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Japanese architectural design in Shanghai: a brief review of the past thirty years

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This paper reviews Japanese architectural design since 1980 in Shanghai, China’s largest city, through studies of typical examples: the Ruijin Building, the Garden Hotel of the 1980s, buildings in Hongqiao of the 1990s and three projects built in the new millennium. The design merits and local people’s attitudes towards these buildings are examined and compared with prominent contemporary buildings, designed by local and overseas architects. The study is set against a background of technical advance and modernisation within the building industry in Shanghai. The paper showcases the unique experiences a fast-growing city gained in its progress towards modernisation.

Introduction
The practice of adopting overseas architectural styles in China became discernible in the nineteenth century, but the large-scale introduction of foreign design under communist rule did not begin in earnest until 1980. Over the past thirty years, it has spread from Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou to the vast Chinese hinterland. The past quarter of a century has seen a huge amount of development of new urban architecture in Chinese cities and a related increase in people’s materialistic aspirations.

Foreign architectural design in China is mostly a joint effort, in which, usually, the overseas party provides preliminary ideas, schematic designs or technical input and the Chinese partner helps with local building regulations, government submissions, construction documents and, sometimes, site supervision.

The authors have recorded 302 building projects in China designed by architects from Japan, North America and Europe: 22 were built in the 1980s, 58 were built in the 1990s, and 222 during the first seven years of the twenty-first century. The figures demonstrate the exponential increase of foreign architectural design in China. From the charts, one can see that Japanese architects have taken a leading role in this importation, especially in the early years of China’s ‘Open Door’ policy (Fig. 1).

This paper focuses on the design influences of Japanese architects in Shanghai and analyses typical examples in different historic stages since 1980: what is the spatial organisation of those buildings (quality of design), how they impact on the city (urban context), how those buildings express the designer/developer’s intentions and how Chinese people accept the resulting buildings over the years (historical context). In regard to the quality of design, we examine these buildings with the principles of Modernism in mind: in terms of urban context, a good building design should contribute to an active urban and social life. In terms of historical context, an ideal building must support positive social, economic and humane development, and be admired by local people and end-users.

Selecting Japanese architectural design as a research topic is based on several factors. Apart
from their American and European peers, Japanese architects were the earliest foreign designers to enter the Chinese market after the ‘Open Door’ policy was implemented in the late 1970s. As an increasingly prominent Asian country, Japan has set an example of learning from the West. By designing buildings in China, Japanese architects inevitably demonstrated the unique experiences they had accumulated in practice, which had great significance in the development of architecture in China and other countries. By investigating Japanese architectural design in Shanghai, the study is intended to contribute to the understanding of Chinese architecture and its development in an era of globalisation.

The Japanese entering China’s design market
In 1976 conservative forces were removed from China’s political arena, and the country adopted an ‘Open Door’ policy and embarked on a fast track to economic recovery. Soon after freer capitalist trading was allowed, Japanese architects came to Shanghai, the most important trading, financial and commercial city in China. The Baoshan Steel Plant was the largest of twenty-two projects to use foreign, including Japanese, bank loans and imported machinery and technology. The Steel Plant was built in 1976 using a low-interest loan from Japan and designed partly by Nikken Sekkei, as architects, and the Nippon Steel Corporation. Then, Nihon Sekkei, another firm of Japanese architects, and the Shanghai Design Institute of Civil Architecture collaborated to design the micro-electronic workshop at Shanghai’s No.14 Factory of Wireless Instruments, where the Japanese architects were mainly in charge of the assembly line processes and related technology. The building designs came with Japanese facilities and governmental ‘friendship’ grants. At the time, because of the nature of industrial buildings, the design work did not arouse much attention.

Although Japanese architects were involved in the early developments after the ‘Open Door’ policy was adopted, their presence in the design of influential civic buildings did not become obvious until the mid-1980s. Good examples include the Ruijin...

