitudes toward the past, which held that the imperishability (buxiu) of words took precedence over physical durability. As long as societal or even individual memory endures, an edifice’s name and the poems and inscriptions associated with it can outlast its built reality. For example, in the Ming dynasty, Liu Shilong (act. early seventeenth century), who styled himself the Snow-Eating Recluse (Canxue jushi), wrote the “Record of the Garden That Is Not There” (Wuyouyuan ji), in which he observed that nothing remained of famous gardens of the past except the words written about them. In building his own garden, therefore, Liu decided: “On its construction I neither need waste gold nor expend effort. … To build in reality is to be limited by reality itself; while a construction conceived only in the imagination suffers no constraint. … My garden relies not on form but on thought. It can be harmed neither by wind nor rain, flood nor fire. Even if my descendants are wastrels, they will not be able to give away so much as a single plant or a tree.” This garden of the imagination survives purely in words.

Prospect Garden (Daguanyuan), which appears in the eighteenth-century novel Dream of the Red Chamber (or The Story of the Stone), similarly epitomizes the power of words to conjure traditional Chinese architecture. The novel gives but passing notice to the actual construction of the garden, instead emphasizing the act of composing titles and poems to characterize the perceived spirit or nature of specific scenic spots and buildings in the garden. This bestowal of words embodies an aesthetic of spontaneity. As important as
the first note in music, or the first brushstroke in calligraphy and painting, the instant of naming in architecture confers on a building its imperishable mark of authentic originality.22 Prospect Garden is a fiction, but through words it has become so real that today it has even been given physical form in the Qingpu District of Shanghai. It is as if today Liu Shilong’s imaginary Garden That Is Not There were suddenly to be given material reality based on the permanence of the words that describe and celebrate it.

Many of the older structures in today’s Shanghai boast a similar venerability and link to the past conferred partly by the power of words. The famous Yu Yuan (Garden of Tranquil Ease), located inside the former walled Chinese City (Figure 5),23 is sometimes dated back four hundred years to the Ming dynasty or called an epitome of traditional gardens in Jiangnan (a region south of the lower Yangzi). Actually, very little of what remains dates earlier than the nineteenth century. The garden was first created between 1559 and 1577 by the Ming dynasty official Pan Yunduan (1526–1601) for his elderly father Pan En (1496–1582), who had supervised the building of the city walls to defend against marauding pirates.24 The descendants of the Pan family, having fallen on hard times, sold the garden in 1760 to associations of rich merchants. After extensive restoration and rebuilding, the garden was donated to the adjoining City-God Temple (Chenghuang Miao) complex and became the headquarters for trade guilds and societies of various sorts. In the late nineteenth century, the garden was made into an administrative center for commerce and industry, and at the same time became a crowded public bazaar, with teahouses, taverns, and vendors. Although other private gardens were incorporated into the grounds of the Yu Yuan, over time the garden’s footprint shrank by more than half. Its layout has also changed significantly, as evidenced by the well-known Lake-Center Pavilion, which was once inside the garden precinct but is now located outside it (Figure 6). The garden was also severely damaged after being commandeered on multiple occasions to headquarter and bivouac European, Chinese, and Japanese troops. Because the Yu Yuan was heavily restored or rebuilt from 1956 to 1961 and again during the 1980s, today little remains from the Ming or Qing dynasties. At best the garden can be called a modern evocation of a traditional Jiangnan garden, a characterization that also applies to the restored and rebuilt classical gardens in nearby Suzhou.25 It is words—the garden’s name, couplets, poems, titles, and inscriptions—that link the Yu Yuan with its past, and despite countless changes in physical shape and form, these words and the memory they evoke allow the present-day architecture to be perceived as the authentic original.26

Although in many cultures the conception of architecture is often shaped by word and memory, recollection of the past is today usually overshadowed by a more future-oriented belief, in which durable material serves as the primary medium for a permanency yet to come. Encountering a greater emphasis on words as irrefutable evocations of the past, consequently, may seem strange to someone more accustomed to look toward physical durability as predictor and guarantor of the future. This difference in viewpoint has had a significant impact on perceptions of the traditional architecture and city of Shanghai.

