

## Special Paper

### **Background and Influences on Liang Sicheng's Planning Thoughts**

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#### **1. Introduction**

Liang Sicheng (梁思成), the honoured architectural historian, is viewed as a representative of Chinese intellectuals with unyielding integrity. His futile campaign to preserve Beijing from destruction remains relevant today as bulldozers roam the city. But his planning ideas are less known despite of his idolized status. We need an earnest examination of his ideas without mere repeating what he said. The first step to study his thoughts of planning in a systematic manner is to identify what had shaped Liang's thoughts about planning. This article reports my examination of the background for each of his planning publication.<sup>1</sup> It will first present an overview of Liang's planning ideas, followed by several sections discussing possible influences on his perspectives on planning.

#### **2. An Overview of Liang Sicheng's Major Planning Publications**

Table 1 presents a summary of Liang Sicheng's primary publications that can be grouped under six categories.

- (1) Western (primarily American) planning system and practices (A & C),
- (2) Urbanism, decentralisation and garden-city like neighbourhood planning (B & H),
- (3) The ideal design education as means to shape the physical environment (C),
- (4) The Liang-Chen Proposal – new town and urban rehabilitation (E),
- (5) Pleading for conserving old Beijing (D, F, G & I), and
- (6) A vision of an ideal city (J)

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<sup>1</sup> This journey started with advising CCTV on a documentary on Liang and an article by the author: "Lin Huiyin and Liang Sicheng as Architectural Students at the University of Pennsylvania (1924-27)." *Planning and Development*, 23(1): 75-93, 2008.

Table 1: Major Planning Publications of Liang Sicheng (Arranged in Chorological Order)

Item	Year of Publication	Title	Major Planning Themes and Comments
A	1930	《城市設計實用手冊 -- 天津特別市物質建設方案》 <i>Practical City Planning Manual: Proposal of the Material Construction of the Tianjin Special City</i>	This award-winning plan modelled on the 1929 <i>Capital Plan of Nanjing</i> and adopted American planning and zoning practices. It has strong emphasis on municipal administration and public.
B	1945	“市鎮的體系秩序” “The Structure and Order of Cities”	This short newspaper article was based on Eliel Saarinen’s notion of form-order. The article advocated for a loosely defined concept called “organic decentralisation.” Liang insisted that planners — not engineers — should develop city plans.
C	1949	“清華大學營建學系學制及學程計劃草案” “A Draft Program and Curriculum of the Department of Architecture and Planning, Tsinghua University” (“Draft Curriculum”)	Liang viewed planning as an extension of architecture to multiple physical settings. He stressed the needs of exposing students to humanities and social science subjects. The curriculum was likely influenced by the Holmes Perkins’ integrated environmental design curriculum at Harvard University.
D	1949 - 1951	Multiple letters to government officials	These letters expressed his concerns over the disorderly redevelopment in Beijing. He pleaded for establishing an effective planning system to guide redevelopment.
E	1950	《關於中央人民政府行政中心位置的建議》 <i>Proposal for the Location of the Central Administrative District of the PRC Central People's Government (Liang-Chen Proposal)</i>	This <i>Proposal</i> aimed at an orderly restoration of the old city and suggested to build a new town. Under the dual city regional plan, the old city would function as a cultural centre while the new town would function as an administrative centre. The layout of the new town would be similar to the old city with self-contained functional districts.
F	1950	“關於北京城牆存廢問題的討論” “A Discussion about the Preservation or Demolition of the Old City Walls in Beijing”	In arguing for the preservation of the walls, Liang explained the ideal city form in terms of multiple small self-contained districts, a theme mentioned earlier in B and E.
G	1951	“北京—都市計劃的無比傑作” “Beijing – The Unparalleled Masterpiece in City Planning”	This traced the historical development of Beijing and the city’s layout composed of segregated districts along its north-south axis. It quoted Nicholai Voronin’s concept of cultural and historical continuity.

Item	Year of Publication	Title	Major Planning Themes and Comments
H	1951	“序”《城市計劃大綱》 “Preface” of the <i>General Principles of City Planning</i>	Liang promoted the planning doctrines in the CIAM’s <i>Athens Charter</i> to government officials. <sup>2</sup> He characterised Raburn and garden cities as isolated half-successes. It also denounced the international architectural style and modernism that CIAM advocated.
I	1952	《蘇聯衛國戰爭被毀地區之重建》“譯者的體會” “Translators’ Understanding” of <i>Rebuilding the Liberated Areas of the Soviet Union</i>	It praised Voronin’s sensitivity to culture and history and argued that China should follow the Soviet experience to build cultural and aesthetical cities.
J	1952	《人民首都的市政建設》 “The Municipal Construction of the People’s Capital”	This article glorified the new government in accomplishing planning ideals. It seemed disingenuous because it did not mention the chaotic redevelopment and the inability of establishing an effective planning system in Beijing.

