

Building in China: Henry K. Murphy's "Adaptive Architecture," 1914–1935. *By Jeffrey W. Cody*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001. xxiv + 264 pp. Photos, drawings, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$50.00. ISBN 0-295-98095-8.

Reviewed by Christopher A. Reed

Jeffrey W. Cody's study of American architect Henry K. Murphy (1877–1954) and his "adaptive Chinese Renaissance" style joins the still-surging tide of works on Chinese cities, urban planning, and architectural design. Significantly for readers of this journal, however, Cody is interested not only in the footprints that particular Murphy designs left on the Chinese urban landscape. He also, in this book, sets Murphy's efforts to develop a culturally balanced design style against the challenges the architect experienced while operating a practice on two continents in an era when personal contact with clients was vitally important.

Although largely forgotten in the United States, the legacy of Murphy survives in China, where he designed numerous well-known and still extant academic campuses. A graduate of Yale (class of 1899), Murphy practiced in various Beaux Arts–influenced architectural firms in New York from 1900 to 1906. Murphy then opened his own firm with Richard Henry Dana Jr. Their partnership lasted until 1921. Drawing on their college connections, Murphy & Dana expanded by designing residences and, eventually, theaters and educational buildings in the Northeast. Like better-known architects of that era, Cody argues, Murphy merged the outlooks of artist and businessman. Even more important, Murphy crossed the worlds of East and West to extend early-twentieth-century adaptive styles of architecture in a completely new direction.

In 1914, an opportunity came, via Yale, that would take Murphy far afield from New York and his efforts to work within the American Colonial, Gothic, and Classical idioms then fashionable. Invited to work on the Changsha (Hunan) Yale-in-China medical campus, Murphy took the first of several trips to East Asia. Although Murphy was also commissioned to design other American-sponsored projects in Tokyo and Seoul, the Changsha campus would be the first of his many attempts to blend elements of

monumental Chinese architecture and design with modern Western building techniques and materials.

From 1914 until he left China for the last time in 1935, Murphy worked to create an adaptive style modeled on the northern designs epitomized by the Ming dynasty's Forbidden City, which he regarded as "the finest group of buildings in the world." At least initially, Murphy chose the northern model to avoid the high costs associated with more ornamental southern Chinese styles. To the satisfaction of his American clients, Murphy also developed the adaptive style to de-emphasize the foreignness of their projects. Murphy's Yale links paid off again when he received an unexpected request to design the campus of American-sponsored Qinghua College (later Qinghua University).

On this first trip, Murphy was in China for a total of only a few months, but he returned to New York a changed man. Although he never would learn to speak the language of the country in which he would now execute many of his designs, Murphy was already advancing a new architectural vernacular quite fluently, thanks to his design abilities, charm, and keen business acumen. In 1915, Murphy's Asia-based missionary projects accounted for about a quarter of his firm's "present work." By 1918, when Murphy returned to China, that proportion had grown to just under a third. Even more striking is the lengthened list of commissions Murphy had acquired: Fukien Christian and Union universities, Ginling College for Women, Fudan College, Yenching University, six buildings for the International Banking Corporation (National City Bank), Shanghai's Robert Dollar Building, and even that city's Standard Oil headquarters. With the exception of the latter three, all designs were done in the adaptive style that Murphy had pioneered for Yale-in-China and Qinghua.

In New York, Murphy & Dana began to hire Chinese graduates of American architectural programs around 1918. Lu Yanzhi, a Cornell graduate, moved to the Shanghai branch office later that year and was eventually one of the first Chinese architects to establish his own Shanghai firm. Commissioned to design the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall (1925) in Guangzhou, Lu borrowed Murphy's adaptive style. Lu's departure from the Shanghai office, however, signaled growing difficulties in Murphy's bicontinental practice. In 1921, Murphy & Dana folded. Murphy continued to work out of New York, even designing Chinese-style buildings in the United States.

In China, however, Murphy was now so well known that, by 1926, he was positioned to bid for Nationalist Party patronage. In other non-Western locales, such as New Delhi and Ankara, foreign architects had already created buildings that hybridized indigenous elements with Western design principles. Now, via his relationship with Sun Fo, son of Sun Yat-sen, Murphy set out to do the same in Guangzhou and Nanjing. In 1929, Chiang Kai-shek personally approved Murphy's plan for a "Chinese Arlington" to honor revolutionary martyrs (*Linggusi*). Six years later, Murphy returned to the United States, honored in China but largely forgotten in his native land.

Building Chinese-style foreign buildings had added from 3 to 10 percent to project costs, but Murphy's clients regarded the money as well spent if it could promote goodwill at a time of rising nationalism in China. Murphy's own reputation for careful supervision of his building projects had helped his career, but not all foreign architects in China were as esteemed or as fortunate. Providing a contrast to Murphy's reputation for probity, Cody discusses Harry Hussey, a Canadian architect who garnered the Rockefeller Foundation commission to design the Peking Union Medical College only to lose it through cost overruns and currency manipulation. Cody's discussions of Hussey's difficulties and of Murphy's Shanghai office administration problems both illustrate the challenges that players in the turbulent pre-1937 China market had to undergo.

Cody has researched Murphy's activities and designs exhaustively. His study of eighteen manuscript collections, two archives of public documents, nearly fifty periodicals and newspapers, and extensive secondary works is augmented with a dozen interviews. Both author and publisher are to be applauded for their selection of, and investment in, twelve color plates and forty-nine figures, which considerably enrich Cody's fresh perspective on architectural and urban design and on the related fields of technology and business.

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