China’s building construction was limited in quantity and mediocre in quality during Mao’s period (1949–1976). With the constraints of tight budgets and a social atmosphere which advocated thrift, design for ordinary civic buildings had to follow a pragmatic and functional trend. Modernist ideas of the twentieth-century pioneers were introduced to China (mainly Shanghai) in the 1940s by apprentices of the Bauhaus school or of Le Corbusier. These ideas, however, were criticised in the 1950s and 1960s as ‘capitalist trash’. The names of Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and other masters were not known to Chinese students and professionals until the early 1980s. In contrast, Japanese architects started to follow the Modernist masters like Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and others in the early twentieth century, when the country was determined to pursue the way of modernisation. Rational functionalism, Modernist aesthetics and the Japanese nation’s self-disciplined characteristics were well integrated into architectural design from generation to generation. There is no doubt that Japan contributed actively to the development of the ‘Modern Movement’ in architecture in the twentieth century.

Foreign architectural designs arrived in China almost at the same time as various foreign trends and theories, including Modernism, were introduced to the country. As they come from developed nations, foreign architectural design and completed buildings are embraced in China as symbols of ‘modernisation’. In the past thirty years, important civic buildings were mostly designed by foreign, including Japanese, architects. The passion for ‘foreign design’ in Shanghai may be equated with ‘Chinese modernity’, as explained by Professor Leo Lee of Harvard University. According to Lee, ‘Chinese modernity’ appeared in the 1920s. The English word ‘modern’, in addition to its primary meaning of ‘characteristic of the present or recent times, as distinguished from the remote past’, is directly adopted through its pronunciation into the Chinese language as mo deng: literally, new and fashionable. When Chinese people assess a building or man-made product, both meanings are used.

Actually, the designs of Japanese architects did not have such a strong impact on the city as those of Hong Kong and later American and European architects. The reasons may be attributed to cultural differences, or, as some people may speculate, the collective memory of the bitter past when the Japanese invaded and looted China during the 1930s and subsequently refused to apologise for their actions. We would argue that the Japanese-designed buildings in Shanghai, although having an intrinsic rationality and high quality of design, do not provide a universal equation to modernity that the Chinese people are eager to experience. They fail to present an idealised western model for Shanghai.

**Ruijin Building (1986): serving expatriates**

The Ruijin Building was designed by the in-house architects of the Mitsui Company of Japan, and built by Mitsui Construction Ltd. The building has a unique structural pattern, skillfully arranged spatial layout and high-quality construction. The
Ruijin Building was owned by the Donghu Group, an hotel chain run by the Shanghai municipal government, and financed by the Bank of China, to ease the severe dearth of high-class offices and residential space mainly used by overseas companies and individuals in the early 1980s.8 After selection, the Mitsui Construction Co. Ltd. was appointed in 1984 as the main contractor for the design-and-build project, with the Shanghai Design Institute of Civil Architecture acting as consultants.

The Ruijin Building was the first high-rise building in Shanghai to use a steel structure after the ‘Open Door’ policy was adopted. Its structure demonstrates technical complexity, with reinforced concrete piled foundations; steel beams and columns cast in concrete for its first nine storeys; steel beams coated with fireproof paint for the eighteen storeys above; steel columns cast in concrete; and all floor slabs cast in in-situ concrete (Fig. 2).

The spatial composition of the Ruijin Building shows a sophistication in its section, compared to the usual simple stacking up of floor plans. The designer investigated the market for office and
residential buildings for expatriates in Shanghai, and proposed to mix the office and residential elements in one building. The overseas office workers can conveniently rent flats in the same building in which they are working. The upper part, was rarely seen in 1980s' China. After 2001, the Chinese government no longer imposed limits on overseas people wanting to buy similar residences to local Chinese citizens. The number and selection of up-market flats for overseas people increased dramatically and the ‘Ruijin Mode’ gradually lost its attraction and was phased out in the early years of the twenty-first century.

In the Ruijin Building, the ninth refuge floor divides the building into the upper office tower and the lower podium. The podium is further divided by the narrow atrium with public facilities and retail in the north and flats in the south. Its spatial relationship is best revealed in its south-north section. The first floors are all the same in both the south and north parts. The floor to floor height of flats from the 2nd to 8th floors is 3.05 metres in the south; and the floor height of a flat in the north is taller. To align the north and south parts visually, the design uses twelve steel girders criss-crossing the atrium. The 4th floor of the north side and the 5th floor of the atrium were designed to be at the same level, and they accommodate a café-shop which alleviates visually the height difference.