This difference in perspective may help explain the persistent myth that portrays Shanghai as a mere “fishing village” before it became a treaty port in 1842. The historian Linda Cooke Johnson and others have already debunked this “fishing village myth.”27 Shanghai was a county capital as early as 1292 during the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368), the central port for inland river trade as well as northern and southern overseas trade routes, and a leading world port by the early nineteenth century, with shipping rivaling that of London, so why have so many past and present-day observers and historians misconstrued this major urban center as a small backwater fishing village? Johnson has suggested that in the West the faulty interpretation resulted in part from a “Eurocentric branch of historiography that maintains that China had to
have ... the impact of the West to be transformed into a modern society, and that without that catalyst, it would have remained its old traditional, backward self, stuck (to employ the terminology of Karl Marx) in the Asiatic mode of production.28 This slant corresponds to the arguable belief that, whereas Western social development is characterized by reason and progress, Eastern society fell victim to “Oriental despotism” and stagnation.29 For some in the West, it is within this polemic that Chinese art, architecture, and cities came to be seen as stylistically static and “unchanging” for thousands of years.30 An alternative explanation depends on what is understood to be the medium of durability. If monumental stone buildings are the chief indicator of an enduring history and future permanence, then the relative absence of such structures may have given rise to a conviction that mid-nineteenth-century Shanghai was relatively undeveloped. In contrast, if words can confer architectural monumental-ity and perdurability, then it is possible to acknowledge Shanghai as a thriving port metropolis with a rich history of architecture.

**Divergent Encounters**

These differing points of view are not mere chauvinism. They are the paradoxical aftermath of global encounters between clashing cultural orientations and histories. China’s history before the concession of Shanghai as a foreign treaty port in 1842 has often been perceived as parallel to but isolated from the histories of other countries. Afterward, the various strands of world history began to intermingle through a process of acculturation. China could no longer imagine itself standing alone as being “all under heaven” (tianxia) and had to acknowledge, albeit fitfully, its new status as a culture among cultures or nation among nations: a “country in the world” (guojia).31 Correspondingly, the anthropologist George W. Stocking, Jr., noted that the idea of culture as a human trait has long existed in the West but there was originally “no real notion of culture as the constituting medium of different thought worlds,” and “by the same token, civilization, like man, was singular: the plural of the noun did not appear until the nineteenth century.”32 It had certainly become plural in the context of Shanghai by the late nineteenth century. Beyond plurality, when “thought worlds” collide, the ensuing encounters force all sides, first, to conceptualize what is newly encountered in other cultures (ideas, technologies, skills, beliefs, and ways of seeing and thinking) and, second, to reconceptualize their own cultural imaginaire—the past, present, and future as “precursors” that thereafter can never be seen as they were before. The aftermath resembles a Borgesian conundrum in which “every
writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.”

Put another way, as a question, does the writer define the story, or does the story redefine the writer?

Collisions between cultural thought worlds forced the Chinese to redefine Shanghai according to an updated global storyline. For example, while Shanghai’s own account of its earlier history had focused on its role as a county capital and center of a regional cotton market, after becoming a semi-colonial treaty port, Shanghai began to be seen as a key entry point for the introduction of capitalism and modernity from the West. Chinese scholars fervently countered that view, insisting that the “seeds of capitalism” had originated independently in China, without a Western catalyst, and that semicolonial oppression had served only to delay China’s natural evolution into a modern society. The issue of capitalism’s origins had never been relevant in traditional China. It became so only after the encounter with new points of view required a redefinition of the Chinese cultural imaginaire. Similar questions in Chinese architectural history arose only when China began to encounter foreign ideas, for example, why Chinese roofs are curved and why the Chinese use wood instead of stone. Such questions had previously been irrelevant; conversely, it would have been equally valid for the Chinese to ask Western cultures why they build straight roofs and why they made structures of stone. The interpretation of an encounter with a divergent thought world depends on one’s cultural perspective and can thus, to repeat a phrase from Xuefei Ren, result in “multiple—often contradictory—interpretations.” And a redefinition of the cultural imaginaire transpires on all sides in the aftermath of an encounter.

Attempts to invent or reconstruct multiple narrative histories of a city through its architectural monuments in stone or words, therefore, permit targeted glimpses of specific themes or viewpoints but may not capture the larger complexities and contradictions of the urban environment. An alternative approach may be to think of the city’s history as an ever-changing kaleidoscope of diverse encounters and divergences in perception. Each encounter encompasses a dialectical set of issues and dilemmas. Such encounters present diverse perspectives, and from the always changing matrix of encounters emerge multiple and often contradictory pictures of the urban landscape. Though not all encounters involve a convergence of different thought worlds, they do lead to dilemmas in defining and redefining the cultural imaginaire.

At the core of any encounter is an exchange of ideas, which may be occasioned by a chance meeting, an adversarial conflict, or a discovery of unknown worlds, real or imagined. Every encounter fosters a dialogue that questions or confronts similarities and differences. What is accepted and familiar (i.e., traditional) in the art, architecture, culture, and environment of any people is apt to go unquestioned until an encounter with something that is different yet similar, or similar yet different, provokes a reevaluation and redefinition. Such encounters elicit curiosity, bemusement, or, sometimes, furious rejection. When individuals face a difference in similar forms, shapes, and conditions, what they had considered familiar can become conspicuously strange. When they confront similarity in cultural objects and ideas from a different cultural imaginaire, what they had thought strange can become unexpectedly familiar. Cross-cultural encounters result in entangled interaction, mutual impact, and translation. The points of encounter can occur across place as well as time, and the direction of the gaze controls how the one culture then sees the other and how it sees itself—sometimes in the guise of the other and sometimes in relation to its own past, present, or future. In the end, every encounter is between people; every encounter motivates them to question what is different yet similar, or similar yet different, and all such questioning affects what all parties see in the world around them.