Most commentators agree that the tenets of Liang Sicheng’s planning thoughts include: 1) well-matched city form and order, 2) planning as a design of the physical environment, 3) organic decentralisation, 4) walkable and self-contained residential districts, 5) comfortable working and living conditions, 6) generous provision of green space and recreational facilities, 7) aesthetical value and cultural continuity, 8) historic preservation, 9) orderly rehabilitation of dilapidated areas, 10) the adherence to master planning, 11) the use of zoning codes, 12) the importance of survey and analysis, 13) the unique role of planning education from engineering training, and 14) the introduction of humanities into architecture and planning.<sup>3</sup>

Liang’s planning ideas were western-centred and had little Soviet influence. His ideas also evolved over time. He started with adopting the best practices of contemporary American practices like zoning, general planning, local planning system, and municipal administration reforms from 《首都計畫》 (*The Capital Plan of Nanjing*, hereafter the *Capital Plan*). Later, Liang was attracted to Saarinen’s form-order notion that the physical setting of a city should

<sup>2</sup> CIAM stands for Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne or the International Congress of Modern Architecture.

<sup>3</sup> 高亦蘭, 王蒙微 1991 “梁思成的古城保護及城市規劃思想研究” 《世界建築》1: 60-69; 郭黛姮, 高亦蘭, 夏路 2006 《一代宗師梁思成》214-226, 北京:中國建築工業出版社; 劉小石 2001 “城市規劃傑出的先驅 -- 紀念梁思成先生誕辰100周年” 《城市規劃》25(5): 45-49; 劉小石 1999 “歷史城市的保護和現代化發展的傑作 -- 重讀梁思成先生論城市規劃的著作” 《五十年回眸 -- 新中國的城市規劃》73-88. 北京: 商務印書館; 吳良鏞 2001 “紀念梁思成先生” 《城市規劃》25(5): 41-44.

match its purposes. Liang augmented the form-order with the garden-city-like self-contained neighbourhoods as basic units of a city. For Liang, ideal cities are those provided generous provision of green space and amenities for these neighbourhoods. He would use zoning and other regulations to control the population and land use patterns.

After a visit to the United States, Liang re-conceptualised planning as a design activity at multiple levels of the physical environment. The 1949 “Draft Curriculum” best reflected his new thinking. Primarily, planning is an enriched design activity; so he required planning students to acquire artistic and urban design skills. Liang saw the necessity for both planning and architecture students to have a common knowledge base in humanities and history. His curriculum required planning students to take intermediate and advanced methods (plan-making skills), municipal administration, public health, rural and urban sociology, transportation engineering, geological engineering, and geology. He distinguished planning from engineering, and argued that only properly trained planners could effectively perform planning tasks. At this stage, Liang considered an ideal city as functionally modern and aesthetically Chinese. Such a city would be divided into different functional districts and was highly regulated to stop formless sprawl. For him, planning was to rationally allocate land use activities and to develop a coordinated transportation system. In this way, planning would improve modern conveniences for the inhabitants, maximise worker production, and improve the aesthetics with harmonious architectural styles and streetscapes.

In 1950, Liang and Chen Zhanxiang (Charles Chen or 陳占祥) published the *Liang-Chen Proposal* to counteract the proposed clearance of the central city. In this plan, they applied current planning concepts and techniques from the western countries. After analysing the regional setting and historical context of Beijing, they conducted various projections to estimate the amount of land needed to meet the demand of the administrative district of the central government. They used cost benefit analysis and impact assessments to evaluate options of locating the administrative district and recommended a regional plan under which a new town would be built west of the old city to accommodate the administrative district and its ancillary uses. This new town would have a similar layout to the old city and contain self-sufficient neighbourhoods. They suggested selective demolition and gradual rehabilitation of the old city to lower its population density and increase its amenities and facilities. Liang viewed the old capital as the nation’s most important cultural centre, so he called for the preservation of its important landmarks and historic buildings.

The *Liang-Chen Proposal* did not prevent Liang from criticism. As the clearance of old Beijing started, the bewildered Liang tried again to present his visions by adding political clichés in his publications to make them look socialist. For example, when he recommended

the *Athens Charter* to government officials, he claimed that good planning could be successful only in a socialist society. Also, he used Soviet rebuilding experience to support his restoration ideas. But the new regime which had a grand scheme to convert Beijing's public space into political statements paid little regards to planning principles.<sup>4</sup> After 1952, Liang stopped writing about planning and for the rest of his life, his confidence in architecture and planning was shattered. The following sections trace the background and influence to Liang's planning ideas.

### 3. Background Influences

Liang Sicheng's thoughts about planning came with various sources of influences, including his upbringing, overseas travels, discussions with the planners and architects he met, and working with colleagues. The following discussions will show how these multiple background shaped his planning thoughts.

