

A Progressivist Program in China: Planning and Building Peking Union Medical College

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At the Rockefeller Archive Center, I conducted archival research on the architectural history of Peking Union Medical College, a major enterprise of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) and the China Medical Board (CMB), which was funded by the RF. The buildings of PUMC are still standing and are widely recognized as the precursor of attempts to adapt the best of Chinese architectural elements to modern Western science. This adaptation was first described and analyzed by Professor Jeff Cody who also visited the RAC in the early 1990s. It had been vehemently criticized by the first generation of Chinese architects in the 1930s and 1940s for overwhelming emphasis on the roof with little systematic research at the time, and was further dismissed as the bastion of American imperialism under Maoism. But undeniably, the buildings of PUMC have a distinct place in modern Chinese architectural history, and need to be well-analyzed based on exhaustive collection and careful reading of related archives.

Mary Ferguson, an important member of the CMB, did research on the architectural history of PUMC in the 1960s, and her research notes are preserved at the RAC, in addition to her famous book on the CMB. Subsequently, both Jeff Cody and Feng Jin traced the development of planning and construction of PUMC in more detail. In addition, a number of research papers and degree theses in China are based more upon field investigation and Chinese materials rather than original materials, including various sorts of plans, maps, minutes, correspondences, newspaper clippings, and pamphlets.

I stayed at the RAC for about a month and celebrated Chinese New Year in New York. I requested anything that came up in the RAC's computer search system relating to construction or architects of PUMC, ranging from materials on three commissions sent to China funded by the RF and their reports to architects' personal letters and drawings. Most valuable for my archival work were personal

reports and correspondences by key individuals in planning and building PUMC, such as George Vincent, Wallace Buttrick, Simon Flexner, F. McLean, Roger S. Greene, H. Houghton, Charles Coolidge, Harry Hussey, C.W. Anner, etc. Also, many things that I researched became more connected after my visit to the RAC. For example, Henry Murphy, the most distinguished foreign architect in the Republic, tried to maintain good relation with the RF, and his associate at Tsinghua University, Charles Lane, also helped prepare mechanical drawings for PUMC, and stayed as a friend to the RF until the 1950s and 1960s. Also, as the Architectural Bureau was established in 1923, architects such as C.W. Anner also participated in projects outside PUMC, including some mission projects in China and Thailand, and the National Library in Peking in the mid-1920s. I was quite surprised to find a 3-story dormitory building at Tsinghua University which was also designed by C.W. Anner's younger brother, C.J. Anner, both of whom were on the list of employees of PUMC/CMB in 1923. It could be deduced that C.J. Anner was introduced to Tsinghua to design and build the dormitory, which a small group of students under my supervision surveyed in the summer of 2019. (Fig. 1) In addition, it is quite well-known that the 4-story Biology Building built in 1929 was half-funded by the RF, with Roger Greene as an intermediary. This building was also surveyed in 2018. (Fig. 2) Many other materials relating to Tsinghua were found in the RAC, and it is obvious that people of the RF/CMB/PUMC had many overlaps and interest in Tsinghua, which awaits closer examination, at a later time.

