

# UC Berkeley Publications

## Title

Nearing Nanjing, 1938

## Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6657d0ww>

## Journal

Room One Thousand, 3(3)

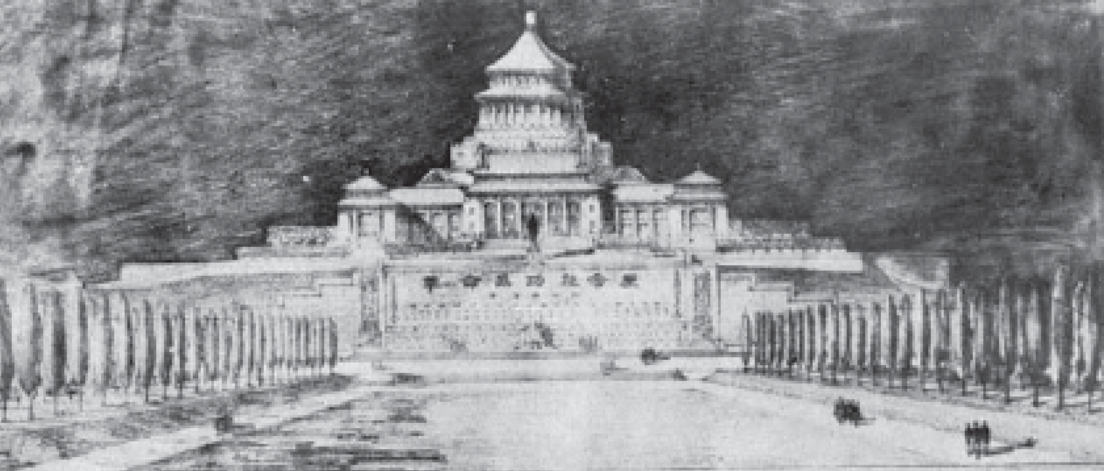
## Author

Shih, Evelyn

## Publication Date

2015

Peer reviewed



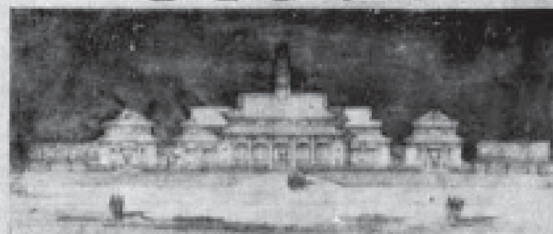
圖面正部黨央中



圖面正府政民國



圖面正院



圖面正部

Evelyn Shih

## Nearing Nanjing, 1938

The Beautiful, the Empty, and the Dead

Travel begins, despite any designs of the traveler to the contrary, with self-serving anticipation. The very act of crossing borders, of encountering linguistic foreignness, sets the individual traveler in a position of vulnerability—at the very least, within the realm of the word. One's semiotic world becomes looser, more slippery, evasive. In this vulnerability, perhaps, it is a matter of course that the traveler resorts to whatever discourse is available to understand the new world in which travel takes place. Paradoxically, the experience of freedom from meaning often pushes the traveler—who may become the travel writer—back toward well-trod routes, time-honored conventions and cliché. Human and non-human objects observed in the land of travel, captured by the old-new words of this reactionary writer, are then entered into their particular textual economy, static prey to traveler's representation. For the travel writer, there is no such thing as discursive naïvete.

In this essay, I linger upon that least naïve of all travel: wartime journeys. Specifically, the route that Japanese nationals followed to Nanjing in 1938, directly after the erstwhile Chinese capital came under Japanese control through what was later called the Nanjing Massacre,

Opposite: Central Administrative Buildings, artist's rendering. Shou du ji hua, 1929.

marking the formal (if not actual) start of the second Sino-Japanese War. The six weeks following December 13, 1937, when the Japanese forces formally captured the city, led to mass rape, killings, theft, and destruction of the built environment. While the death toll is still debated, the Tokyo War Crimes trial presented an estimate of 200,000 civilians and surrendered soldiers dead, and the official Chinese estimate surpasses 300,000.<sup>1</sup> Destroyed records and the practice of mass burials and cremations obscure the true scope of deaths, but ominously suggest an even higher toll.<sup>2</sup> Wherever one travels, in the months that follow such a historical context of emergency, would seem to be determined by one's stake in the war; how could it not be so, when one walks among the remains of the city and its dead?

The two travelers whose accounts I use as an entry into this tendentious space, however, are not pilgrims seeking to worship at the altar of morbid curiosity or triumphalism. Certainly, Nanjing was the latest prize of Japan's conquest, the new capital that the government of the Republic of China, under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, had attempted to construct as a great, modern Chinese city. Yet the first of the two writers, the literary critic Kobayashi Hideo, who arrived in March 1938, refused to attend the ceremony that marked a new era of Japanese governance in Nanjing. Chen Fengyuan, a Taiwanese intellectual, poet and journalist, who arrived in late September, dwells far more upon the city's cultural heritage from centuries past than upon its yet unknown future. One a highly respected figure in the metropolis and the other a colonial intellectual who shared a cultural history with the newly conquered, Kobayashi and Chen both maintain a distance from the very system of imperial power that allowed them to travel to Nanjing in the first place. They treat the sight of the dead with reticence and restraint.

What they did instead was to turn travel narrative, a genre putatively concerned with external objects, inwards, toward the end of producing

a bounded self: an identity with fixed meaning. Chen and Kobayashi, approaching Nanjing from extremely different textual sources and narrative strategies, both attempted to rebuild their selves amidst a state of emergency. Emergency as I use it here extends beyond the six weeks of horror of the massacre itself into its aftermath, the months afterwards, when governance remained in flux, and various positionalities were also in emergence. These were positions not only vis-à-vis state subjecthood, but significantly here, positions vis-à-vis China as an imaginary, its cultural meaning, and the performance of difference in the real space of China. China looms large for them, not only as the object of Japanese conquest (for Kobayashi), but as the bounded state entity to which Taiwan once belonged (for Chen).<sup>3</sup>

But what exactly was the idea of China with which Chen and Kobayashi grappled, and why was it urgent for them to do so in the space of Nanjing? When we compare their accounts, they both seemed compelled to replicate an eerily consistent itinerary. Why should these very different travelers so closely follow the same list of landmarks or notable city features, and feel obliged not only to visit, but to depict them in their writings? The famous temples and the Sun Yat-sen mausoleum, the old city wall that coexists with new government buildings and the grand main boulevard, the mountains and lakes—what China meant, spatially, seems inseparable from this list. What or where was this secret script that informed their convergent paths?