#### Formative Years (1920 to 1928)

In 1924, Liang left China with his fiancée, Lin Huiyin (林徽音 and later 林徽因), to study at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). Philadelphia, his home for three years, gave him first-hand experience of a modern city. This America's third largest city was served by modern utilities and infrastructure. It had a mass transit system, an elaborated tram network. Liang witnessed a frenzied construction boom during the Roaring Twenties. The city was building its museums, institutional buildings along a tree-lined Parisian-like boulevard. Blocks from the Penn campus was the construction site of the nation's first intermodal electrical railroad station. When he graduated in 1927, he had witnessed the construction of skyscrapers, the world's longest suspension bridge, and many advanced modern city facilities. Liang got married in Canada in 1928 and took an extended honeymoon trip in Europe. This particular experience gave Liang opportunity to observe, with eyes trained through architectural programs, how modern cities functioned even he had not received any training in city planning. By the time he returned China, Liang was one of a handful of people there who had such a rich experience in modern cities.

#### Chinese Planning Publications (1919 to 1930) and the Capital Plan of Nanjing (1929)

In 1924, Dong Xiujia (董修甲) published his 《市政新論》 (*Municipal Government*), a book

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Campanella. 2008. *The Concrete Dragon: China's Urban Revolution and What It Means for The World*. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press. Chang-Tai Hung. 2011. *Mao's New World: Political Culture in the Early People's Republic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

entirely on western planning.<sup>5</sup> A year later, he and Zhang Rui (張銳) wrote planning articles in 《東方雜誌》 (*Dong Fang Magazine*).<sup>6</sup> In following years, half a dozen Chinese books were published. Such book on city planning, municipal government (市制) and municipal administration (市政) quadrupled in number after the national unification to meet the needs of planning technicians.<sup>7</sup> Despite much overlapping and varying quality, these publications introduced western planning methods and practices into China. They collectively covered topics including garden cities, local planning systems, zoning ordinances, garden cities, neighbourhood planning, local layouts, transportation planning, road engineering, and case studies in foreign cities. They seemed to affect Liang in his first planning work and contributed to his insistence of small liveable neighbourhoods along the garden city concepts. The 1927 national unification triggered a planning movement in major Chinese cities because the national government started the preparation of the *Capital Plan of Nanking*. An international team led by Henry Murphy was commissioned to work with a group of Chinese architects.<sup>8</sup> These experts brought in advanced planning techniques. In particular, it adopted the two important American planning tools: the 1924 Standard State Zoning Enabling Act and the 1928 Standard State City Planning Enabling Act. The 1929 *Capital Plan* became a model in other major cities.

#### Zhang Rui: The Pathfinder (1930)

Liang Sicheng’s first planning involvement was his collaboration with Zhang Rui in the 1930 Tianjin planning competition.<sup>9</sup> Zhang was a municipal administration expert. Before entering university, Zhang had published an article “城市設計” (“City Planning”) and two books on municipal government.<sup>10</sup> Zhang obtained the best training public administration in American universities before joining the acclaimed National Institute of Public Administration in New York. In 1930, Zhang was a secretary on planning affairs in Tianjin. As the director of the city’s training centre, he had prepared lecture notes on municipal government and planning which he turned into 《市行政原理與技術初稿》 (*The First Draft of the Principles and Technology of Municipal Administration*), a three-volume work; one

<sup>5</sup> 董修甲. 1924. 《市政新論》上海：商務印書館. The book covered types of city planning, public finance, layouts in western cities, and nine Chinese city plans and the Tokyo Reconstruction Plan.

<sup>6</sup> 董修甲1925 “田園新市與我國市政”《東方雜誌》第22卷第11；張銳1925 “城市設計”《東方雜誌》第22卷第11號.

<sup>7</sup> See 邱紅梅. 2002. “試述近代西方市政理念的東漸”《黃岡師範學院學報》2期；邱瑛. 2010. “中國近代分散主義城市規劃思潮的歷史研究”武漢理工大學，工學碩士論文.

<sup>8</sup> For the planning of Nanjing, see 王俊雄. 2002. “國民政府時期南京首都計畫之研究”成功大學，建築學系博士論文. For Henry Murphy, see Jeffrey W. Cody. 2001. *Building in China: Henry K. Murphy’s “Adaptive Architecture,” 1914-1935*. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong.

<sup>9</sup> Two years younger than Liang Sicheng, Zhang was Liang’s neighbour in Tianjin and they both attended Tsinghua College. Liang’s father was the editor of the second edition of Zhang’s book on municipal government.

<sup>10</sup> 張銳1925 “城市設計”《東方雜誌》第22卷第11號；張銳1926《市制新論》上海：商務印書館；張銳1926《中國歷代都市行政之大勢》.

devoted to city planning.