In Shanghai, such entangled interactions involving exchanges of ideas between peoples and cultures, as well as between times and places, became increasingly evident after the establishment of the international settlements. Native residents considered the new form of lilong housing an updated version of traditional courtyard housing in the Jiangnan region, but foreign landowners and developers thought it derived from the European row-house models to which they were accustomed. Each side identified with what was more culturally familiar, while at the same time accepting or rejecting what they perceived as new or different. In a similar manner, the intrusion of Western-styled buildings and innovations along the Bund and in other areas of the city incited divergent responses. The contrast of those structures to traditional Chinese building and technology may have signaled modernity and progress to many Chinese, but others saw foreign-style buildings and railroads as alarming interventions that threatened to disrupt harmonious fengshui and upset the natural order. Western observers, however, often deemed these so-called Western constructions in China derivative at best, quaintly old-fashioned, or just plain ugly (but still better than Chinese buildings).

The Shanghai cityscape also included other late nineteenth-century cross-cultural examples: the Hardoon Garden, built by the Jewish British merchant Silas Aaron Hardoon (1851–1931) in a Chinese style, and the Zhang Garden, built by the Chinese merchant Zhang Honglu (also known as Zhang Shuhe, 1850–1919) in an occidental manner. The Hardoon Garden included an area reconstructed...
according to the fictive Prospect Garden from the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and Hardoon’s adoption of Chinese forms and aesthetics raises questions about his reasons for turning away from his own cultural heritage. Indeed, his own countrymen looked down on his effort, seeing it as a mere fantasy or folly. Zhang Honglu, in contrast, may have imitated Western styles as a way to gain or express social status and to establish a broader international network of political and economic connections.\textsuperscript{38} Both gardens engendered complex transcultural interpretations, including some that saw both patrons claiming roots in more than one culture at the same time, a global outlook \textit{avant la lettre}, or as figures struggling with their own cultural identity.

**Encountering Water**

The name Shanghai literally means “on water” or “above the sea,” and the confrontation of city and people with the waters of the sea, rivers, canals, reservoirs, and wells has been and continues to be a life-and-death matter. After every flood or near-disaster, the city is forced to reimagine its place and fit in the natural and cultivated landscape. In many ways the definition and redefinition of Shanghai’s cultural \textit{imaginaire} can be said to depend on its ongoing encounter with water. Recall that this entire area had originally been underwater; tidal deposits aided by dikes and seawalls slowly created landfill. The littoral of the Bund was itself built on fill, and the territory occupied by present-day Pudong was also reclaimed from the sea. Today the land is only about four meters above sea level; river flooding, storm surges, tidal flows, sinking land, and rising water levels owing to global warming continue to threaten the city.\textsuperscript{39} Extensive seawalls, dikes, river embankments, and floodgates have been erected in defense (Figure 7), but the fear of deluge is not the only concern. Fresh water for drinking, agriculture, and industry is crucial to the city’s sustainability—\textsuperscript{40} it is a need common to all cities, but one that has been exacerbated by Shanghai’s rapid urbanization and population growth.

Shanghai’s encounter with water has also included its changing economic and cultural interaction with the regional network of rivers, streams, and canals. Present-day Shanghai straddles the Huangpu River as it wends north to join the Yangzi. The Huangpu began life as a small stream or drainage ditch.\textsuperscript{41} Before the early fifteenth century, the main watercourse for inland transport had been the Suzhou River (formerly the Songjiang River) that led west upstream to the main port at Qinglong and the city of Suzhou where it intersected with the Grand Canal. At Shanghai, where it met the Huangpu, the Suzhou River had originally flowed east, directly to the seacoast, but that course exposed the river to tidal silt deposits that blocked shipping. To remedy this situation, in 1404 the river was rerouted northward to discharge into the Yangzi, and the Huangpu became dominant.\textsuperscript{42} This remarkable achievement in river engineering should be seen in the context of China’s long history of water control projects. Water had always been a significant force.
in China’s cultural landscape, and the management of waterways by means of dams, dikes, and canals was traditionally one of the primary duties of the government. From the ancient legendary ruler Yu to the present-day construction of the Three Gorges Dam across the Yangzi, water control has been an important responsibility of the government and a symbol of its legitimacy.