Though they both wrote in the Japanese language and were traveling as members of the Japanese empire, Chen and Kobayashi actively interpreted a spatial discourse that had less to do with the new Japanese colonial government than with the Republic of China. In fact, they came to Nanjing after the grand city planning and subsequent building projects that the city underwent as it was being deliberately constructed as the new capital of China. Considered on an even longer

timeline, this modern re-imagination of Nanjing, from 1928 to 1937, was just the most recent attempt to modify the spatial organization of a city that had existed as an urban entity for centuries. Chen and Kobayashi's itineraries might be more accurately described as the latest tracing on a centuries-old palimpsest. Considering the fact that the darkest lines on this map were from the immediately preceding layer, it is little wonder that they felt the need not only to define themselves with respect to Japanese-language discourse, but also to engage with that still-present blueprint.

Interestingly, this Republican layer also retained certain deliberate transparencies, wherein older built environments were meant to remain visible. During the "Nanjing Decade" (1927-1937) of the Republic of China, Chiang Kai-shek used Nanjing as a base to consolidate his power over China, which was divided and under the control of various parties, factions, and militias. A key component of this strategy was to truly establish Nanjing—and not Beijing—as a great modern city worthy of representing the totality of China. The planning project involved Chinese and American architects, who were brought in to help "modernize" the city—while retaining traces of its history and cultural heritage.<sup>4</sup> Both Chen and Kobayashi remark on the evidence that these plans had significantly marked the city, but had not yet fulfilled their promise; they read the space of the capital as an interrupted work of city planning. That interruption, of course, was the all-encompassing war.

The spatial discourse of Nanjing, then, was not merely the planned space of the city as Chen and Kobayashi witnessed it, but also its thwarted future. Walking through the streets, they read what Nanjing *could have been* in projects started and now left unfinished. The itinerary that the two travel writers share, we might even say, was an itinerary of remains. The built and the human both remain in Nanjing, and become the objects of wartime travel writing. These remnants and revenants, in

turn, demand that the travel writer constantly write of and produce a bounded self, so as not to be swallowed by an overwhelming sense of destruction. Yet their tracings on top of urban ruins cannot help but be drawn to these stubborn remains, even as they attempt to mark themselves separate from them by way of an implicitly ideologized textual practice. Perhaps the only way to continue the journey is to constitute remains as Other: those bodies resemble the butchered animal, the unfortunate prey of larger beasts; but they are dead, and I am of the living. This space looks unfinished, vacated, and wrecked, but it is not my space; I am merely passing through. Modern war provides the constant necessity—diplomatic or otherwise—to verify one's status, one's citizenship, and national identity. These are categories that determine not only one's fate in the event of capture, but the primary experience of walking among and interacting with one's subjects, dead or alive.

These specific categories were particularly complicated for both Kobayashi Hideo and Chen Fengyuan. At the time, one needed specific traveling permission from Japanese authorities in order to travel not only to China, a foreign country, but to a city that was so recently a war zone. For Kobayashi, traveling to China as a known literary figure at this particular juncture was a position of potential ethical compromise, as there were certain expectations for his output following the trip. To a certain extent, he seems to have accepted these obligations; but he also appears to have felt alienated from a clear patriotic purpose.

For Chen, who was much less of a literary celebrity, the issue was one of a vexed colonial status. Taiwanese elites played a particular role in the emerging collaborationist government (*weixin zhengfu*) in Nanjing, Shanghai, and other cities newly controlled by Japan. A Japanese colony since the first Sino-Japanese War ended in 1895, Taiwan had fostered a generation of intellectuals fluent in modern Japanese. Many of these educated Taiwanese, unemployed in Taiwan,



Figure 1: Central Administrative Buildings from above, artist's rendering. *Shou du ji hua*, 1929.

found work within the collaboration government as bureaucrats and middlemen of Chinese ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> While the presence of Japanese could be felt, Taiwanese elites could often pass as Chinese, provided they could learn the Mandarin topolect.<sup>6</sup>

Chen Fengyuan benefited greatly from this new circuit of movement from Taiwan to China, although he himself did not take a new job on the continent. Yet like many who belonged to ethnically Chinese families in Taiwan, Chen maintained a strong interest in what it meant to be Chinese—at least, in a very particular fashion. Chen, a vibrant figure in Taiwanese journalism, also found time to frequent classical poetry societies that kept pre-colonial Chinese traditions alive.<sup>7</sup> Like most Taiwanese who received classical education alongside a modern Japanese education, the greater part of Chen's textual reference point,



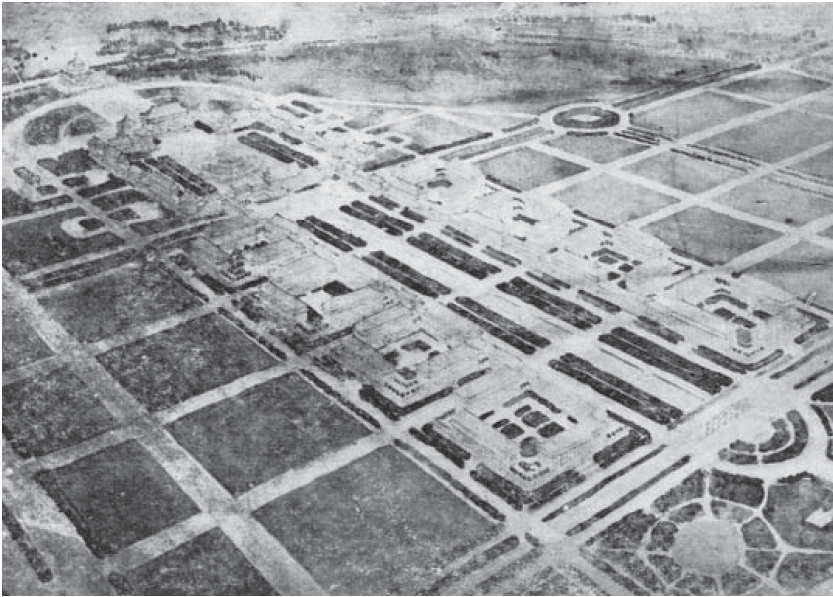


Figure 2: Plan for boulevards, artist's rendering. *Shou du ji hua*, 1929

when it came to China, was the canon of Chinese classics.<sup>8</sup> His identification as Chinese—yet simultaneous disavowal of the brutalized, dehumanized Chinese of Nanjing—becomes a powerful undercurrent throughout Chen's text: he becomes a latter day connoisseur of the pleasure boats, inheriting the aura of pre-modern Nanjing. When he observes that current Nanjing has fallen on hard times, it is only to take aesthetic pleasure from the ruins.