The subtle spatial relationships in the Ruijin Building are difficult to perceive from its plan. In its atrium and main lobby, a visitor can hardly find the location of the office tower. The core of the office tower is in the north part. One can only see an escalator and three stairs leading to the second floor of the retail part. In a typical floor of the office tower, the core and lifts are in the north and the exit stair is in the south. People can in the event of fire exit onto the ninth floor, then escape from the two stairs of the flats area (see Fig. 2 above).
The Ruijin Building is located in the old lane-house area of Shanghai. Its tower thus initially rose up out of the low-rise lane-houses of the 1920s. Following construction of the Ruijin Building, the old area was revitalised and a group of similar service flats was built nearby. The Ruijin Building, together with the Union Building (1985) and the Sheraton Huating Hotel (1985), are all prominent landmarks of the Shanghai of the 1980s. The latter two buildings were designed by local architects from the East China Institute of Architectural Design. So far, however, the impact on the city of the Ruijin Building seems rather modest and less well known.

The Union Building was completed a year earlier than Ruijin. Its spatial relationship is clearly shown in its typical floor plan: a square office plate with a central core. The building is located at the junction of Yan’an Road and Sichuan Road, the traditional Bund, and enjoys a sweeping view of the Huangpu River. The Bund is the riverfront of Shanghai, occupied by colonial buildings with all the fashionable flavours of the 1930s. The Union Building was the first curtain-wall building in Shanghai and as such became part of the Bund’s landscape; its central core plan was the first to be used in China. The Union Building was widely publicised in journals and newspapers. The Sheraton Huating Hotel was designed in a curvilinear plan with the hotel tower cascading from the top to the lower floors. It is located in a busy road leading to a suburban district and attracts the attention of many passers-by.

The Union Building, with its open-plan offices, used with such familiarity by international companies, enjoyed a high prestige in the Shanghai property market and was hence a key symbol of the ‘Open Door’ policy. The old granite and dark tiles of the surrounding historic buildings were mirrored in its tinted glass façade and its image completely conformed with the concept of ‘modern’ in the minds of ordinary Chinese people. The Sheraton Huating Hotel marked the beginning of a revival of interest by designers in Shanghai in eye-catching space and form in the city (Figs 3, 4).

One year after the Union Building was finished, Japanese architects designed another ‘modern’
scheme in the Ruijin Building. Ruijin was the first high-rise building of the 1980s with a steel structure and external metal tile façades which set a precedent for many other buildings throughout the city. The use of advanced technology and materials no doubt symbolised a new era. The design of the Union Building and the Huating Hotel is universal, while the Ruijin example embodies imported ideas suitable for the early years of the open-door policy. The Union Building was conceived from a typical floor plan, while the Ruijin Building shows its sophistication in the sectional design. In its lobby, the building guide is even shown in section, instead of plan. Its unique design is appropriate for its functions, but difficult to understand and be copied elsewhere.

The rationality of the Ruijin Building is reflected in its internal arrangement. When novelty and fashion were replaced by new trends, the Ruijin Building remained timeless and classic. A building like the Ruijin is a ubiquitous mid-twentieth century corporate model and can easily be found in the streets of Japanese cities like Tokyo or even emerging American cities like Houston. But the functions, spatial composition, building shape and envelope are all rooted in Shanghai.

**Garden Hotel (1989): respecting history**

In 1989, the Garden Hotel was completed above the old French Club of Shanghai, in an area where the atmosphere of the 1920s lingers in the tree-lined avenues and Art Deco buildings are hidden behind rows of trees. The building was financed by the Japanese and designed by Obayashi Corporation of Tokyo with the East China Institute of Architectural Design acting as local consultants. The old two-storey French Club was renovated and served as its podium, including the original porch, lobby, atrium, banquet halls, shops and bars. An L-shaped new part was inserted between the 34-storey hotel tower and the old two-storey club.