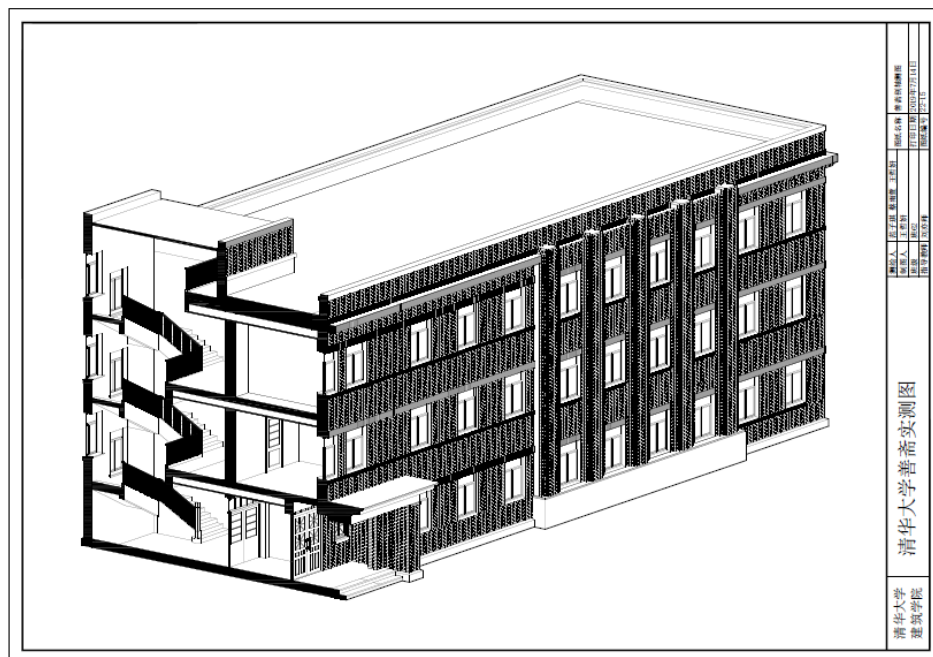


Fig 1 Section analysis of Shanzhai (Dormitory of Kindness) at Tsinghua University, built in 1933

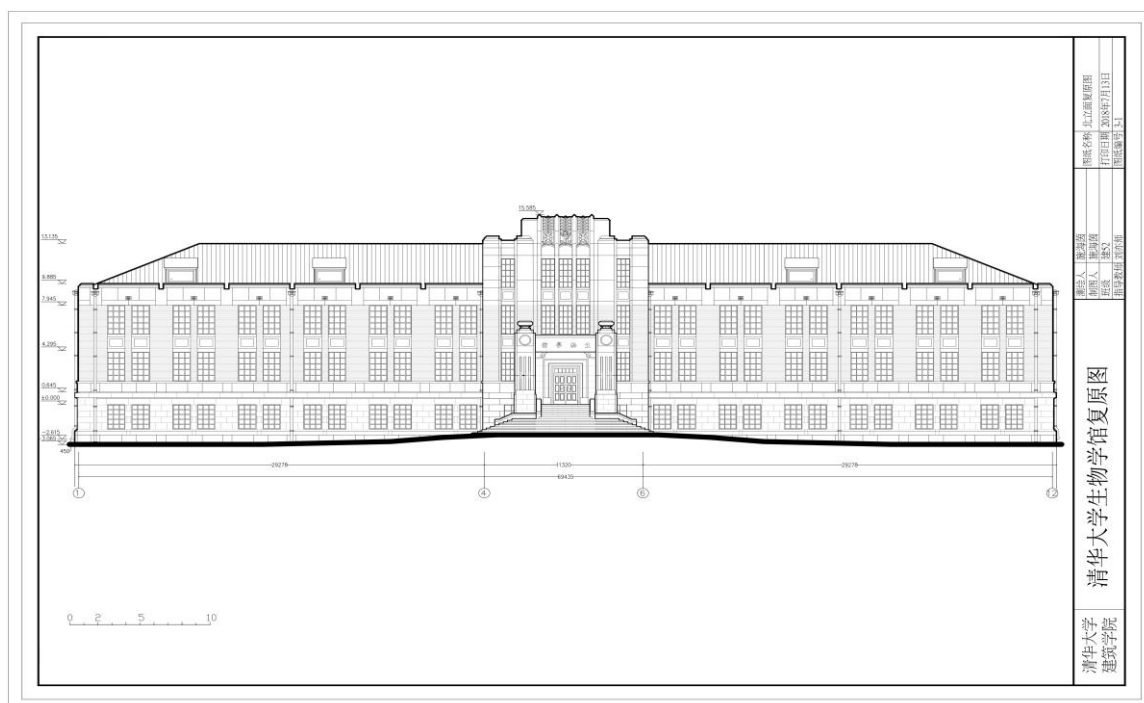


Fig 2 Tsinghua's Biology Building, Designed by T.P. Yang in 1928.

The early history of three missions sent to China in 1909, 1914 and 1915, respectively has been well described both in John Bowers' book¹ and Mary Ferguson's book.² The most important man behind the creation of a modern medical research institution in China was Frederick T. Gates, the major advisor for the Rockefeller philanthropic work. Leaders active in the Progressive Era advocated for technology, scientific knowledge and experts to cure social ills, and missionary and philanthropic organizations extended activities and impacts on a global scale, of which PUMC was only one example³. The theoretical framework of American progressivism should be potentially useful in connecting American ideas and global transmissions and local adaptations.

In line with progressive thinking, Gates managed to motivate the RF, the most powerful philanthropic organization, by a commercial model based on scientific management, and he convened the most recognized experts and preeminent figures as missionaries (such as John Mott and Wallace Buttrick, who had been a classmate of Gates at the theological seminary), entrepreneurs, philanthropists (such as John D. Rockefeller, Jr.) and most importantly, professionals (such as Simon Flexner and William Welch, both of whom were engaged by Buttrick to form the last commission to China in 1915.). Experts' opinions were added to the legitimization and social recognition of the decision, which can again be seen in the selection of architect and resident officers of PUMC.