Kobayashi Hideo, as a Japanese intellectual, would have had access to same traditions of classical Chinese texts within Japan, referred to as *kangaku*. This type of sinology was kept alive not only by its active practitioners, but by educated Japanese who considered writing *kanshi*, or classical Chinese poetry, a part of their elite cultural practice. Yet Kobayashi's travel text rejects such knowledge of China. Although he

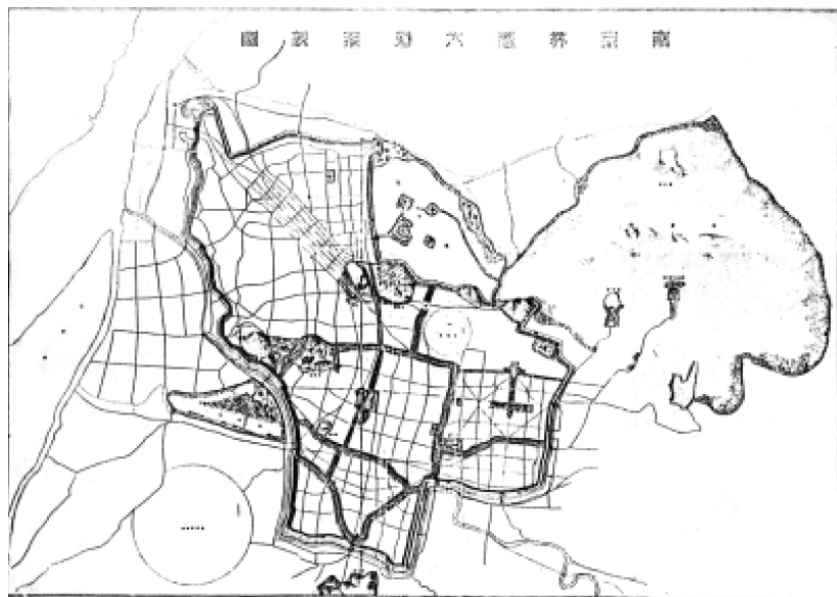


Figure 3: Overall plan showing tree-lined boulevards. Shou du ji hua, 1929.

equally rejects the triumphalism of his peers with regards to Nanjing, putting off his visit to Nanjing for as long as possible, he questions the validity of the classicist appreciation of China. Instead, his observations of the contemporary reality of China bring him to idiosyncratic moments of essayistic self-reflection. Kobayashi, for his part, cannot escape being interpellated as Japanese during his travels within Japanese-controlled China, but seems determined to escape the Japanese clichés about China by way of an almost solipsistic subjectivity.

The biggest difference between the two accounts, then, is not their superior position vis-à-vis China and the newly colonized citizens of Nanjing, but in their projection of the self in relation to the huge weight of Chinese cultural history. Nanjing is only a city, but through the government planning of the Nanjing Decade, it had become a metonym for the character of the whole continent. To be sure, Nanjing

was not their sole destination within China: Kobayashi's treatment of Nanjing in the text "Kôshû yori Nankin" (From Hangzhou to Nanjing) is one installment of a series that documented his trip to China and began to see print in May of 1938 in *Bungei Shunjû*.<sup>9</sup> The same trip would take him through Shanghai, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Manchuria, and Seoul. Yet it is upon visiting Nanjing with its grand boulevards that Kobayashi most thoroughly contemplates China's quality of *hirosa* or "expansiveness." Chen Fengyuan's ambitious 50-day tour through the continent took him from Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Nanjing all the way north to Beijing, Manchuria, Seoul, and even Inner Mongolia. It resulted in a 1939 volume, *Shin Shina Sobyô*, or "Sketches of the New Shina." The entire volume, as well as revised versions of the same essays in Chen's 1942 anthology *Usô Bokuteki* ("Ink Drops at a Rainy Window"), was written in Japanese and referred to China with the modern Japanese moniker "Shina" instead of *Chûgoku*, the traditional designation for the Middle Kingdom. Though his persona assumed great intimacy with the Chinese textual tradition, Chen's text was written within the ideological framework of an imperial Japan that structurally de-centered China. It was specifically in Nanjing, however, that he practiced his own vision of Chinese identity, and measured the present circumstances of China against this personal imagination of "Chineseness."

The importance of Nanjing as a metonym was, in fact, the result of another projected vision: the Republic of China's plans for Nanjing during the Nanjing Decade. What Chiang Kai-shek sought to do was to consolidate China under his governance; in 1927, when he moved his government to Nanjing, this was no little task. The government under Chiang Kai-shek was in competition not only with the Communists, against whom he had turned in 1927, only months after his capture of Nanjing; but also with warlords in various regions of China who had effectively autonomous control of their own territories. Thus it

was important for the new capital to generate confidence among the citizenry in the legitimacy of the ROC as a governing party.<sup>10</sup>

As many historians of Nanjing's city planning have noted, the text that most clearly lays out the ambitions for the new capital—unrealistic though they may have been—was 1929's *Shoudu Jihua*, or "Capital City Plans," a 184-page publication produced by the "National Capital Design and Technical Specialist Office" and commissioned by the national government.<sup>11</sup> The document, complete with artist renderings of architecture and birds-eye view maps, proclaims, from the first page, that the aim for the grand city plan would be to "follow the scientific principles of Europe and America while preserving the merits of our national arts."<sup>12</sup> (See Figures 1-3) In other words, it was not enough to create a *Chinese* city that inherited the Chinese cultural legacy; in fact, it was even more to the point that the re-designed Nanjing would be a *modern* city that was on par with other global cities. With this in mind, the Republic of China government had appointed two American consultants, Henry Murphy and Charles Coolidge, to help draw up plans for the city alongside the mostly American-trained Chinese architects and planners. The leader of the design team and son of ROC founding father Sun Yat-sen, Sun Ke, was himself trained at UCLA and Columbia University as a planner. As Jeffrey Cody has remarked, this was a period in which American planners, architects, and engineers were actively "exporting the American city" as a "paradigm of progress," and the language of *Shoudu Jihua* reflects faith in the technical superiority and futurity of the American city.<sup>13</sup> Following records of Murphy's plans, it would be no exaggeration to say that Nanjing was being imagined as a patchwork of "great" American cities, with Washington, D. C. as the central point of reference.<sup>14</sup> These plans were reported in America as a part of Chiang's project to construct a modern China, as entrusted to the American Murphy (see Figure 4).<sup>15</sup>

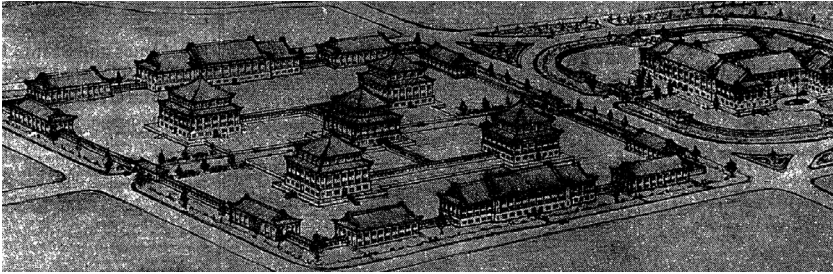


Figure 4: Henry Murphy's plan for Central Administrative Buildings. Henry Misselwitz, "China Lays Out a Great Capitol," *The New York Times*, September 15, 1929.