The slightly projecting part of the tower and the external wall materials are all compatible with the old rotunda porch and stone cladding. The new L-shaped building also harmonises with the old building but uses a simpler form. The new L-shaped podium and the old building both adopt the American Art Deco style of the 1930s, which is naturally extended to the lift lobby of the hotel tower. The building’s design gently respects the existing context and the old structure (Fig. 5).

The Garden Hotel is built in the garden of the old French Club, surrounded by lawns and cypress trees. It is set back from the street, and fences and security guards exclude visits from ordinary citizens. Nearby are buildings of the 1930s: cinemas, hotels, cafés, boutique shops and clubhouses. The Garden
Hotel, with its tower, reinforces the old colonial Shanghai atmosphere. People in the area can physically and psychologically orient themselves by seeing this building.

A year later, the new Jin Jiang Tower, an hotel, this time designed by Wong Tung & Partners Ltd. (Architects and Planners) of Hong Kong, was completed on the opposite side of Maoming Road to the Garden Hotel. Jin Jiang was the original Grosvenor House of 1935, designed by Palmer and Turner and used as a government guest house after the communists took power in 1949. There are several other similar Art Deco buildings in the vicinity and they contribute to the strong nostalgic atmosphere of the area. However, the new Jin Jiang Tower completely ignored this historical context and the designer created a soaring 153-metre high edifice. The exaggerated entrance canopy, the 5-storey high atrium and the curtain wall express little empathy with the surrounding old neighbourhood. The building is topped with a double-deck revolving restaurant, floating above a 9-metre-high open garden. Its slim, slick, glittering and exclusive image received many plaudits in the city, similarly to the Union Building (Fig. 6).

Thus when designing new buildings in this historically sensitive district, Hong Kong and Japanese architects adopted different strategies. The Hong Kong architects erected a completely grand building which looked incongruous in the old neighbourhood, while the Japanese architects showed a professional respect for the physical surroundings. To harmonise with existing historical buildings, the new podium space of the Garden Hotel is merged with the old, but the original serves a new function. The façades of old and new are treated with the same language and they blend into a new entity. After twenty years, many more flamboyant buildings were built in the district, but the Garden Hotel keeps its elegant image, serving high-profile guests and their activities in the city. The design of the Garden Hotel set a precedent for the later trend towards conservation and contextualism in China.

Japanese designs in the Hongqiao District (1990s): modest presence

In the early 1990s, the Hongqiao Economic Development District had developed into a significant entity,11 and was a model for the new Pudong District on the east bank of the Huangpu River. Two buildings, the Tai Ping Yang Hotel and the Shanghai International Trade Centre, were designed by Nihon Sekkei in conjunction with the Shanghai Design Institute of Civil Architecture.

The two buildings are generic and mediocre in conception, partly because of the architects’ misunderstanding of China’s building control procedures.
The Hongqiao District was planned in detail in the late 1980s, when building volume, mass, vehicular and pedestrian ingress/egress were determined in an urban design model. These factors needed to be incorporated in urban design submissions for the approval of the municipal construction committee. The Japanese architects may have believed that the building’s shape could not be altered. For the Tai Ping Yang Hotel, they based their design for a building at a street corner of Zunyi Road on a similar curved building from Tokyo Bay. The International Exhibition Centre completely fits the perceived required shape in the Chinese submission drawing.
The tower for the Trade Centre is another version of the Union Building. The office tower and exhibition podium are aligned along the road, without any recess or indentations. The full-flush glass curtain wall was also seen as an appropriate aesthetic for the senior employees of transnational companies. In fact to some extent, the International Trade Centre enhanced the significance of the Union Building (Figs 7, 8).

In the same year (1990), the New World Yangtze Hotel (now Renaissance Yangtze Shanghai Hotel), designed by D. Heung & Associates of Hong Kong, was completed next to the Tai Ping Yang Hotel and the Shanghai International Trade Centre. Its roof and podium are diagonally cut and the massive oblique planes facing the street corner are eye-catching. In the early 1990s, the prominent buildings in Shanghai mostly took the shape of sharp and clean geometry. However, both the Japanese-designed buildings adopted more modest shapes.