This legitimacy was seriously challenged by the foreign presence of the domineering stone buildings overlooking the Bund. On the fundamental relationship between the Shanghai Bund and water, the historian Jeremy Taylor has written: “Access to great expanses of water ... was perceived as highly valuable, given the prime importance of water for travel, communications and trade. ... Without water, the treaty port lost its very meaning.” Because the Bund’s direct access to water allowed trade and anchorage for merchant and military ships, early twentieth-century Shanghai became a symbol of foreign authority and commerce on Chinese territory. China’s loss of control over local waterways to extraterritorial powers, as well as the humiliating reason for Shanghai’s concession as a treaty port—the opium trade—made this quasi-colonialist encounter especially unfamiliar and poignant to the Chinese. In contrast, many observers outside China interpreted Shanghai’s vaunted rise to cultural and commercial prominence (as the Paris of the East) as a success. This interpretation arose in part because of the outsiders’ familiarity with certain imitated, imposed, or transposed elements of so-called Western civilization and modernity, such as neoclassical architecture, electric lights, municipal governance, sanitation, parks, music, fashions, art, and even sports and other lifestyle activities. In Chinese eyes, however, these elements were largely considered to be more different than similar—unfamiliar novelties, curiosities, or veritable abominations.

The diverse reactions among the Chinese populace are recorded in the printed images and photographs published in Shanghai’s popular illustrated newspapers and periodicals, including the Dianshizhai huabao (Lithography Studio Pictorial, 1884–98) and Liangyou (Young Companion, 1926–45). The very proliferation of such periodicals, as well as images of Chinese dressed in Western attire or living in houses with interiors furnished in Western style, demonstrated a general acceptance of some foreign ideas. In contrast, illustrations depicting the apparent Western fixation on sports and physical exercise—ranging from horse and dog racing to tug-of-war and sack racing—aroused both curiosity and bewilderment. The compulsion to exert oneself constantly as opposed to resting quietly, or to compete aggressively instead of acquiescing tranquilly, seemed comically incomprehensible. Other illustrations recorded instances of cultural misunderstanding, abhorrence, and conflict. For example, the illustration “Taking Pigs into Custody at the Police Station” (Figure 8) shows what happened when a group of swineherds, following their customary practice, had brought several dozen pigs through the streets of the French Settlement, violating the French standards of hygiene and sanitation that had led to restrictions against herding livestock through the city streets. The swineherds, unaware of the prohibition, were arrested. The absurdity of the situation to the Chinese is expressed in the depiction of the pigs actually being herded through the main entrance into the French police station. I do not want to belabor here the contrast in cultural viewpoints or their racial and religious implications. Instead, I return to the process of acculturation between differing thought worlds, because it redefines each culture’s past history, present circumstances, and future direction.

**Acculturative Tension**

Acculturation occurs as the result of an urban encounter, generating adaptive, imitative, or reactive change in any one or every contact group. The field of social psychology has looked closely at acculturation in studying the effects of colonialism, immigration, and multicultural societies, but the process is actually difficult to conceptualize and measure. The historian Joseph Levenson, writing about Chinese modernization, observed that acculturation is “the process of displacement or modification of the techniques, institutions, values, and attitudes of one culture by those of another.” In Shanghai, the prominence of (or displacement effected by) the foreign settlements centering on the Bund elicited nationalistic efforts to redefine and reclaim the city for China. Plans were devised to circumvent the Bund’s prime authority and meaning, its “access” to water. As early as 1919, Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), founder of the Chinese Republic, proposed that the Huangpu River be rechanneled to flow past a “New Bund,” a future urban commercial hub and port to be built in Pudong and that the stretch of the Huangpu (Whang poo) fronting the old Bund be filled in (Figure 9). Though funds were lacking at that time, there was clear historical precedent. Shanghai’s main river had been rerouted once before, in 1404. After 1927, when the new government of Shanghai became answerable to the Nationalist government, its City Planning Commission began discussing ideas for a new administrative center and port for the expanding city. A design competition in 1929–30 led to the selection of a grand Beaux-Arts plan for a civic center (Figure 10) in the Jiangwan area north of Suzhou River. This Greater Shanghai Plan, like Sun Yat-sen’s
proposal, was “intended to shift the focal point of Shanghai away from the international settlements, and form the nucleus of a reclaimed Chinese metropolis.” When the Chinese sections of Shanghai fell to the Japanese in 1937, construction, already under way and several major buildings completed, was halted. (The foreign settlements were not seized until 8 December 1941.)