Where, then, did the “Chinese” aspect manifest itself in the plans and designs? Everyone from Murphy to the Chinese architects to the government officials commenting on the various competing designs remarked that something of a “Chinese essence” was desirable, provided it did not interfere with “scientific” parameters of hygiene, efficiency, and infrastructural standards. The process of synthesizing Chinese architectural style with Beaux-Arts style has been discussed by Cody et al. at length, and lies outside the parameters of our concern.<sup>16</sup> What I will explore, instead, are two ways in which the city plans for preserving and projecting Chineseness intersected with the paths of our two particular city walkers: Chen Fengyuan and Kobayashi Hideo. The first category is the way in which discourses of the Garden City and the City Beautiful seem to have informed a selective preservation of Ming-era structures and public spaces. Many of these sites became points on the itinerary of our two travel writers. As a corollary, I will briefly discuss the way in which the same discourses appear to have been the basis for the modern aesthetic of the boulevard, which Kobayashi, in particular, read as *symptomatic* of China's character. The second category is the design of the mausoleum of Sun Yat-sen, a memorial to the founding father of the Republic of China that became the symbolic anchor of the

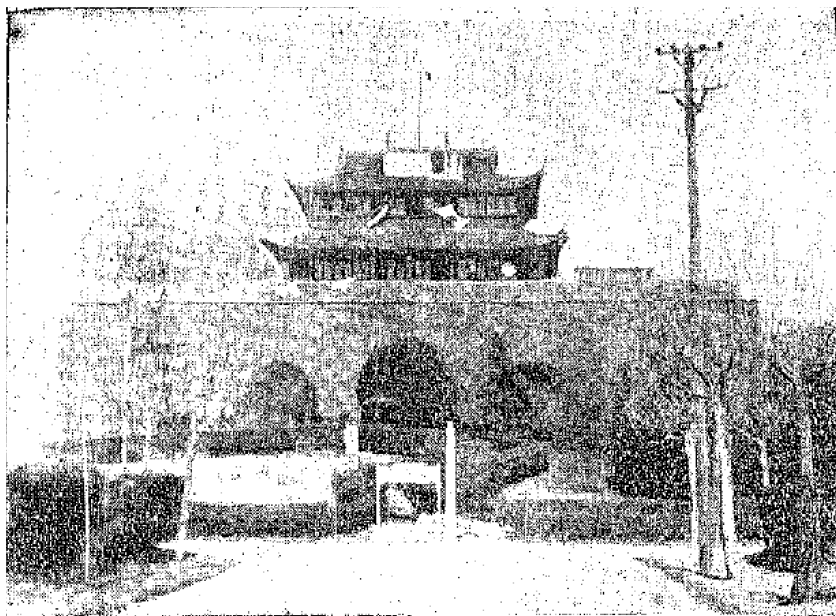


Figure 5: The Drum Tower. Chen Fengyuan, *Shin Shina Sobyō*, 1939.

entire city plan. The mausoleum and its spatial relationship with the rest of the city was designed with the ancient tombs of Ming emperors as well as Chinese laws of geomancy in mind, towards which Chen, as a connoisseur of Ming culture, gravitated. Kobayashi, on the other hand, felt compelled by the spatial arrangement of the city to look upon it from afar, a moment which immediately precedes his contemplation of fresh human remains left in the open nearby. In other words, the second category is the way in which the city plan dealt with death and continuity, but the way in which death was present, in the space of the city, had drastically changed due to events of the Nanjing Massacre. Although Chen held this new kind of death at arm's length, he too eventually feels compelled to treat it in his travel writing.



Figure 6: The Drum Tower from above. Zhu Xie, *Jinling guji mingsheng yingji*, 1936.

The two categories discussed here provide a rough sketch of two contrasting observations of Nanjing: on one end, the pressing issue of containment, or lack thereof, pertaining to death and human remains; on the other, the evidence of design for life, beauty, vitality, and the future. The nature of travel in 1938, however, is such that even the latter was viewed through the lens of its failure. This is not unlike the narrative of other utopian city plans in retrospect, after they have inevitably failed, for Utopia is nowhere. Jane Jacobs, in dealing with the Garden City, Radiant City, and City Beautiful movements that were in vogue in America during the 1920s—just at the moment that American planning ideas were being “exported” to China—calls these movements “utopian” due to their high-minded ideals regarding urban beauty, the educational function of monuments, and compartmentalized urban space.<sup>17</sup> Jacobs,



Figure 7: Sun Yat-sen Boulevard. Ma Chao-chun, *Nanking's Development*, Nanjing Municipal Government, 1937.

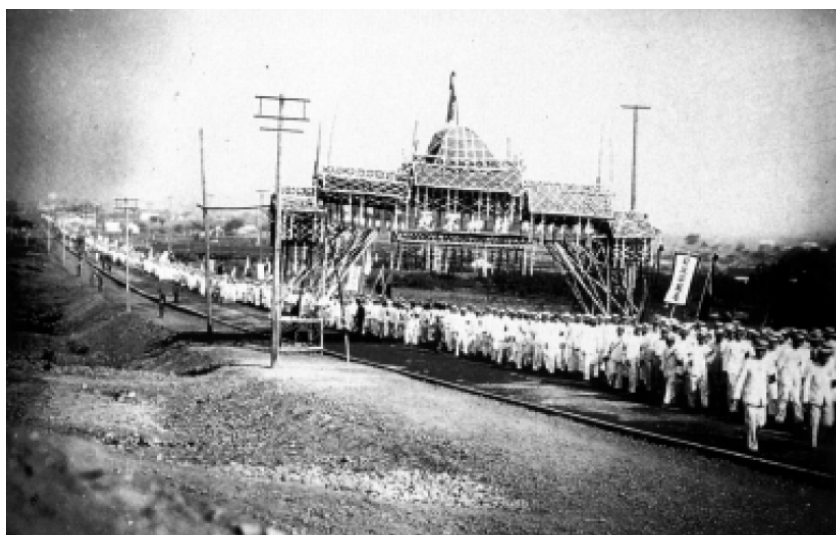


Figure 8: The first stage of Sun Yat-sen Boulevard construction, finished May 1929. Wan Renyuan, ed, *Sun Zhongshan yu guo min ge ming*, Taiwan Shang wu yin shu guan, 1994



of course, is interested in the fatal flaws of these “city-destroying” ideals, which in her mind caused the dysfunction and stagnation of cities such as Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C.