The plan prepared by Liang and Zhang that won the planning competition of Tianjin was modelled on the *Capital Plan*, referring many times to the latter's engineering standards and design specifications. Nevertheless, the *Tianjin Plan* distinguished itself from the *Capital Plan*. First, it proposed merging the city and the county to form a regional government. Second, it advocated for the modernisation of city government, civil service reform, and modern fiscal and budgetary systems. Third, the *Tianjin Plan* included public finance proposals such as fiscal planning, debt financing, property tax reform, special assessment, and public utilities regulations. Fourth, it proposed how to regulate public utilities and other municipal reforms following the America's Good City Government Movement. This unique emphasis indicated the *Tianjin Plan* was primarily prepared by Zhang Rui, the public administration expert, rather than the architect Liang Sicheng. A copy of the original *Tianjin Plan* kept in the Far Eastern Library of University Chicago provides support for this judgment. A label pasted to a back page contained: "City Plan for Tientsin, by Ray Chang, Illustrated by Ssu-Cheng Liang Sicheng." Zhang did not assume first authorship perhaps because he was an insider in the Tianjin government. Nonetheless, Liang likely prepared sections relating to hexagonal street layout, open space arrangement, and urban design. The chapter on public buildings was definitely written by Liang as it stated the principles of durability, usefulness, and beauty (Vitruvius's principles that Liang frequently quoted). He recommended two styles: a neo-Chinese style that was functionally modern but aesthetical Chinese, and a minimal modernist prototypical style modelled on Tokyo. His collaboration with Zhang exposed Liang to a variety of urban issues and public administration solutions. Through the preparation of the *Tianjin Plan*, Liang appreciated the importance of American zoning and planning system. The use of zoning and strict land use control became Liang Sicheng's hallmark ideas.

#### Clarence Stein: The Elder Architect (1936)

In the spring of 1936, Clarence Stein, the founder of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), and his actress wife were visiting Beiping (name for Beijing between 1928 and 1949). They stayed for weeks to immerse themselves in its culture and to interact with local intellectuals. As such, Stein met Liang Sicheng and developed a friendship that lasted till 1949.<sup>11</sup> Stein and Liang had many similar life experiences that made it easy for them to connect. Their Beaux-arts architectural training did not prevent them from examining the wider urban environment. They both were socially conscious and pursued a type of architecture that addressed societal needs. Born into well-to-do families, both of them were

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<sup>11</sup> Fairbank, Wilma. 1994. *Liang Sicheng and Lin: Partners in Exploring China's Architectural Past*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

cultured and highly intellectual. They were quiet persons, and pensive when engrossed in thought; but engaging when they found an exciting topic.

Stein received his architectural training at Paris's École des Beaux Arts. During the 1920s, he was appointed to head a New York state housing and regional planning commission. He belonged to a group of New York intellectuals including Lewis Mumford, and architect-planners like Charles Whitaker, Benton MacKaye, and Henry Wright. Stein wrote widely on planning issues and went to meet British planning pioneers, Patrick Geddes and Ebenezer Howard and toured the garden cities. He invited Howard Unwin to America to teach. In 1923, he founded the RPAA to advance regional planning and garden cities. In 1925, Stein was elected vice president of the International Garden City Planning Federation. Stein and his left-leaning friends also promote affordable housing for the working poor and he designed several prototypical housing projects. Stein and Henry Wright designed Radburn in New Jersey, the first garden city built in the automobile era. They advanced a concept called the “super block” to separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Instead of having local roads interwoven with dwelling units, they moved the roads to the perimeter of a superblock which was a big common green space surrounded by dwelling houses.

In 1936, Liang Sicheng was making important progress in ancient Chinese architecture while Stein was facing a career setback.<sup>12</sup> According to Wilma Fairbank, Stein stimulated Liang to read and think about city planning. This assertion may not be accurate because Liang had involved in the planning of Tianjin seven year before meeting the Steins. And a meticulous search of the Stein archive by the author did not unearth any record concerning planning discussion between them during the 1936 trip. Instead, Stein was absorbed in the Chinese gardens, temples and ancient buildings in this trip. An observer recalled how Stein was captivated in the Summer Palace and murmured, “Oh—oh—oh .... What floating architecture”.<sup>13</sup> In a letter thirteen years later, Stein recounted the sensation he had when he looked at the palace and the walled city.<sup>14</sup> Since Stein was enthralled by the ancient capital and Liang was the leading expert in Chinese architecture; Stein, the guest, was more likely than Liang to be the student. Additionally, in 1936 Liang was working hard on architectural research, so it is reasonable to conclude that their interactions were more likely about Chinese

<sup>12</sup> Stein's career was stalling by 1935, so he took a long vacation outside the country. After 1937, he suffered from chronic depression. For Stein's life and his later career revival, see Kermit Carlyle Parsons. Ed. 1998. *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein: Architect of The Planned Community*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Jin Yuelin (alias Chin Yueh-lin or Lao Jin, 金岳霖), “letter to Wilma Fairbank,” (c.a. April 1936), quotation in Fairbank, *Liang Sicheng and Lin*, 92. Also most films Stein took in Beijing were on Chinese buildings and gardens.