During the war years and the subsequent Communist regime that redirected resources to industrial production and collective ownership, Shanghai and other cities languished. With economic reforms and investment since the 1990s, Sun Yat-sen’s vision of reclaiming Shanghai was finally achieved with the building of the Lujiazui financial district in Pudong. The new steel-and-concrete skyline of Pudong is a symbol of the New Shanghai and China (see Figure 3). It stands across the Huangpu River facing the Western-style stone buildings along the Bund (see Figures 1, 2) that epitomize Old Shanghai in its heyday as an international settlement. And although the river separating the old and new skylines has not been filled in, by 2020 there will be about twenty vehicular crossings linking the two sides, making the Huangpu “one of the most crossed, spanned, and tunneled urban waterways in the world.” The patriotic precedent and political symbolism of Sun Yat-sen’s vision for Shanghai, which was first set out in words, should not be underestimated. To bridge the Yangzi at Nanjing and to construct the Three Gorges Dam—projects that have been hailed as modern engineering marvels and symbols of national pride and progress—were similarly first proposed by Sun.

This faceoff between Old and New Shanghai across the Huangpu, reveals a tension in the multiple definitions and redefinitions of the city, people, and nation. The foreign-style monuments of the treaty-port period in durable stone confront the traditional Chinese architecture, which often derived permanence from words. The tension between them was heightened by foreign military and economic dominance during a period when China was at its weakest and subject
to extraterritorial manipulation. Under these circumstances, Western architecture in Shanghai became a model of strength to be emulated and at the same time a symbol of humiliation to be subdued or destroyed. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that the Bund was not demolished after Shanghai returned to Chinese control, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Possibly, instead of dismantling the Western and Nationalist regime (e.g., Bank of China) buildings, it was judged sufficient to destroy or conceal almost all of the buildings’ cornerstones or to mutilate their inscriptions.54 In essence, the original ceremonial cornerstones bearing foreign words were effectively purged and new titles and inscriptions sanctified by Chinese words were substituted. The foreign buildings were thereby appropriated and redefined so as to center on China’s past.

Appropriating foreign innovations by redefining them in terms of Chinese precedent is one facet of the well-known dictum coined in 1898 by Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909): “Chinese learning for the fundamental principles, Western learning for practical application” (tiyong).55 This approach influenced activities ranging from politics to science in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it had a significant impact on the national self-strengthening and reform movements.56 Peter Rowe and Seng Kuan’s book Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China discusses its crucial influence on the encounter between Chinese and Western architecture.57 New modern Western ideas in architecture constituted the practical application, or external “form” (yong), set into a matrix—or against a touchstone—of Chinese principle, or internal “essence” (ti), thus rendering Western thought suitable to China. Never a simple dichotomy between East and West, this intellectual framework, or acculturative tension, has been so open to interpretation and translation that it exemplifies a Borgesian conundrum writ large in Chinese terms. What is considered Chinese precedent or essence, consequently, was often used to disguise newly encountered ideas as an interpretation of Chinese tradition, and this frequently required the creation of new precursors that redefined China’s past, present, and future—does the writer define the story, or does the story redefine the writer? For example, Confucius was recast as a reformer in order to both validate and serve as precedent

Figure 9 Sun Yat-sen’s plan to rechannel the Huangpu River to create a new urban center, the New Bund, in Pudong (from Sun Yat-sen, The International Development of China [New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1922], map 4, facing p. 33)

Figure 10 Greater Shanghai Plan, Civic Center, detail of plan layout, 1929 (from “Greater Shanghai: Building a New Port and City,” Far Eastern Review, June 1930, 297)
for modern political reforms. Likewise, to justify the appropriation of some practical features of newly encountered Western stone architecture, a precedent in Chinese tradition had to be found. Thus wood architecture was proclaimed the paradigm in China and the use of other building materials, including stone, was justified by the concept “imitating the mode of building with wood” (fangmugou). That is to say, the use of steel, stone, and concrete, though new, is rooted in past modes of traditional building in wood.

But what about buildings designed wholly in Western styles by Chinese or Western architects for Chinese clients? In early twentieth-century Shanghai, examples include the Bank of China building (Figure 11) on the Bund, designed by Lu Qianshou (1904–92), working in the firm of Palmer and Turner, and Hudek’s Park Hotel. How do these appropriations of Western architecture compare with the modern buildings, skyscrapers, bridges, and themed satellite New Towns (Figures 12, 13) that are copied from or designed in Western styles in Shanghai and throughout China today? Are they all to be considered derivative imitations, or do they indicate a global architecture or world “stylistic matrix,” in which works of art and architecture are related by formal characteristics, regardless of history, location, or culture? Such appropriations provoke the question, is a Chinese aesthetic, style, or essence (ti) still discernible? Put another way, though rapid urban development over the past two decades has led to Shanghai’s ranking as a “global city” (an important node in a transnational socioeconomic system), that designation relies on criteria drawn from a perspective that may not take into account the local or historical “fit” that is so much a part of what defines architecture. Such criteria may appear global because of their transnational reach and because the Chinese seem to have embraced them with gusto. But participation through outward imitation cannot

Figure 11 Lu Qianshou, Bank of China, Shanghai, 1936–46 (author’s photo, 2012)
be assumed to mean docile acceptance. Perhaps the present-day appropriation or imitation of external forms (practical application, 落)—“is not meant to flatter the West, nor is it a form of ‘self-colonization.’ The copies are built as monuments to China’s technological prowess, affluence and power. The Chinese have seized on the icons of Western architecture as potent symbols for their own ascension to—and aspiration for—global supremacy.”