Nanjing’s reconstruction in the model of these cities was never complete enough for it to see a similar slow rot. And yet, when Chen and Kobayashi set foot in Nanjing, it was patently clear that the aspiration to greatness had left a mark on the millenia-old city. Describing being driven around with a guide to “see the famed landmarks,” Kobayashi remarks, “Suddenly it occurred to me that this was ten years of Chiang Kai-shek’s meticulous work...It gave me the deep impression of having taken the first step towards city planning in a great hurry, as even the road-side trees were still mere poplar saplings.”<sup>18</sup> Chen notes that from the vantage point of the top of the Drum Tower, a preserved Ming Dynasty watchtower, “the traces of the National Government’s reconstruction were visible everywhere.”<sup>19</sup> (Figure 5 and Figure 6)

It is understandable that the Drum Tower provided a good vantage point for the new city, for it stood at the geometric center and took residence in a traffic circle on Sun Yat-sen Boulevard, which, as Chen goes on to explain, was a new thoroughfare going straight down south through the preserved ruins of the Ming palace and to the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum (Figure 7). In fact, we can pinpoint the Drum Tower as a location where Chen and Kobayashi’s itineraries crossed: Kobayashi specifically recalls hearing his guide introducing National Central University, which is visible in the top of the photograph of Drum Tower in Figure 6. It is not surprising that they passed through this space, since the Sun Yat-sen Boulevard was one of the largest undertakings of the capital city project. Not only was the boulevard wider than any street previously existing in Nanjing, but it also passed through the Ming Dynasty era walls and gates that zoned the city with physical barriers. The plan caused some controversy as the city government

struggled to remove the city inhabitants whose homes and properties were occupying the many sites of expansion.<sup>20</sup> (Figure 8) The stated model for Sun Yat-sen Boulevard in *Shoudu Jianshe*, incidentally, was the Bronx River Parkway,<sup>21</sup> which was designed to provide green space for nearby residents.<sup>22</sup> The poplar and acacia saplings that Kobayashi recalls were a part of the greening effort. (See Figure 3, bold lines indicate parkways.)

The incorporation and renovation of Drum Tower into the boulevard made a ruin into a relic, a tribute to the past Ming era, the last ethnic Han Chinese dynasty of the imperial era (Figure 9).<sup>23</sup> Instead of being razed, as many houses were, it was restored as an element of pre-modern architecture within the structure of a modern city design of a thoroughfare, beautifying the city as a ready-made monument situated within a small green space. Along with the unprecedented breadth of the Sun Yat-sen Boulevard, it contributed to the openness of public space, especially in the zone set aside for government buildings, a quality that was considered not only desirable for its ability to project the power of the state, but also for its ability to discipline urban behavior. The grand new boulevard was clean; it was spacious and orderly; it required proper public behavior, and the Drum Tower was a feature that marked it as different from any other boulevard in a European or American city.

Yet despite the impression of painstaking city planning that Kobayashi sensed from his trip on the thoroughfare, he completely omits the Drum Tower. He notes the universities, the government buildings, and even the roadside trees, all visible from the tower; but for all intents and purposes, the Drum Tower does not exist in Kobayashi's Nanjing. This omission, strange as it may seem, is in keeping with Kobayashi's practice throughout his travel writing in China of willfully ignoring the historicity of preserved structures. In a previous episode in Hangzhou, where he visited a well-known Yue Fei temple, he writes:



Figure 9: The Drum Tower in the 19th Century before reconstruction. Liu Xiaofan, ed., *Nanjing jiu ying*, Renmin mei shu chu ban she, 1998

“I wrote down the name in my notebook, and that’s why I know it, but due to my shallow knowledge of Eastern history, it is hard to make any meaning out of it other than the fact that I wrote it down. On the most basic level, if I were asked what there is to see there, I would not even have a guess.”<sup>24</sup> Kobayashi’s interpretation of the space of China rejects *kangaku*, the Japanese study of classical Chinese knowledge, instead validating the subjective experience of the present—even if that experience is one where meaning is void.

Chen, on the other hand, takes the opposite approach: his travel writing is replete with reference to previous writings that either describe or evoke the atmosphere of Nanjing. He quotes from plays that romanticize the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD); he recounts the history of other reconstructed historical monuments like the Drum Tower. He even goes as far as to evoke the ancient legend of a Nanjing curse, wherein the Qin Emperor (c. 259 BC) deliberately destroyed the geomantic power of the city by creating the Qinhuai canal. According



Figure 10: The Qinhuai Pleasure boats. Chen Fengyuan, *Shin Shina Sobyō*, 1939.

to the legend, every subsequent kingdom or empire that attempted to make it the capital would fall when its ruler became obsessively infatuated with a consort. “It is so mysterious that we may even wonder if Chiang Kai-shek loved [his wife] Song Meiling too much, causing him to retread the steps of the princes of the Six Dynasties,” he adds, tongue in cheek.<sup>25</sup> Suddenly, even the fall of Nanjing in the course of modern warfare becomes a matter of fulfilling a Chinese legend.

This moment in the text, light though it may be, reveals the intimacy of the relationship between traveling and textual tradition for Chen. Not only does he quote it to proffer information about the location of travel, but he seeks to insert the present—including his own present—into an intertextual performance. This is highlighted by his frequent interjection of his own compositions of classical Chinese poetry at intervals into the

mostly prosaic text. These lyrical verses were what he was mostly known for at the time, outside of journalistic work, but, here, gesture to the idea that his use of reference to the Chinese classical tradition was, in fact, like the poetry, part of his literary persona. He styled himself as a gentleman of the late-imperial sort: he knew classics, he wrote poetry to express both fine lyrical emotions and grand sentiments about history, and he was even a connoisseur of the Nanjing courtesan.

As Chen explains, the courtesans of the painted boats of Q<sub>in</sub>huai were legendary for their beauty and talent as performers over the centuries, and this tradition still existed in modern Nanjing. In fact, Chen had visited Nanjing in 1924, and it was his brief patronage of the pleasure quarters that left the most lasting mark upon his memory as having a *Shina rasii* or “typically Chinese” flavor. He asks his Nanjing friends to help re-create the experience, only to be disappointed with the lower caliber of courtesan singing at their banquet (Figure 10). He writes a poem of historical pathos: “Pleasure boats and pipe song all to dust/ Not one remains of the Six Dynasty beauties/ Dreary cracked shingle in remaining city walls/ Hard to seek the Q<sub>in</sub>huai spring of days past.” At the prompting of a *Weixin* puppet government official, at a banquet the following night, however, he reassesses the girls present, and offers a new poem with a more hopeful tone: “Jade trees dry up but the jade disk moon is new/ Q<sub>in</sub>huai has not sunken, after all/ After Xiao Lan’s departure elegance ceased/ The pure voice of Huang Guichun remains.”<sup>26</sup> After Chen’s more journalistic observations of city ruins earlier in the piece, the allegorical resonance of this anecdote speaks volumes. The tension between Chen’s horror at a great Chinese city’s destruction by war and the pressure to drum up hope for its future, for the possibility of renewal after great trauma under the *Weixin* government, is spelled out in this act of rewriting.

