

Course Syllabus

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COLUMBIA GSAPP : FALL 2018 / A4620

BUILDING CHINA MODERN / 1919-1958: EXPERIMENTS FOR A NEW PARADIGM

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409 Avery, 3 pts

The quest for an architecture both modern and Chinese has been going on for significantly more than a hundred years. In the early years of the last century a desire for this kind of language of building, one that could be both international and specific, was a common puzzler world over. But in China, the quest started early and continues to this day, running parallel with changing ideas of “China”—the place and nation—a concept radically reconstrued at least four times in the course of the same period of time.

This seminar proposes to investigate experiments in new Chinese building run in three of these moments—around the May 4th Movement (1919), by Nationalist China (1927-48) and the inaugural years of the People’s Republic (1949-58)—periods representing sharply distinct mind sets but in which the reimagining of Chinese architecture and China itself was equally all-important.

The first four weeks of the seminar will introduce the “tradition” of Chinese architecture. This grounding will be combined with an introduction to the deep resources of Columbia’s research collections: Avery’s periodical holdings (i.e. Zhong Guo Ying Zao Xue She Hui Kan / The Bulletin of the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture), Department of Drawings and Archives (the Richard Dana and Talbot Hamlin collections), The Union Theological Seminary’s Burke Library’s China Collections, C.V. Starr East Asian Library’s film collection, etc.

The balance of the semester will use primary resources from these collections and assigned readings (tailored to each student’s research project) to explore case study “experiments” in modern Chinese building, buildings which purposely broke with certain aspects of tradition while safeguarding others, in terms of the qualities of “new” and the character of the building, and other discourses they represent. The first hour of each class will be reserved for student led discussion. In the second, a short lecture will set up the following week’s reading.

Seminar members will be expected to write short assignments, one 1500-word bibliographic (“sources”) essay, and a longer 4000 word final research paper related to an experiment in “modern Chinese” building and configured around an accessible primary source.