Acculturative imitation of Western architectural forms should not be understood as mere copying. It can appear so, because it adopts a similar vocabulary, but it uses that vocabulary differently to accommodate the cultural, aesthetic,
and socioeconomic needs of another people, place, or time. The external forms can be appropriated to various degrees of acculturation that range, according to the psychologist John Berry, from “assimilation” to “marginalization” or from “integration” to “separation.” As a parallel example, take the introduction of Western oil painting during the early twentieth century, which led those calling for modernization and reform to relegate traditional Chinese ink painting to a legacy of the classical or dynastic past. Some in the arts called for an integration with Western techniques that would transmute the style of Chinese painting into a Western style (xiyanghua). Others sought separation, drawing on China’s past to refine a new modern national style (guohua). The degree of integration or separation varied with time and circumstance as a dialectical tension revolving around the tiyong intellectual framework. A similar acculturative tension can be seen in the recurring efforts to search for a national modern style in Chinese architecture. Modern architects, by retaining traditional Chinese motifs—such as a Chinese-style “big roof” crowning a modern building, or bracket-sets (dongong; see Figure 4)—and juxtaposing them to new technologies, functions, and materials, make this tension part of the modern discourse in which they converse. Engineering feats such as the heroic building of the Nanjing Bridge across the Yangzi were seen as markers of progress. Similarly, the Oriental Pearl Tower (Figure 14) exemplifies a Chinese attempt at a national style (about 1960s–90s) that was meant to symbolize China’s modernization. Notwithstanding its space-age style and technology, the Pearl Tower’s futuristic structure, with eleven spheres suspended over a circular base, came to be popularly associated with a verse by the Tang-dynasty poet Bo Juyi (or Bai Juyi, 772–846), in which the sound of a pipa-lute is likened to that of large and small pearls falling onto a jade plate. Along with an exuberant pursuit of enduring modernity in towering steel and concrete was a longing to establish a link to China’s cultural past, an anxious desire for validation from antiquity. This anxiety or tension is embodied, in the words of Shanghai’s mayor: “Rejoice in the present, while recalling the past,” engraved in Chinese and English on a low stone wall near the base of the Pearl Tower. Inextricably tied to China’s modernization is this “taste for antiquity” (shigu) or “addiction to antiquity” (nigu)—the urge to recover and revitalize what is proper or ideal in the past (fugu)—that underlies much of China’s attitude toward the past, present, and future.

Where Yesterday Meets Tomorrow

In looking for ways to approach the architectural and urban history of Shanghai other than reconstructing the city’s history as a narrative march of monuments or as a stylistic matrix of visual and structural similarities, it may be useful to focus on moments of change, acculturation, tension, and dilemma. Such encounters or intersections redefine and establish anew the reality and imagination of the city’s timescape. In general, a city can be viewed through its overall layout, planning, policies, changing environmental conditions, and interactions between different social and cultural groups. The goal, however, should not be to establish an immutable chronology of facts and events but to comprehend the complex tensions and issues defining each encounter. Understanding any city’s cultural history also requires the examination of specific urban sites as they encountered change over time. Tracing how the former exclusive Shanghai Racecourse in the International Settlement changed into the present-day People’s Square and People’s Park reveals the ideological, moral, racialist, and nationalist tensions as they played out in history. Similar issues surface in studying the cultural history of the Canidrome, a dog-racing stadium built in 1928. After 1949 it became an arena for political rallies and executions, then a flower market, and then a stock exchange. Most recently the site has been redefined as the Shanghai Culture Center, a large theater complex for international performances. Originally scheduled for completion...
in time for the Shanghai Expo 2010, the center was designed by the New York firm of Beyer Blinder Belle and has been nicknamed the “space turtle” for its new age carapacial appearance.\textsuperscript{71} At each stage or change in the cultural history of any site, encounters may cause the urban landscape to be reimagined and redefined. Because every city is constantly reinventing itself and the only constant appears to be change, examining the cultural history of any particular site adds to the kaleidoscopic mosaic. In addition, encounters occur not only between peoples and cultures but also across time. Before the 1980s, the dialogue in China revolved chiefly around interactions with new methods and ideas from outside the country: encounters between Chinese tradition and Western modernity. With economic reforms and rapid urbanization since the 1990s, China now invents its own modernity while still appropriating Western forms and making them its own. Today, however, the \textit{tiyong} framework has changed: now it is less a geographical or cross-cultural exchange between East and West than an attempt to bridge the gap between China’s present/future and its past. Nowhere can this be better seen than in the Xintiandi redevelopment project at Shanghai’s urban core (Figure 15).\textsuperscript{72} Formerly this area in the French Concession had been occupied by city blocks with internal alleyways fronted by decorative stone gates or \textit{shikumen} (literally “stone warehouse gates”); along the alleyways ran rows of low residential units. This block pattern, known as \textit{lilong}, developed in Shanghai as some of the earliest mass-produced commercially marketed housing.