Caught up in the spell of Chen’s narrative, we may, as readers, be

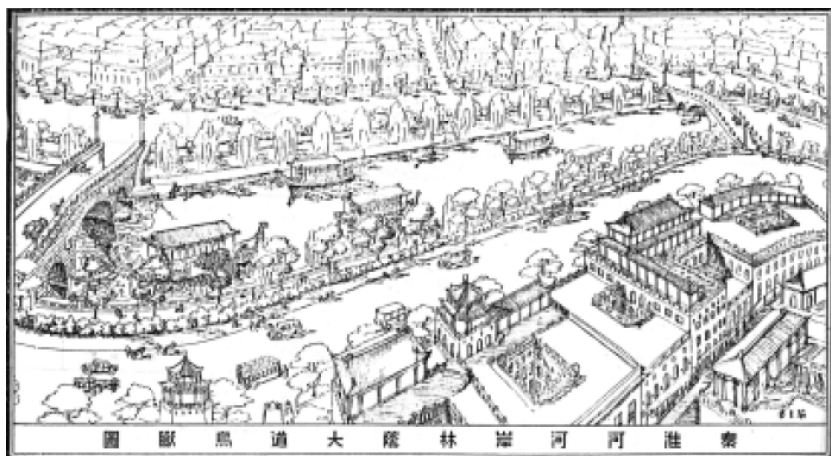


Figure 11: The Qinhuai sector, artist's rendering. *Shou du ji hua*, 1929.

tempted to merely regard him as a kind of Taiwanese Don Quixote who is clinging to a romantic vision of the Chinese poetic and literary tradition that no longer exists after the fall of yet another Chinese ruler. Considered against the city planning vision of the Qinhuai canal, however, his wish to re-create the symbiotic poet-to-courtesan relationship may have appeared pathological to modern Chinese bureaucrats. Following *Shoudu Jihua*, the Qinhuai canal was supposed to have been retired from active use as a shipping canal and preserved as a park (See plan Figure 11).<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, far from being captive to the guiles of seductive women, actually sought, in turns, to eradicate and regulate prostitution in Nanjing, but met with trenchant resistance at the local level.<sup>28</sup> (Figure 12, the cleaned-up canals in 1933.) Chen describes the courtesans as having “fled to the four directions” during the devastation of the Japanese conquest, with only a few now returned to work in the old pleasure quarters. What he does not entertain as a possibility is the fact that rape and death were likely in store for those unlucky enough to be caught in the city during

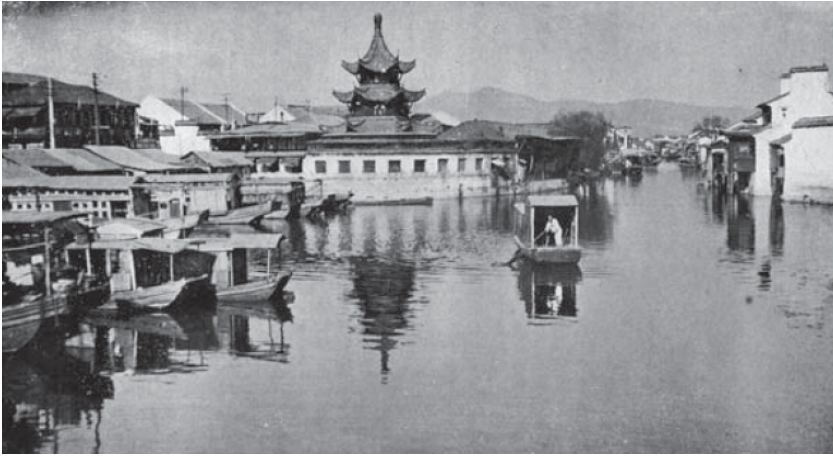


Figure 12: The Qinhuai area. Nanking Woman's Club, Sketches of Nanjing, 1933.

the Nanjing Massacre; and those that survived likely saw their numbers swollen during the *Weixin* period due to general social unrest and new potential sources of clientele.

It's worth considering that Kobayashi Hideo, as a Japanese traveler, also passed through the Confucius Temple where many of the pleasure boats pick up clients. Chen calls the juxtaposition of the decorous Confucius Temple with the pleasure boats "almost too ironic." Kobayashi, however, merely compares the small cluster of shops around the temple to the shops in front of Asakusa in Tokyo. Of course, he finds the stalls lacking, for post-calamity shortages have reduced the wares to only a few paltry offerings. He does not care to notice transactions of the sort Chen engaged in during his travel, but notes instead a difference between the passersby in Nanjing and those in Hangzhou or even war-torn Shanghai: their eyes were listless. Vitality was somehow lacking, even in the smaller, less manicured streets of Nanjing. The city was moving, but it was the motion of the undead.

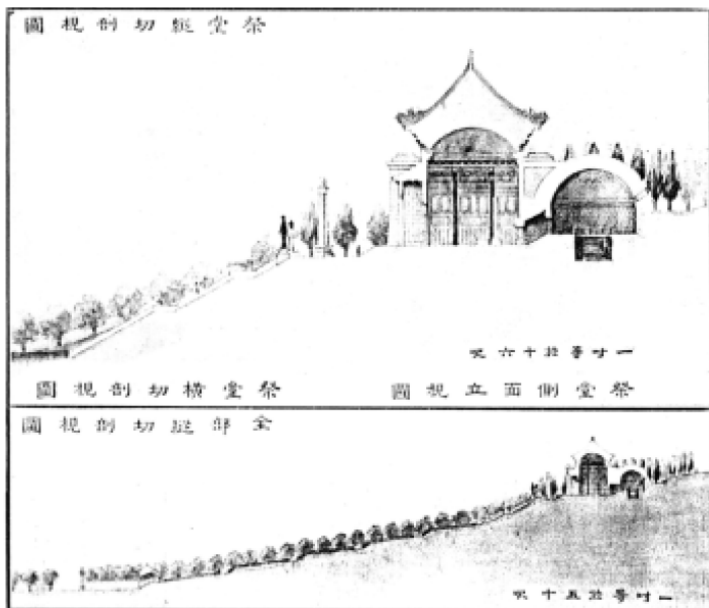


Figure 13: Cutaway, diagram for Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum. Lü Yanzhi, 1925. Collected in *Zong li ling yuan guan li wei yuan hui bao gao*, 1931.

For the dead were still present in the city, even in October and November during Chen Fengyuan's visit. He wrote in open terms of the long dead: Sun Yat-sen, preserved like Lenin in his mausoleum, and the Ming royals who lay in eternal rest around him (Figure 13). Chen's treatment of a visit to Purple Mountain, the locus of these burial sites, was similar in tone to his treatment of Sun Yat-sen Boulevard and the government buildings. The site had fallen into disrepair, ten months after the "occupation," but "the fact that it had been carefully maintained during the time of the National Government was clear to be seen."<sup>29</sup> The graves were "modernistic" but had "pure Chinese style" in the form of touches such as roof tiles on entrance gates. Chen, by his own account a reverent pilgrim at the foot of the man who invented modern China, becomes an apologist for Sun Yat-sen, arguing that