A building committee for the construction of PUMC was established in 1915, consisting of Buttrick, Flexner and Welch, but it seemed Buttrick was in charge of most routine correspondences with local officers in Peking. On recommendation by Simon Flexner, Boston-based architect Charles Coolidge was selected to go to Peking with the appointed dean, F. McLean, in April 1916, to investigate the recently-bought Yu Wang Fu plot and relevant building conditions of hospital and medical schools in Peking and other cities. Coolidge was obviously interested in the offer and the possibility of preparing all plans for PUMC. He submitted reports to the Board with preparatory schemes of putting both the school and teaching hospital on Yu Wang Fu, connected by a long north-south terrace. Previously, he had proposed that the CMB buy the plot of land in between Yu Wang Fu and Mission properties to its west. That proposal was denied by the Board as it was viewed as an economic investment in land and buildings, so, hence, the revised

plan. However, in the plan, the layout of two groups of buildings (school and hospital, respectively) and the most distinctive characteristics such as sloping roofs were already decided and further elaborated by Hussey later. It is obvious that Coolidge followed instructions from Flexner before his departure to China, that “[t]he hospitals are to be used for teaching purposes. They should bear relation to the country in which they are located, as well as to the uses to which they are to be put.”⁴ In the same letter, Flexner suggested that Coolidge visit the newly built missionary hospital and medical school of Cheloo University, which had incorporated Chinese roof styles on the top of a Western building. It seems it was pre-decided that adaptations should be made to adapt to the Chinese forms, but the equipment and scientific laboratories should keep up to modern standards. Words such as “combination,” “adaptations” and “preservation of best heritage,” etc., were used to find the balance in the creation of the medical palaces, or as a contemporary newspaper concluded, “The education value to Chinese art and craftsmanship of the method of construction adopted for the college buildings and their adjuncts has not received the attention it deserves.”⁵ But it refers to the outlook, and in some cases interior design like the admission room of the hospital, but also the large windows of labs and wards and purely functional accessories in laying out most rooms.

Charles Coolidge was a prominent architect, trained by famous Eclecticist architect Henry Hobson Richardson, who left his disciples with his unfinished projects and design methods upon his sudden death in 1886. Coolidge participated in the design of Harvard University Medical School, whose president, Charles W. Eliot was instrumental in the formation of CMB and PUMC, and also the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. Thanks to Mary Ferguson’s notes, I noticed a young architect who later became partner in Coolidge’s firm in Boston and a noted architect of hospital design, Henry Shepley, who participated in the initial design of PUMC, discussed above. Ferguson visited Richardson in 1960, and the latter remembered that he produced the design, probably under Coolidge’s supervision. The schemes were removed from the file of Coolidge’s report to Mr. Rockefeller’s family maps, but I did not find them. I wrote to Shepley and Bulfinch enquiring if they have a copy. Fortunately, Mr. Feng Jin had the planning and design schemes in his papers published in the 1990s and

again reprinted with expansion as a chapter in the 2016 multi-volume books on modern Chinese architectural history.

Coolidge earned trust amongst nearly all key members of the RF. He had obvious interest in the PUMC project to be built, as reported by Roger Greene when they were still in Peking, and his own report on choosing an architect shows that he, rather than Hussey, might better fit the position. But when he estimated the cost might well go beyond 3 million dollars which shocked the CMB members, Coolidge decided to be a consultant architect. In this position, he generously helped Hussey, who proposed to build the whole plant for only one million dollars, which impressed the CMB, for sure. It is understandable that whenever the PUMC managerial board had problems with Hussey, they returned to Coolidge for help. One thing that demonstrates Coolidge's fine judgment as a professional and good sense as a businessman was his readiness to maintain a favorable relationship with the RF. Hussey asked obviously too much for compensation both as architect and overseer of construction, though in his own autobiography, he stated it was so because of suggestion of Coolidge and CMB members, but people in New York and Peking thought Hussey was overpaid. When Coolidge was hired to replace Hussey in 1919, a letter from George Vincent required him to indicate how much he would charge. Coolidge replied that normally his firm charges 2 per cent of building cost but he would like to charge 1 percent for work done before 1919. Knowing total cost might amount to over 6 million dollars (finally close to 7 million), Coolidge smartly stated that he would only charge 1 per cent of 3 million for the working undergoing in his firm⁶, which proposition was of course appreciated by the RF/CMB.