<sup>14</sup> Clarence Stein, “letter to Anita Willcox,” on January 24, 1949 in Clarence Stein Papers, 1905-1983, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections Cornell University Library (hereafter Stein Papers), Container 7, File Unit 19.



architecture than planning ideas.

#### The War Time Experience (1937 to 1945)

Shortly after Japan occupied Beijing in 1937, Liang and his family joined millions of refugees in a treacherous journey to the interior. They finally moved to Lizhuang (李莊), a remote village in Sichuan. During this time, Liang lost family members and experienced extreme deprivation. They lived at subsistence levels and their health deteriorated. Liang witnessed city destruction due to bombing, housing shortages, and many other acute urban problems. This experience prompted him to think about rebuilding war-torn cities. It made him better appreciate the saying, “living in harmony and working in satisfaction,” and that became his main planning goal. During this time, Liang kept in touch with the outside world only through publications provided by Wilma Fairbank. In particular, several articles in *Pencil Point* became useful for his study of housing issues, leading to a housing article that his wife authored.<sup>15</sup> Among these materials, Saarinen’s book and the *Athens Charter* left an important impression on Liang.

#### Eliel Saarinen: The Inspiration (1944)

In 1945, Liang wrote “The Structure and Order of Cities” based on his reading of Saarinen’s *The City: Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future*. Saarinen was a Finish architect who designed the Helsinki railway station and had been involved in neighbourhood projects in Europe and had won prizes in important design competitions. In 1923 he established the Cranbrook Institute of Arts in Michigan. Being an outsider, Saarinen’s concept of planning differed from that of American planners. He considered Howard’s garden cities too rigid. He criticised the New York regional plan failed to challenge the dominance of Manhattan. He did not have much faith in progress, machines or technology. Rather, Saarinen contended that planning should be flexible to allow future generations to search for innovative solutions. In contrast to the prevailing modernity notion, Saarinen found the past could provide inspiration and he treasured the continuity of history. For him, small medieval towns represented the ideal form of urban living.

*The City* was a lengthy book, flawed in many ways and was not well received by the planning professionals. In particular, Saarinen’s inability to write clearly made it difficult to comprehend. The book did not have a bibliography, so it is impossible to trace the sources of his arguments. Furthermore, it was heavy in visionary statements, but light in details or practical suggestions. In the book, the designer Saarinen became an amateur sociologist. One reviewer objected his notion that the medieval time was the climax of civilisation, and called the book as an undertaking of “grandiose schemes for the replanning of metropolises with

<sup>15</sup> 林徽因 1945 “現代住宅設計的參考”《中國營造學社彙刊》第七卷第二期, 10月.

inadequate data and no experience.” Others said Saarinen did not understand urban development, had a misguided hostility against property rights, and failed to present actionable proposals. Another reviewer found the book left “many specific questions unanswered” and criticised Saarinen lack of understanding of scientific methods. Another complained that he unknowingly handed too much power to the government, while one bluntly concluded that *The City* “really convey little meaning”.<sup>16</sup> Indeed *The City* was full of idiosyncrasies. While Saarinen considered urban problems to be social in nature, he did not suggest social solutions. While he believed in cultural continuity and the open nature of the future, he asserted that cities were governed by the law of natural selection. While he treasured flexibility, his visions were rigid and dogmatic. While he disagreed with Baron Haussmann on urban form, like Haussmann, Saarinen called for massive relocation. While he treasured the organic nature of neighbourhoods, he sought a central authority to determine the urban fabric.

*The City* was full of visionary statements, metaphors like “living organism,” and terms like “principle of correlation,” “creative impetus,” and “cultural ambitions.” Saarinen’s notion of “living and working accommodations of its populations” resonated with Liang’s motto of “living in harmony and working in satisfaction.” These ill-defined concepts allowed Liang to fill them in with his predisposed ideas. Saarinen argued that urban problems were the results of the mismatch between the “physical form” and the “social order” -- an attractive proposition for Liang to connect the physical environment to social issues. However, a careful comparison of Liang’s article with *The City* reveals major differences. Their views of “social order” were not the same: Liang’s version centred on behaviours, ethics and the sense of sin in contrast to Saarinen’s broader view of cultural aspirations. Saarinen’s analogies between cities and biological organisms inferred simultaneous growth and decay. Therefore, his “organic decentralisation” heavily relied on surgical removal of the decaying areas and constant relocation of inhabitants to the reformed areas. Saarinen proposed a powerful authority to facilitate condemnation and slum clearance. Had Liang read these those chapters, he probably would not have endorsed this type of “organic decentralisation.” Judging from other differences between Liang’s “The Structure and Order of Cities.” and *The City*, it is questionable that Liang fully comprehend Saarinen’s philosophies and authoritarian inclination.

