FOREWORD

Whatever one may have read about or expects to see in a visit to today's Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Chongqing, Chengdu, or half a dozen other Chinese metropolitan centers, the traveler there is likely to be dazzled by the pace of urban development, by the lightning-like speed of Westernization, by China's sudden surpassing of the cities of Europe and North America at their own "game." The New York or London or Tokyo that the traveler returns to can only seem like a dated and relatively downtrodden city. This phenomenon raises all sorts of questions about the new and the old in China, including the wholesale abandonment of China's two thousand-plus-year-old tradition of architectural engineering and urban design—a tradition so thoroughly systematized by the early centuries of the first millennium CE and so deeply integrated into Chinese systems of thought and culture that little room existed for improvement or individual architectural creativity and only slow, almost invisible evolution in basic form took place before the modern encounter with the West.

What isn't well known is the collateral Chinese tradition of thematic appropriation, dating back to the unification under the First Emperor in the late third century BCE. According to official Chinese histories, as Qin Shihuangdi successively conquered the last six kingdoms holding out against unification, he replicated each of their local palaces (probably in miniature, perhaps two-thirds scale) along the banks of the Wei River outside his own capital city of Xianyang. Before unification, when variations in regional culture were still considerable, in everything from writing script to architectural style, the diverse architecture arrayed along the Wei must have been quite a sight to residents of the capital and may well have rivaled the contrast between old and new seen in today's urban centers. The underlying nature of this appropriation was manifest as well in the early royal parks: exclusive preserves that later gave rise to China's private gardens but that were paradisical microcosms stocked with all the beasts, horticultural varieties, and man-made replicas of geography from throughout the known world that the ruler could manage to gather in one place as both symbol of his hegemony and a reality that he could draw upon to enhance his own earthly powers. As a classic example of this, when still in the early planning stages of his invasion of the Dian Kingdom in the deep south (now Yunnan Province), the Han emperor Wudi (reigned 141–87 BCE) made a small-scale replica of Dian's Kunming Lake, upon which his naval

assault would be launched. Down through the ages, such appropriation continued. Reduction of scale of alien landscapes and architecture facilitated control; possession of the replica made it real. The modern historian of architecture should realize that the appropriation of Soviet-style architecture in the 1950s—no less a transformation than the current one—served in the Chinese mind to vault China into leadership of the international socialist movement.

The Chinese appropriation of "other" types of architecture results from all kinds of negotiation. Professor Ning Qiang recently showed me photographs of the city hotel of Tumushuke (Tumxuk), a town just east of Kashgar in China's westernmost, Islamic province, built in an eighteenth-century northern European style found anywhere from Hanover north to Sweden and Finland. When a major hotel was proposed in an Iranian style appropriate to the region and its ethnicity, Han members of the provincial administration blocked it; if there were to be a local Muslim uprising, they protested, rioters would naturally flock to such a site and fortify themselves there. The designer relented and produced a traditional Chinese-style building instead. But now the Muslim-Uyghur members of the administration protested against this as a violation of their territorial culture. In a third go-round, the politically savvy architect produced the northern European design. Everyone was happy with it: nothing was lost, something was gained.

More or less alike in principle, each example of architectural appropriation is different in its particulars. But none is more astonishing than the one presented here by Bianca Bosker. Designed for China's newly risen upper-middle and upper classes, a new brand of suburb has recently sprung up surrounding many of the modernist cities, serving as gated communities that provide simulacra of foreign towns and cultures—not modernist but retrograde, like the Tudor-style Thames Town outside of Shanghai. Providing the benefits of a life abroad without one's having to go abroad, these themed suburbs allow their residents to globalize while avoiding the challenge of foreign languages and cultures, while China avoids the brain-drain of its educated elite. "What distinguishes the Chinese simulacra cities from Disneyland, Renaissance Towns, Las Vegas, and other theme-park-like environments," the author writes, "is that the suspension of disbelief is temporary in the latter and permanent in the former."

If the theme-park atmosphere here seems *faux* and superficial, Ms. Bosker's study of this urban phenomenon most decidedly is not. She explicates the motivation behind it and details the reality of it through careful architectural and anthropological investigation, in both image and word. In her own words:

> What this exploration will reveal is that the factors impinging on the decision to simulate alien townscapes are not merely exogenous but lead deep into the cultural character of contemporary China: the rise of its newly minted middle and upper classes and their desire for branded

> luxury consumer goods and, more important, symbols of self-cultivation; the flexing of the national soft-power muscle; a "yes-we-can" boosterism bloated on a decade of unprecedented economic growth and increasing prestige and power in the global arena; and a deeply rooted tradition of celebrating cultural achievements by constructing gigantic monuments.

Accordingly, she translates this architecture into a study that ranges widely from Chinese concepts of originality and copywork—in Chinese ontogeny, *everything* in the material realm is but a replica of its ur-concept, or *xiang*, residing outside of this realm; multiples, regardless of scale, are equals—to a characterization of what these suburbs say about the latest in taste, emergent class differentiation, business methods, and ecology in today's China. Those viewers who would be astonished by the sight of these new towns (Thames Town here, Fontainebleau Villas there, Bauhaus architecture somewhere just up the freeway) will be even more astonished when they read what this book has to say about them, as Ms. Bosker opens the gates and takes us inside.

Jerome Silbergeld
P. Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Professor of Chinese Art History
and Director, Tang Center for East Asian Art, Princeton University