I read diaries of Roger Greene; he was the most important hand in the first two decades in imagining, building and managing PUMC, in which he mentioned the tension of relation with Hussey, which had tremendous impact on Hussey's later practicing architectural design in China and is largely forgotten in previous scholarship. As a matter of fact, Greene had recommended to New York that Hussey of Shattuck and Hussey be hired as a field architect supervising construction, if not as architect to prepare for all plans in the US. It was Hussey's artistic preposition and his hurried, indiscreet statement of a \$1 million budget

caused grudges between him and many people of the institution. Greene, despite his recommendation of Hussey in the first place, formed negative opinions on Hussey, which caused Hussey to lose a few important commissions, including a large plant proposed to be built by Dupont Corporation. Interesting to note that Hussey's artistic temperature and agreeable personality allowed him to delve into other fields. For example, he became a close friend of the famous diplomat V.K. Wellington Koo (Gu Weijun) who wrote the introduction for Hussey's autobiography⁷ and played a key role in the negotiations of the 9/18 Incident (1931) in Manchuria, as elaborated by Jin Guangyao in a 1999 Chinese paper, with related archives preserved at Columbia University.

Hussey was brought to the attention of RF/CMB people because he formerly designed a few buildings for the YMCA in China and other Asian countries. His performance was well received by the leader of International YMCA, John Mott, who became a member of CMB and chair of PUMC. Mott recommended Hussey to the Board⁸. Hussey had maintained good relationships with prominent Chinese scholar-officials, including Zhu Qiqian, the founding director of the subsequent Society for the Study in Chinese Architecture, and even opened a branch office in Peking (and later in Shanghai) to oversee ongoing projects. It was Hussey's familiarity with the local construction market and conditions more than any other foreigners that Greene recommended him, too, knowing changes and corrections on site which failed many missionary buildings would be unavoidable and Hussey's suggestions and criticisms would be valuable. Greene also noted that Hussey was "very anxious to get our work. ... (if not) their prestige with the missionary societies would be seriously impaired."⁹ This goes back to my earlier statement that the global circulation of knowledge and technology as a symbol of the Progressive Era played a critical role in the planning and designing PUMC, for without previous experience with YMCA, a product of progressivism, Hussey would not have been selected in the first place.

Final Observations

It was a great pleasure to visit Rockefeller Archive Center in January and February 2019 with a generous research stipend from RAC. It was my first time to ride northward along the Hudson River to Tarrytown, and I received a kind reception at the Center. The richness of materials well-preserved in the vaults (which I had the chance to view) was far beyond my expectations, and surely needs closer examination for related research projects in subsequent visits.

I will save pages of the details of design and construction processes for a separate paper I am writing, greatly relying on materials I found in the RAC. My aim is to restore an unrevealed architectural history of this project and its place in modernizing Chinese architecture in the Republic. For future research, I am keen on examining the drastic change of the space of PUMC, both during the warfare against Japan, and across the abyssal divide of 1949. I will revisit the RAC in early 2020 because I lost about 3000 pictures from Anner's collection, which formed another angle of describing a construction history of the RF-funded enterprise.

¹ John Bowers. *Western Medicine in a Chinese Palace: Peking Union Medical College, 1917-1951*. Philadelphia: Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, 1972.

² Mary Ferguson. *China Medical Board and Peking Union Medical College*. New York: CMB of New York, Inc., 1970.

³ John S. Baick. "Cracks in the Foundation: Frederick T. Gates, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the China Medical Board." *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan. 2004), pp.59-89.

⁴ Simon Flexner to Coolidge. June 27, 1916. Flexner APS papers. Roll 26, RAC.

⁵ 'Green City' Shows Hope of New China. August 29, 1920. Publication unknown. Mary Ferguson Research (1920-1929). Mary Ferguson Papers, Box 1, RAC.

⁶ Coolidge to Vincent. April 19, 1919. Mary Ferguson Research (1920-1929). Mary Ferguson Papers, Box 1, RAC.

⁷ Harry Hussey. *My Pleasures and Palaces*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968.

⁸ Mary Ferguson Research (1920-1929). Mary Ferguson Papers, Box 1, RAC.

⁹ Greene to Buttrick. June 3, 1916. Mary Ferguson Research (1920-1929). Mary Ferguson Papers, Box 1, RAC.