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Ascher. 1944. “Book Review,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 236: 208-209; Theron I. Cain. 1945. “Book Review,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 3(11/12): 87-88; Homer Hoyt. 1943. “Book Review,” *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics*, 19(4): 487- 488; Thomas C. McCormick. 1944. “Book Review,” *American Sociological Review*, 9(3): 341-342; William W. Newcomb. 1944. “Architect’s Dream City,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 3(4): 663-664.

### Clarence Stein: The Mentor (1946 to 1947)

In 1946, Liang came to America as a visiting scholar and Liang was a frequent overnight guest at Stein's apartment. Unlike their last meeting, this time Liang was eager to learn about planning. They exchanged information about new towns and Stein twice mentioned to Liang about his effort of writing a book on garden cities.<sup>17</sup> Liang's diary entry on June 29, 1947 recorded a trip to Raburn with Stein. Liang was impressed by its quiet residential neighbourhoods, centrally located commercial zone, ample amount of open space, and the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Stein invited Liang into his professional circle in New York and wrote introduction letters to architects and planners in other cities to prepare for Liang's visit. He donated his personal architecture library to Tsinghua University. After Liang returned to China, Stein attempted to help Liang to obtain research funding.<sup>18</sup> Stein acted as a mentor in helping Liang to establish the Tsinghua architectural program, opened a dialogue of new towns and garden cities, included Liang in his professional circle, and offered assistance for Liang's research projects.

### The Tour in America (1947)

The first half of 1947 was the most stimulating period Liang's career as he met with scores of prominent art historians, architects and planners, and represented China in the United Nations Board of Design Consultants to design the United Nations headquarters complex. In February 1947, Liang met Le Corbusier, the intellectual leader of the modernism movement, and heard him lecturing about urbanism and designing large scale projects. During the next four months, Liang worked with architects like Oscar Niemeyer, Garnett Soilleux, and Louis Skidmore to generate over fifty alternative schemes before settling on the final design.<sup>19</sup> Early on, Liang Sicheng had proposed to establish an architectural program modelling on the Americanised Bauhaus teaching methods.<sup>20</sup> Now, he had the chance of visiting top ranking architectural schools. The architectural and planning curriculum Liang proposed two years later was similar to the program developed by Holmes Perkins at Harvard. Perkins was the chair of the planning program and was sensitive to cultural and historical context in design. He believed that students of all design disciplines should be exposed to a wide variety of subjects, a vision shared by Liang who had a strong background in humanities.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Clarence Stein, "letter to Liang Sicheng Sus-ch'eng [Sicheng]," July 18, 1947 and February 12, 1948, Stein Papers, Container 15, File Unit 26. Stein finally published *Toward New Towns for America* in 1950.

<sup>18</sup> Correspondence between Liang and Stein in 1947 and 1948 indicated that Stein was seeking funding for the Institute for Research in Chinese Architecture (中國營造學社) from the Rockefeller Foundation.

<sup>19</sup> For Liang's involvement in the United Nations Board of Design Consultants, see George Dudley. 1994. *A Workshop for Peace: Designing the United Nations Headquarters*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

<sup>20</sup> 梁思成“致 [青華大學校長] 梅貽琦信”. March 9, 1945 (Liang Sicheng, "letter to [Tsinghua University chancellor] Mei Yizi").

<sup>21</sup> For Perkins at Harvard, see Anthony Alofsin. 2002. *The Struggle for Modernism: Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and City Planning at Harvard*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Another event that shaped Liang Sicheng’s thoughts about planning was the Princeton Conference on Planning Man’s Physical Environment.<sup>22</sup> For two days in March 1947, leading architects, scholars, planners and writers examined the past and future of architecture and planning. The last dinner of the event featured a debate between Frank Lloyd Wright and Robert Moses. Liang was bombarded of diverse and inspiring ideas. He was impressed with the concept of holistic design of the physical environment, which he endorsed in his future draft curriculum. During the conference, Liang co-signed a letter to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation proposing the reform of the training for architects and planners. This letter stated the importance of new architects and planners to understand the interrelation of “social, economic and emotional factors.” However, the conference disappointed most participants because they failed to agree on an ultimate architectural philosophy. A commentator criticised the naiveté and presumptuous notion that designers being the stewards of changes in society.<sup>23</sup>

In July 1947, on his way back to China, Liang Sicheng visited dam projects and the housing development of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Liang wrote to Stein, “I wish and hope that the Yangtze Valley project materialise and elevate the living standard of the Chinese. We need hundreds of TVA in China”.<sup>24</sup> In the same letter, Liang mentioned David E. Lilienthal’s *T.V.A.: Democracy on the March*, a book discussing a new kind of democracy under a unified regional government and might have shifted his political thoughts from neutral to the left. He then visited University of Michigan, Eliel Saarinen and his son Eero at Cranbrook Academy of Art, Frank Lloyd Wright in Taliesin, the Chicago Housing Authority, the Illinois Institute of Technology and Baldwin Hills in Los Angeles.<sup>25</sup> These encounters were vital to Liang in experiencing various types of planning projects, academic programs, and architectural philosophies. By the time he went home, he was probably the only Chinese architect who had such extensive exposure to pioneering ideas in architecture and planning.