Also in 1990, the completion of the Shanghai Centre, designed by John Portman & Associates...
of the USA, was a milestone in the array of imported architecture in Shanghai and aroused much attention. The high-density complex (plot ratio at 1:10) consists of the six-star Ritz-Carlton Portman Hotel in the centre with high-rise flats on two sides. Its huge podium, fountains, escalators, balconies and gardens are all open to the West Nanjing Road and the view of ordinary citizens. The public part includes a theatre, supermarket, American airline companies and various boutique shops: they showcased an enchanting new lifestyle for citizens who aspired to be wealthy and ‘westernised’ (Fig. 9).

In contrast, the Japanese-designed buildings had neither trendy appearances nor open accessible features, and were largely ignored by the inhabitants of Shanghai. No doubt, buildings designed by Japanese architects (all from big design companies) satisfied the clients’ functional and financial requirements and generated huge profits for their owners. However, neither building wrote a new page in the architectural development of Shanghai. In 1993, a Japanese consortium initiated the tallest skyscraper in Pudong, Shanghai, with an investment of over US$1 billion. This building was expected to be the world’s tallest. In an icon-conscious era, Japanese architects did not even make the shortlist. Kohn Pederson Fox Associates of the USA finally won the design competition and their 492-metre-high building was completed in 2008.

Three twenty-first century projects: surfing the wave

After twenty years of intensive development, Shanghai seems to have successfully built a ‘modern’ cityscape: skyscrapers are everywhere. In the new century, cities, as nodes of global networks, are radiating a more powerful influence than nations. Shanghai is actively pursuing ‘global node’ status by adjusting its industrial policies and exhibiting its history and culture. This old industrial town has evolved through manufacturing to the services and is now a hub for the financial and creative industries (Fig. 10).

Concurrently, Japanese architects have quickened their efforts to enter the Chinese market. The Nikken Sekkei organisation alone has designed in Shanghai the Bank of China building, the Shanghai Information Building, the Eastern Bund Garden, the Citicorp Building and the Chia Tai Building. In contrast to the 1980s, clients are mostly private enterprises or multinational companies. These clients demand not only highly functional buildings, but also sound design and attractive appearances. Some Japanese architects with international reputations, for example Isozaki Arata, Tadao Ando and Kengo Kuma, have also made their
debuts in Shanghai. Three projects in particular marked this transition. They were either conceived in conjunction with local professionals or fully designed by Japanese architects.

The first project is Xintiandi (New Horizon) in the old French quarter, financed by Shui On Ltd. of Hong Kong and mainly designed by Nikken Sekkei of Japan and Ben Wood of the USA. Xintiandi is located in the old zone of *lilong* terraced lane houses. Residents were evicted and most of their lane houses demolished. Used as boutique shops, cafés and restaurants, the new buildings adopted the fabric of *lilong* houses, and retained fragments of the original façades and gates. Some old stone gates and even bricks were reinstalled in the new buildings. Those buildings of particular historic interest were mostly rebuilt. The rejuvenated designs of the 1930s with new materials and contents create an illusion of Shanghai in its glory days.

The Xintiandi project evokes the nostalgia of Shanghai after decades of turbulent revolution. Conspicuous consumption takes place in this old-fashioned area and makes it a focus of new trends. In the eyes of overseas tourists, Xintiandi is compatible with the Shanghai of yesterday which was learnt about from old photographs and films. Xintiandi is successful through keeping ‘historic reality’ and stimulating metropolitan desires. However, the new collage of ‘historic buildings’ lacks temporal depth. The Japanese design firm undertook the documentation of the old houses and conceived a successful renovation strategy. The developer was rewarded with huge

Figure 10. View of Pudong, east bank, Huangpu River, Shanghai in the twenty-first century: the Global Financial Centre was funded by a Japanese consortium, but designed by an American firm. The landmark buildings in Pudong are mostly designed by foreign architects, but few are Japanese.
profits by renting out the property and developing high-rise housing and commercial offices nearby (Fig. 11).