Sun was not “anti-Japanese” in his lifetime, and thus still commanded respect as a great man in the new era. The continuity that Chen seeks for Sun’s memory was, one might argue, built into the plan of the city. It was the manifest destination of the Sun Yat-sen Boulevard, and though Kobayashi had no interest in visiting it, he seems to feel compelled to note the “famed Sun Yat-sen mausoleum” as it was “inlaid in the belly of Purple Mountain” before his eyes as he stood on the preserved Ming city wall. Perhaps its ritual centrality to the whole project of nation-building through the creation of a model city was built into the new capital, and Kobayashi merely picked up on these cues while following his own route through the city. Sun’s wish to be buried in Nanjing and his conviction, before he died, that Nanjing should be the new capital of the Republic symbolically motivated the whole endeavor of capital planning in the years after his death in 1925.<sup>30</sup>

Sun’s ritualized remains were carefully housed according to plan even after the failure of the capital project in 1937; much more of the human remainder, however, lay anonymous and exposed in *Weixin* era Nanjing. No grave, no matter how modern or “Chinese,” could entirely contain them in Nanjing’s state of emergency. They did not fit into any particular itinerary, but could irrupt into the urban fabric at any time. Both Chen’s and Kobayashi’s texts, however, employed strategies to stabilize their meaning. After all, both texts were to be distributed within the Japanese empire, and a direct treatment—especially of the quantity and manner of deaths—would have entailed the risk of censure or censorship. What becomes apparent, in comparing their respective strategies, is that both authors reflexively recoil back to the living self, in a move of reaffirmation that identifies the human remainder as an object of aestheticization.

Chen, for example, only dares to envision the human cost through a simile with the pleasure boats of Qinhuai.

...The Pacific Restaurant where we were, a high-class establishment by reputation, was a sooty old two-story building. The balcony facing the Qinhuai was already rotting. Buildings on the other side, if we may call them buildings, were the remnants of brothels, and as traces of the chaos of war they were for the most part extremely disordered like a fallen, dilapidated city wall. As far as the eye could see, a scene that evoked a sense of desolation. Not only were the waters of the Qinhuai stagnating, but the pleasure boats lay everywhere silent and horizontal, like corpses in a city of the dead.<sup>31</sup>

The almost gothic eating establishment, rotting but clinging on to life, suggests the scent of decomposition. The collapsed brothels figure as a crumbled city wall, a trope that often evokes a fallen castle or dynastic power in classical poetry. And finally, the pleasure boats themselves feature as the figures of the human remainder. Though Chen otherwise appears rather cavalier in his assessment of the courtesans and participation in male literati leisure activity, the presence of this evocative passage belies a strong sense of Nanjing's trauma, and the human costs of "occupation" by Japanese forces.

In the next sentence, however, he is back to form: he cites Satô Haruo, the Japanese modernist, as taking inspiration from ruins. "There is nothing more apt to inspire the poet to write of sorrows than the Qinhuai today," Chen declares. Just like that, Chen is no longer in danger of being the object of metaphor, another Chinese corpse in a city of the dead; he is a poet, and everything he sees merely fodder for the next verse. Quotation again allows Chen to fashion a persona through association. Here he becomes a disciple of Satô, who, incidentally, in this period, was a great supporter of colonial writers from Taiwan and Korea.<sup>32</sup> Chen dances on a dangerous edge, revealing his desire to

consume and to practice “Chineseness” but maintaining a web of other affiliations in order to protect his Taiwanese positionality.

Kobayashi’s position, by contrast, may seem less precarious. He was, after all, traveling in China on the pretense of delivering a literary award to a Japanese writer in the army. But Kobayashi turns unexpectedly on himself, so that by the end of the essay he has written himself into his own moment of liminality. If Chen makes corpses out of pleasure boats, Kobayashi engages in the less than tasteful process of making art from corpses. As the following scene begins, Kobayashi stands at the top of Guanghua Gate, taking in the view of what was recently a battlefield.

The trench was dug about three breadths wide, and in it are scattered hats, belts and the remnants of scorched birdcages. The bones of Chinese soldiers that were not quite buried stick out, standing in shreds. There is a thighbone in smooth brown that allowed the sun to shine through beautifully. There is a spine that looks like it is moist from being spread with coal tar. Flies thronged, and the shimmering air stank. An officer accompanied by two people climbed up. We’re taking a commemorative picture, so please press the shutter for us, I was told, so I snapped one against the background of a column that read “occupied by the Wakisaka troop.”<sup>33</sup>

The startling present tense that intrudes in Kobayashi’s past tense retelling draws attention to the direct objectification and terrifyingly aesthetic description of human remains. When the flies swoop in, the reality of decomposition and horror return—but not without distinctive visual effects. Everything has a color, a texture, a lighting scheme. That is, of course, until Kobayashi is hailed—presumably recognized as Japanese from outward appearance, as he is standing on top of the wall alone—and asked to take part in the creation of a photograph for fellow countrymen

in military uniform. Marked as Japanese, Kobayashi is drawn out of a moment of absorption in the abstracted, cruel beauty wrought by war. Yet the officer and his companions come across as equally out of place, non-critical tourists whose expectations are easy to fulfill with the click of a shutter at the pre-designated tourist location. The passage at once dramatizes the absurdity of the conventional tourists, who walk right past human bones, and Kobayashi's peculiar absorption in the present. As Kobayashi remarks in the preceding sentence, looking upon what he is told was a battlefield: "There wasn't anyone to ask, so as to where the battle began or how it happened, I do not know."<sup>34</sup> Again, Kobayashi embraces a void of meaning: the bodily artifacts of wartime human cost form a skeletal testimony for which there are no words, only sense.

The essay, however, soon ends upon ironic word play that enunciates a difference on the level of national identity. Leaving the Guanghai Gate, Kobayashi returns to the city and walks into a restaurant for some beer. Perhaps in a charitable mood, he treats three Chinese waitresses to beer and pork, but soon realizes that their pork is all lean while his, cut with fat, is of a lower quality. "The discrimination was so *conspicuous* that it was laughable,"<sup>35</sup> he writes. *Rokotsu* or "Conspicuous" here is written with a Chinese compound that literally could be taken to mean "revealing the bone." Like the thighbones of the previous scene, the microaggression of the women reveals the vulnerability of the traveler. He may reject context, national or otherwise, in order to achieve a subjective present; but the context will find him.

For as much as Kobayashi Hideo claims naïvete, there is no naïve wartime travel, and he knows it. This is the truth hiding in plain sight at every moment of his narrative: while he is busy interpreting the other space and the other people inhabiting it, he produces himself as their other. Chen Fengyuan, on the other hand, tries to fashion the self as an agent possessing intimate knowledge of Chineseness. Yet ultimately this

intimacy is curtailed, or *must* be, lest he be silenced. Only in enunciating difference with the Chinese can he continue to write.

This was not as easy as it may have seemed. If the city plan of a new capital in Nanjing was meant to enunciate Chineseness in a modern world, its interruption meant that this vision was left incomplete. It was left open to interpretation, and these two travel accounts were only two out of a multitude of narratives made possible by this juncture. The plan's power to suggest an itinerary survived, but its utopian nature and gesture towards futurity had been replaced by the gaze of nostalgia, or by a willful void. What was meant to be beautiful now becomes empty; what was meant to guide the steps of the living still guides our travelers, but it also houses absence. It houses the dead. Wartime travel writing claims immediacy even as it falls backwards into apostrophe.