#### CIAM Athens Charter (1944 to 1951)

The *Athens Charter* was a proclamation drafted by modernist architects at the 1933 CIAM conference. The most authoritative version was the 1943 edition prepared by Le Corbusier. The conference explored the concept of “City Functional” designed to connect four major human activities: dwelling, work, transportation, and recreation. They agreed on a number of platitudes or guidelines for the planning of modern cities. The *Charter* called for functional zoning, segregated land use, a single type of urban housing, and the integration of modern

<sup>22</sup> For the details of the Conference on Planning Man’s Physical Environment, see Thomas H. Creighton ed. 1949. *Building for Modern Man: A Symposium*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>23</sup> Carroll Meeks. 1949/50 “Book Review,” *College Art Journal*, 9(2): 229-230.

<sup>24</sup> Liang Sicheng, “letter to Clarence Stein,” July 5, 1947, Stein Papers, Container 15, File Unit 26.

<sup>25</sup> The Chicago Housing Authority was the domicile of prominent housing and planning experts during WWII. Baldwin Hills was one of Clarence Stein’s housing projects.

transportation system. These platitudes reflected an optimistic version of urbanism that relied on technology to control the physical and social environment. In 1935, Le Corbusier announced the concept of a “Radiant City” that encapsulated these doctrines. High-density development would be built in accordance of a rigid layout. The steel and glass skyscraper apartments would be clustered to create a neighbourhood equipped with cafeterias, laundry rooms, childcare centres and other communal facilities. Large area of open space and plazas would be provided at the ground level and the city would rely on freeways and public transportation systems to connect these neighbourhoods. Over time, CIAM members questioned these platitudes and their disagreement finally led to the collapse of CIAM in 1956.

Like many others, Liang was attracted to the *Charter's* doctrines. He first quoted them in a 1948 article and later formed a team to translate the entire work into Chinese. In the preface of the 1951 edition, Liang stated that the *Charter's* doctrines were well-thought solutions to urban problems.<sup>26</sup> At that time, he had been criticised and the *Liang-Chen Proposal* was denounced, so he took a risk to advocate these non-socialist ideas. Thus he added several caveats, such as asserting that these doctrines worked only under a socialist system. However, Liang's vision of an ideal neighbourhood was low-rise and medium-density housing modelled on garden cities, which was very different from the regimented and high-rise development exemplified in the Radiant City. Grandiose proclamations are always appealing because they are easy to agree in theory before their specific, practical implications can be examined. Given his humanistic inclination, Liang probably would not totally endorse the *Charter*.

#### Chen Zhanxiang: A Collaborator (1949 to 1951)

In 1949, Liang nominated a team of Chinese experts including Chen Zhanxiang, to the capital planning team. Chen was China's first English-trained professional planner. Because of the war, Chen spent eight years in England, completing the undergraduate and masters degrees at the University of Liverpool and briefly studying with Patrick Abercrombie at University of London.<sup>27</sup> Chen had published “Some Ancient Chinese Concepts of Town and Country” in the *Town Planning Review* and articles on Chinese architecture.<sup>28</sup> He also participated in the Greater London Plan preparation and was familiar with the English new town plans. In

<sup>26</sup> Liang first mentioned the *Charter* in his 1948 article: 《北平文物必須整理與保存》北平文物整理委員會。In the 1951 Chinese edition, the title of the *Athens Charter* was changed to *The General Principles of City Planning* 《城市計劃大綱》。

<sup>27</sup> The University of Liverpool's civic design program was established in 1909 by Patrick Abercrombie and was the first of the kind in English-speaking countries.

<sup>28</sup> Volume 19 (no. 3 & 4) of the *Town Planning Review*, page 160-3 in 1947. See also Charles Chen. 1947. “Chinese Architectural Theories” *Architectural Review*, July, 19-25; “Feng Shui” *ibid.* 26-27; “Recent Architecture in China” *ibid.* 27-28.

mid-1949, Chen joined the capital planning team. However, from the beginning, the Beijing City Planning Commission lacked the authority to regulate frenzied development. In late 1949, a Soviet planning team arrived and sidestepped the Chinese planners. These Soviet “planners” were trained as engineers and traditional architects, and they were not familiar with the modern city planning. Chen and Liang were concerned with the Soviet proposal to clear the centre of the old capital. In February 1950, they prepared a counterproposal, even after the government already endorsed the Soviet proposal. The *Liang-Chen Proposal* was a desperate attempt to reason with the decision makers and explain the merits of rational planning. They knew that a new town was unavoidable for the new capital to accommodate the anticipated growth; but they argued against its location within the historical city because of the problems with relocation and congestion, and the loss of historical relics. Through Chen, Liang learned how English planners conducted regional planning and validated his idea of self-sufficient neighbourhoods. However, their efforts were futile because the new regime was not interested in the kind of planning Liang and Chen envisioned.