---

\textbf{Figure 15} Wood + Zapata, Xintiandi, Shanghai, 2001 (author’s photo, 2012)

\textbf{Figure 16} Interior alley in \textit{lilong} neighborhood block, Shanghai (author’s photo, 2012)

\textbf{Figure 17} \textit{Shikumen}-style hall where, in July 1921, the First National Communist Party Congress convened (author’s photo, 2012)
in China. Until the mid-twentieth century about three-quarters of Shanghai housing was of the *lilong* type, which gave rise to a distinctive alley-based community living, much beloved but now quickly disappearing (Figure 16).

Xintiandi, transformed into a lifestyle center with upscale housing along with shops, restaurants, cafés, and bars, has been called a historical redevelopment project. Highly successful, it has become a prototype for historical redevelopment in other Chinese cities. Almost the entire project area, however, is new construction, incorporating only some architectural elements from the original historical structures—architectural elements transplanted through time. Developed by the Hong Kong–based Shui On Group and designed by the American architect Benjamin Wood, Xintiandi retains a semblance of Shanghai’s past, somewhat in the way Western architectural styles and forms were planted across time and geography. The New T owns were outside Shanghai and were designed by foreign architects to imitate the urban forms of different Western nations: Australia, England, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden, and the United States. Fittingly, Xintiandi is billed as a place where “yesterday meets tomorrow in Shanghai today.” In this center of commercialism, ironically, the one historical site that was preserved and restored by government mandate is the *shikumen*-style hall in which the First National Communist Party Congress convened in July 1921 (Figure 17). Now a museum, this Congress Hall is heavily repackaged in the lore of Communist historiography. A monument in both stone and words, it may also be the impetus for the name Xintiandi, meaning “New Heaven and Earth.” In the heart of Shanghai, the new image of China’s present and future is joined to its recent past by the Congress Hall, the symbolic birthplace of a new China.


6. The character 里 in *lilong* can also be understood to refer to a district, village, neighborhood, or jurisdiction. Zhao Chunlan, “From *Shikumen* to New-style: A Rereading of *Lilong* Housing in Modern Shanghai,” *Journal of Architecture* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 49–76. Zhao identifies “the significance and uniqueness of *lilong* as a particular dwelling form in a process of moving from tradition towards modernity” (50). See also Samuel Y. Liang, “Where the Courtyard Meets the Street: Spatial Culture of the Li Neighborhoods, Shanghai, 1870–1900,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 67, no. 4 (2008), 501. Notions about the arrival of modernism in Shanghai and China are controversial and will be briefly discussed below. See Renee Chow’s analysis, “In a Field of Party Walls: Drawing Shanghai’s *Lilong*,” in this issue.


20. The translation follows that of Geremie R. Barmé, An Artistic Excise: A Life of Feng Zikai (1899–1975) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 214. There are differences in the identification of the garden owner. In the “Record,” the owner is listed as the “Snow-Eating Recluse Liu Yuhua.” Barmé suggests that Liu Shilong and Liu Yuhua are two different men. In Liu Shilong’s “Zhongnan youji zuo” (My preface on touring the Zhongnan mountains), a stele text carved in 1623, however, Liu styles himself as the “Snow-Eating Recluse,” indicating that Yuhua was his sobriquet.


24. Johnson, Shanghai, 78–82, 90.

25. According to Liu Dunzhen et al., Chinese Classical Gardens of Suzhou, trans. Chen Lixian (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 8: “The farther back a garden can be traced in history, the more numerous [the] repairs and reconstructions it must have gone through, with the result that probably little is left today of its original appearance, which must have been changed beyond recognition. … By the end of the 1940s most of the classical gardens had been either partly demolished or completely destroyed.” See also James C. Y. Watt, review of Scholar Gardens of China, by R. Stewart Johnston, Journal of Asian Studies 52, no. 2 (1993), 441–42.