If the capital of Nanjing had been synonymous with the power of China and its meaning in the world, it was, at the moment that Kobayashi and Chen entered it, a China whose meaning in the world faltered. When such meaning falters, it does not necessarily make it static prey to other strong cultural entities; in fact, I believe what it did, in the case of Chen and Kobayashi, was that it infected them with its own instability. Chen reached for a vision of China that belonged to the peculiar textual environment of colonial Taiwan, but mourned as it slipped through his grasp in the space of travel. Kobayashi tried to stabilize his experience through negation, but was confronted at each turn with the obstinate space of the city, which returned again and again to meanings that escaped his control. What these two travelers experienced and how they re-conceived it in their accounts suggests the continuing power of the Chinese city upon the imagination. Nanjing continued its own legend through built space, through text, and even through the overheard word or song. While a traveler can never be naïve, a traveler can also never quite arrive at a bounded self. There is always something left over.

## [Endnotes]

1. Charles S. Maier, *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
2. Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, (New York: Basic Books, 2012).
3. Taiwan, once a province of Qing China, became a Japanese colony in 1895 and remained so until 1945. Though Taiwan was first inhabited by Pacific Islanders, the Chinese population referred to itself as “Taiwanese” and continues to do so into the present. Chen was of Chinese ethnicity, but like other intellectuals of his milieu wrote in both Japanese and various forms of Chinese language.
4. Charles D Musgrove, *China’s Contested Capital. Architecture, Ritual, and Response in Nanjing* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013).
5. *Ibid*, 249.
6. Noted Taiwanese writer and itinerant traveler Wu Zhuoliu, who stayed in Nanjing for a full year from 1941-1942, worked in this capacity for the collaboration government, though he had some difficulty in adjusting to Mandarin. See Shi-ru Chen, “Identity Conundrum of Taiwanese Travelers to Mainland China during the Japanese Colonial Period: Using Lian Heng’s ‘Mainland Travel Notes’ and Wu Zhuoliu’s ‘Mixed Thoughts on Nanjing’ as Example,” *Ren Wen Yan Jiu Xue Bao* 41, no. 2 (April 2007): 33–50.
7. Shibo Lan, “The Price of Status—Discussing the Chinese Identity and Cultural Identification of Post-War Taiwanese with the Example of Chen Fengyuan (1893–1983) [Guo Min Shen Fen de Dai Jia-Yi Chen Fengyuan Ge an Tan Zhan Hou Taiwan Ren de Zhongguo Ren Xing Xiang Yu Wen Hua Ren Tong],” *Wen Hua Yan Jiu Yue Bao*, no. 125 (February 2012): 23–47.
8. Pre-colonial Chinese literary language in Taiwan was a late-Qing language, and grew further and further apart from the modern Chinese vernacular (baihua) practiced in China as the colonial period continued. Books from publishing centers in Shanghai were sought after but rare in colonial Taiwan, and the difference between the Mandarin-based vernacular and the Hokkien topolect in Taiwan was great enough to create a significant barrier to would-be learners of the new literary language.
9. Zeljko Cipris, “Responsibility of Intellectuals: Kobayashi Hideo on Japan at War,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, accessed October 28, 2014, <http://www.japanfocus.org/~Zeljko-Cipris/1625>.
10. See Charles D. Musgrove, *China’s Contested Capital. Architecture, Ritual, and Response in Nanjing* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013). Also: Jun-xiong Wang, “On the capital plan of Nanking in the nationalist era of China, 1928-1937” (National Cheng Kung University, 2002).
11. *Guo du she ji ji shu zhuan yuan ban shi chu, Shou Du Ji Hua* (Nanjing, 1929).

12. Ibid, 1.
13. Jeffrey W. Cody, "Exporting the American City as a Paradigm for Progress, 1920-1945," in *Exporting American Architecture 1870-2000* (Routledge, 2005).
14. Wang, 181.
15. Henry Misselwitz, "China Lays Out a Great Capitol," *The New York Times*, September 15, 1929.
16. In short, it was a complex process that involved the agency of Chinese actors studying modern architecture in America and Europe, non-Chinese actors who attained important positions in major building projects, and a constantly changing discourse of architecture's relationship to Chinese tradition and modernity. This resulted in a particular hybrid style overtaking many new projects at the time, with aesthetic and ideological implications. Jeffrey W. Cody, Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, and Tony Atkin, *Chinese Architecture and the Beaux-Arts* (University of Hawaii Press, 2011).
17. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).
18. Hideo Kobayashi, "Kōshū Yori Nankin," in *Kobayashi Hideo Shū, Chikuma Gendai Bungaku Taikei* 43 (Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1975), 442-52.
19. Fengyuan Chen, *Shin Shina Sobyō* (Taihoku: Taiwan Shin Minpo sha, 1939).
20. Charles D Musgrove, *China's Contested Capital. Architecture, Ritual, and Response in Nanjing* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013).
21. Jeffrey W. Cody, "Exporting the American City as a Paradigm for Progress, 1920-1945," in *Exporting American Architecture 1870-2000* (Routledge, 2005).
22. Diana Rice, "A MAGICAL PARKWAY LEADS OUT OF CITY; Bronx River, Once a Dumping Ground, Has Become a Long Vista of Sylvan Charm, With New Pictures at Every Turn -- Ambitious Landscape Development Is Nearly Completed," *The New York Times*, August 16, 1925, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=940DE1DB133AEF3ABC4E52DFBE66838E639EDE#>.
23. The Qing Dynasty, overthrown by those who would establish the Republic of China in 1911, was ruled by ethnic Manchus.
24. Hideo Kobayashi, "Kōshū," in *Kobayashi Hideo Shū, Chikuma Gendai Bungaku Taikei* 43 (Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1975), 432-41.
25. Chen, *Shin Shina Sobyō*. 55.
26. Xiao Lan was a talented courtesan whose performance impressed Chen in 1924, but who could not be found when he returned in 1938. Huang Guichun was a courtesan present at the dinner in 1938.
27. Wang, 170.
28. Zvia Lipkin, *Useless to the State: "Social Problems" and Social Engineering in Nationalist Nanjing, 1927-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2006).

29. Chen, Shin Shina Sobyō. 59.

30. Musgrove, *China's Contested Capital: Architecture, Ritual, and Response in Nanjing*. See also: Rudolf Wagner, "Ritual, Architecture, Politics, and Publicity during the Republic," in *Chinese Architecture and the Beaux-Arts*, ed. Jeffrey W. Cody, Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, and Tony Atkin (University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 223–78.

31. Chen, Shin Shina Sobyō.

32. He was, among many things, on the committee that awarded Long Yingzong from Taiwan and Kim Saryang from Korea with the Akutagawa Prize for their stories in the literary journal *Kaizō*.

33. Kobayashi, "Kōshū Yori Nankin."

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*