#### Questionable Soviet Influence (1950 to 1951)

After Stalin persecuted the intellectuals, architects and engineers in the Soviet Union were stuck with mechanical application of predetermined planning standards. Thus, Liang found it difficult to integrate his western thinking with the rigid ideas of the foreign “experts”.<sup>29</sup> Trying to prevent massive demolition in Beijing, Liang translated Voronin’s *Rebuilding the Liberated Areas of the Soviet Union* to highlight how Soviet planners treasured cultural continuity. But Voronin’s book is mediocre and descriptive in nature and Voronin showed little understanding of planning theories and methods. The only chapter on planning actually covered slum clearance and housing construction. Voronin’s claim that “town-planning is the work of groups of architects of the most authoritative institutions,” was an approach planners in the west no longer held. If one carefully read the “Translators’ Understanding,” one could find that Liang cherry-picked those principles consistent with his viewpoints on historic preservation. The purpose of citing Voronin appeared to use Soviet authority to criticise Beijing’s chaotic redevelopment.<sup>30</sup> For example, Liang particularly quoted, “planning must also take into consideration the customs of the inhabitants and the cultural and aesthetic demands of the Soviet people.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> In 1949, the new regime announced a policy called “One-Sided toward the Soviet Union” under which Soviet “experts” took the supreme role. As a result, the western-trained Chinese professionals were pushed aside. However, these “experts” knew very little about China.

<sup>30</sup> By 1951, Liang had to be very careful in criticising the government. He had to add self-abasing comments in the “Translator’s Understanding” such as “we had been poisoned by two toxins in architecture .... and unconsciously became the accomplices of the cultural invaders of capitalism and imperialism.”

<sup>31</sup> Nicholai Voronin. 1943. *Rebuilding the Liberated Areas*, quotations from 26. Liang used similar quotes from Voronin in other articles too.

#### 4. Conclusion

This article has presented an overview of Liang Sicheng's planning ideas and connected them with various sources and influences. Liang might have borrowed a term but use it under different connotations. For example, Liang and Saarinen viewed "social order" quite differently and Liang's brand of "organic decentralisation" differed from the more brutal form Saarinen advocated. While Liang endorsed the *Athens Charter*, his vision of was dissimilar to that of the Radiant City. He took the *Athens Charter* at face value and appeared not aware that the *Charter* was inconsistent with his humanistic and cultural-oriented architecture. He thought that planning was an extension of architecture but he did not have a chance to know that planners discarded this view. His planning thoughts seem to build on general concepts rather than on strong theoretical underpinnings. Three influences on his thoughts – Saarinen, Voronin and CIAM – unfortunately were not the state-of-the-art in planning. Saarinen was a visionary without practical suggestions, Voronin was not a planner, and the CIAM promulgated a dogmatic version of planning. Liang may not have fully understood the limitations of these works, or he may have simply chosen what he found appropriate to the unique Chinese circumstances. In this light, Liang's best planning publications are the 1949 "Draft Program" and the *Liang-Chen Proposal* where he offered a systematic viewpoint. After that, he was deprived of the opportunities to advance his planning ideas.<sup>32</sup> But even by 1949, his planning thoughts have not been fully developed.

To the end, he was a follower of the garden city movement, at least at the abstract level. He liked Radburn's design and admired similar walkable and self-contained neighbourhoods. His ideal city was a conglomerate of these residential districts, though he did not explore how such an arrangement would be possible in a big city without effective control of daily lives. He joined most urban commentators in condemning formless sprawl, overcrowding and congestion, and inner-city decay. His planning thoughts were always western-oriented even when he included a socialist touch and added the Chinese element of "living in harmony and working in satisfaction." His essential planning tools included the American zoning and local planning system, which he first proposed in the *Tianjin Plan* and recommended again in other writings. Unfortunately, the political persecution he experienced did not allow him to develop a theoretical framework to integrate his planning thoughts. The isolation from the world denied him a chance to see how western planning evolved from design toward a multidisciplinary practice. After all, cities have never grown as Saarinen might have imagined and human needs and economic necessities always break down the deterministic functional zones.

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<sup>32</sup> At that time Liang had been under tremendous pressure to denounce his professional training. He started criticising his western, capitalistic and imperialistic architectural ideas.