While Xintiandi is a popular venue, the No.8 Bridge, designed by HMA (Seiichi Hirokawa, Kenji Hantant, Hideki Azuma) of Japan, is a factory of trendsetting ideas. No.8 Bridge consists of eight 1950s’ factory workshops which have been converted into studio spaces for the creative arts. The internal streets formed within the renovated areas resemble fingers. The back street and the public space related to Building 5 connect all these finger shapes (Fig. 12).

Interestingly, the No.8 Bridge creative centre does not have a perfect architectural image. For example, Building 2 has elevations which are all different and do not look like a whole building. If seen from the internal street, however, the two sides are pleasantly compatible. Several of the streets present a continuous, harmonising, enclosing façade. The traditional clay brick here is not load-bearing, only a veneer which was introduced in the renovation. Obviously, the renovation of No.8 Bridge does not begin with individual buildings but stems from the manipulation of the internal streets. In fact the internal streets become the main space and focus of attention. The No.8 Bridge creates an optimistic illusion of international living by superimposing various elements on the street façade. It symbolises the boom in the creative industries and the increased desire of people to inhabit a large international city. The No.8 Bridge was soon occupied by designers, artists, visitors and buyers.
The third project is the Shanghai International Design Centre, designed by Tadao Ando Architect and Associates. It is a building complex located at the Guokang Road, next to Tongji University. In the past ten years, hundreds of building- and design-related companies have located themselves on the periphery of Tongji University and have engendered an annual revenue of 2 thousand million yuan (US$ 280 million). The district is known as the ‘design silicon valley’ of Shanghai. Ando’s design, commissioned by the Tongji University Science Park Ltd. in 2004, is an iconic landmark in the area.

The Shanghai International Design Centre’s site is on a narrow plot of 9,000 sq.m., and it has a total floor area of 36,000 sq.m. The north of the site is flanked by a motorway. The building complex extends in an east-west direction. A 24-storey-high tower is located at the west end and is surrounded by a cultural centre, a 6-storey-high Building B to the north, and a lower Building C to the south. These two buildings form a narrow square 10–12 metres wide. This square starts from the existing headquarters building, goes through the canopy of Building D and ends at the tower. The base level of the square changes height, and its shape alters with the opening and closing geometries of the surrounding buildings. The relationship of buildings and the elaborated square embodied the designer’s desire to mingle people’s activities with the environment. With this, his first formal design project in China, Ando himself was also exploring the proper architectural language for the modernisation of Shanghai. Although there are plenty of similar good-quality buildings nearby, the developer has high expectations for the Ando ‘brand’. The building broke ground in 2007 (figs 13, 14).

In these three projects, it is attempted in Xintiandi to construct individual buildings redolent of a perceived romantic past, while the No.8 Bridge eliminates the individual building concept and presents a juxtaposition of street vistas and the Shanghai International Design Centre establishes a sophisticated complex in a developing district as a significant milestone in the development of Shanghai’s creative industry.

Japanese design in Shanghai: a contemplation

This paper briefly reviews Japanese architectural design in Shanghai in the late-twentieth and
early-twenty-first centuries, and includes some typical examples at various stages of development. In the 1980s, when the ‘Open Door’ policy was first adopted, Japanese architects designed a mode of living-working for expatriates to meet the societal demands of the time. The new hotel in the old French quarter successfully respected history and the environment. In the 1990s, buildings in Hongqiao and other districts continued to serve the client’s economic and financial needs. These buildings reflected Japanese architects’ (mainly from big design companies) attitudes and principles for dealing with urban architecture. These principles are in line with the spirit of Modern architecture: form following function, no extra decoration, economical, accompanied by Japanese introversion and self-discipline. However, these buildings have not been greatly valued by Shanghai’s citizens or in the international architectural field.