26. For literary couplets, poems, titles, and inscriptions associated with Yu Yuan, see Xue Liyong, ed., Wen yi xing yu—Yu Yuan bianhua, biwen shangxi (Appreciating the titles, couplets, and steles of Yu Yuan) (Shanghai: Tongji Daxue Chubanshe, 1987). This practice is still a living tradition; for a compilation of recent poetry for the garden, see Zhou Daonan, ed., Yu Yuan xin ying (Yu Yuan’s new poem) (Shanghai: Tongji Daxue Chubanshe, 1989).

27. Johnson, Shanghai, 3–6, 8–10, 165.

28. Ibid., 9.


30. Craig Clunas, “Oriental Antiquities / Far Eastern Art,” in Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 417–18, 426; and Gin-dijh Su, Chinese Architecture: Past and Contemporary (Hong Kong: Sin Poh Amalgamated [H.K.], 1964), 1, 4. The notion of “unchanging” as it has been applied to Chinese art is discussed in Views of Difference: Different Views of Art, ed. Catherine King (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press; and the Open University, 1999), in the introduction by Catherine King and Gill Perry with Nicola Durbridge: “We may consider the treatment of art in China. Here was a field that could hardly be treated as backward. … The solution—for western art historians—was to classify Chinese art as different from the progressive art of the West by interpreting it as unchanging. We should be clear that the word ‘unchanging’ (were this description of Chinese art even true) was intended to imply a lack, as we can see from its opposition to ‘progression’” (10).


32. Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, 18, 19.


34. Many claim Shanghai was the point of entry into China for external ideas and these thoughts on encounters were generated by the exhibition Encounters—Discovery, Dialogue, and Conflict (14 July–23 September 2012), at the Princeton University Art Museum, that I organized with Francesca Williams and Juliana Ochs Neeck.

35. These thoughts on encounters were generated by the exhibition Encounters—Discovery, Dialogue, and Conflict (14 July–23 September 2012), at the Princeton University Art Museum, that I organized with Francesca Williams and Juliana Ochs Neeck.


41. Johnson, Shanghai, 38.

42. Ibid., 38–41.


45. See the printed illustration “Li butong ke” (“All sorts of aggressive behavior”) (1887–88) by Fu Jie (signed Liangxin), in Dianzhubai huaban: Daketang bian (Lithography Studio: Daketang edition) (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 2001), vol. 4, no. 200.

46. For a brief overview of different theories and viewpoints on the development of Shanghai, see Johnson, Shanghai, 1–17. On racial exclusion in Shanghai as history, myth, and symbol, see Robert A. Bickers and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, Shanghai’s ‘Dogs and Chinese Not Admitted’ Sign: Legend, History and Contemporary Symbol, China Quarterly, no. 142 (June 1995), 444–66.


48. Levenson, Liang Ci’s ‘ch’ao, 34.


52. Campanella, Concrete Dragon, 76–79.

53. Nanjing Changjiang daqiao (Great Bridge across the Yangzi River at Nanking) (Hong Kong: Xianggang Sanlian Shudian, 1968). See also Sun Yat-sen, International Development of China, 74.

54. Peter Hibbard, The Bund Shanghai: China Faces West (Hong Kong: Odyssey, 2007), 152–53, 278–79; and Sarah Magana, untitled Art/Arc 459 seminar paper, Princeton University, 2013. The laying of the cornerstone sometimes entailed elaborate ceremonies. These were held on auspicious days and often involved time capsules containing commemorative mementos.


56. On tiyong in the context of the self-strengthening movement, see Jonathan D. Spence, Search for Modern China (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 197, 216–30, esp. 225.

57. Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan, Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

58. Yu Ying-shih, “Radicalization of China,” 128; and Spence, Search for Modern China, 226.


60. Bianca Bosker, Original Copies: Architectural Mimicry in Contemporary China (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).


64. Berry, “Conceptual Approaches to Acculturation,” 23–25.

65. Rowe and Kuan, Architectural Encounters.

66. Ibid., 87–106.


68. Deyan Sudjic, “The Speed and the Friction,” in Endless City, 114. These words are also found on a sculpture of an anchor located on the Pudong bund.

69. The term fuga is often translated “return to the past,” which overemphasizes antique prototypes as the chief goal and overlooks the importance of orthodoxy or propriety (zheng) sought after in antiquity. A better translation of the term may be “recovering the legitimacy of what was orthodox and proper in the past.” For an analysis of the concept fuga in the arts, see Frederick W. Mare, “The Arts and the Theorizing Mode of the Civilization,” in Artists and Tradition, ed. Christian F. Murck (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 4–8.

70. Cameron White, “Exploring a Shanghai Space: From Racecourse to People’s Square and Beyond,” Annuaire Megalopolis: Shanghai, 16–27.


72. See n. 6 above.