The collective perception of ‘modern’ in China, tends to interpret it as ‘new and fashionable’ as opposed to the strict dictionary definition of ‘characteristic of the present or recent times’. This feeling was especially strong after Chinese people had been isolated from the western world for thirty years. The Japanese designs of the 1980s and 1990s failed to provide a ‘fashionable’ response according to this perception.
Over the last twenty years, Shanghai has digested quickly the fruits of world architecture, including Modernism, and made great strides to catch up with trends in globalisation. Xintiandi, No. 8 Bridge, the Shanghai International Design Centre and other Japanese designs reveal a new direction for urban architecture and contrast sharply with Japanese designs of the previous twenty years. They capture the trend for industrial transitions, and pay much attention to fun, urbanity, environment and publicity. Xintiandi has rebuilt ‘historic’ lane house buildings, while the No. 8 Bridge project extends compatible street façades: the two projects reflect different strategies for urban renewal.

In these two projects, old contexts and new icons are mainly adopted, with architectural space
being of secondary importance. When completed, the Shanghai Design Centre will be more comprehensive in terms of architecture and space; it is being developed as a complex of internal and external spaces both horizontally and vertically to accommodate civic activities. The three projects all express the optimistic aspirations of an international metropolis: booming new industries, a collage of various materials and exuberant activities. The designs by Japanese architects in Shanghai have attracted international attention in the new millennium.¹⁴

The Japanese architects who designed buildings in Shanghai in the 1980s and 90s were all from big design corporations (some staffed by more than one thousand people). They had designed numerous office and hotel blocks in Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama, Fukuoka and other Japanese cities with excellent details and admirable precision. Those blocks formed endlessly unified street façades with few individual icons ‘stealing the
show’. The buildings they designed in Shanghai in the 1980s and 1990s are natural continuations of such works in their home country. They generally conform to the principles laid down by the early Modernist pioneers.15

In the face of globalisation and fierce commercial competition, Japanese architectural design continuously changes its strategies and attitudes towards China and Shanghai. In addition to traditional technical excellence, a group of young Japanese architects are deliberately pursuing unique and meaningful form-giving. Japanese architecture presents a diversified state compared to thirty years’ ago (figs 15, 16). With this background, stellar architects with idiosyncratic styles are invited to Shanghai. Their individual brands and visions are exactly what Shanghai — a city eager to put itself in the world map — wants to acquire. Reviewing the past thirty years showcases the unique experience Shanghai has gained in its progress toward modernisation and sheds significant light on the way ahead.

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Notes and references

2. The statistics have been developed by the authors from sources such as journals, magazines, newspapers, websites, archives of design firms and their own investigations.

3. For the definition of Modernism, we refer to Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture — A Critical History* (London, Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1992); for a view of good urban design, we refer to Alexander R. Cuthbert, ‘Urban design: requiem for an era — review and critique of the last 50 years’, *Urban Design International*, 12 (2007), pp.177–223.

4. Telephone interview with Mr. Hong Birong, the former director of the Shanghai Design Institute of Civic Architecture, September 22nd–24th, 2005.


8. In the early years of the open-door policy, foreigners could not freely rent ordinary property. They had to live in and rent flats and office buildings designated by the Chinese Government. In the early 1990s, the Chinese Government allowed foreigners to buy properties specifically designed for overseas people with higher prices. In June, 2001, the Shanghai municipal government promulgated *Opinions on Property Sale for Domestic and Overseas Buyers* cancelling restrictions on property affecting overseas buyers.


11. In 1984, the Shanghai municipal government approved an area of 0.652 km² in Hongqiao as a pilot development zone and attracted foreign investment to construct the infrastructure and individual buildings. A land leasing system was also first adopted in 1988. The Hongqiao development zone
consists of exhibition, trading, office, residential and entertainment buildings, and was an experiment related to the later Pudong development.

12. According to China’s old regulations, buildings over 8 storeys, or 24 metres high, were defined as ‘high-rise’ buildings: lifts had to be installed in such high-rise buildings. See Charlie Q. L. Xue, *Building Practice in China*, op. cit. Around 5000 skyscrapers over 18 storeys were completed in Shanghai during the twenty-year period 1985–2005. See ‘Interview with Wu Jiang (Shanghai Urban Planning Bureau)’, *Architecture and Urbanism*, No.399 (Tokyo, December, 2003), p.79.


14. The designs by Isozaki Arata and Kengo Kuma were reported by influential international design magazines like *The Architectural Review*, and exhibited overseas. Xintiandi is a darling of popular media such *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek* and the BBC.