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Relocating Shengjing: Traveling Panorama as Theory

Abstract: This paper details the production of *Shengjing Panorama*, a 360-degree illustration of the semicolonial Manchurian metropolis of Shenyang circa 1910–1930. Currently on view at the Velaslavasay Panorama in Downtown Los Angeles, the painting joins three modes of panorama creation—the Chinese revolutionary praxis, the European fine art and the contemporary Los Angeles "feral" DIY method—allowing for a thicker, more open, non-prescribed, visual historiography of the lost world of Shengjing (Wertheim 2007). By focusing on *Shengjing Panorama's* representation and theorization of Shenyang's history, its collaborative genesis by artists in contemporary Shenyang and Los Angeles, and its process of installation at the Velaslavasay Panorama, this paper explores how panoramas can theorize both the past and the present, or how the lost worlds of the past can be evoked and communicated to diverse audiences in the present, through engaging the public with ways of knowing and viewing contested landscapes and lost worlds across space and time.

Keywords: Velaslavasay Panorama, Traveling Theory, Shenyang, Los Angeles, Manchuria

1 Prelude

The historic teal-colored Union Theatre in Los Angeles stands in a partially gentrified residential neighborhood of West Adams adjacent to the campus of the University of Southern California (Fig. 1). Since its completion in 1910, this early purpose-built motion picture house has become a palimpsest of neighborhood-based mass media on the outskirts of Hollywood. Of the many incarnations of this building were; a movie theatre, an acting school and playhouse opened by Louise Glaum, a site of church meetings, and the headquarters of the Tile Layers Union Local #18 (Von Blon 1935; *Los Angeles Times* 1955). Since 2004, it has been home to its current inhabitant, the Velas-

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Fig. 1: Union Theatre marquee of the Velaslavasay Panorama, 1122 W. 24th Street, Los Angeles, California, 90007, USA. Image, Forest Casey, 2016.

lavasay Panorama (VP), a non-profit art space founded by Sara Velas, a panorama artist from Panorama City, California, that was originally located in a vacant round Chinese take-out restaurant on Hollywood Boulevard. The VP's previous panoramas included *Panorama of the Valley of the Smokes* (of Los Angeles two hundred years ago), *Effulgence of the North* (a moonlit arctic landscape), and *Grand Moving Mirror of California* (a moving panorama of a gold-rush era journey).

One would least expect to see in the fourth and current panorama-on-view an old city in northeastern China from a hundred years ago with outstanding Russian and Japanese architecture. It is the *Shengjing Panorama*, an illustration of the semicolonial Manchurian metropolis of Shenyang circa 1910–1930. Leaving behind the sun-filled streets of Los Angeles, the visitor enters the VP through the lobby, gets a ticket and brochure at the front desk, and carries on down a darkened hallway (Fig. 2). This nineteenth-century style entrance forces the eyes to adjust to a different way of seeing (Oettermann 1997, 49). Once she travels up the spiral staircase, she finds herself immersed in the sights and sounds of early twentieth-century Shengjing (today's Shenyang). The imagined viewer is now suddenly far from Los Angeles outside, deep in an aesthetically constructed lost world. Much of what can be seen in the spectacles have been lost in domestic and international wars, anti-Manchu political revolutions, Maoist decolonial industrialization, and post-Mao urban renewal. Yet some iconic architectures survived, including the warlord Zhang Zuolin's mansion and the Shenyang

Fig. 2: Hallway entrance to *Shengjing Panorama* installed at the Velaslavasay Panorama. Photograph courtesy of Velaslavasay Panorama, 2022.

Station of 1899, initiated by Russian investment and completed by the Japanese South Manchuria Railway.

The Shenyang Station can be zoomed in as a landmark of note for highlighting the essay's theoretical set-up. In fact, before the visitor entered the rotunda, she already spotted the station in a diorama in the dim corridor leading to the panorama's spiral staircase. The diorama of Shenyang Station presents a miniature 3D version of the station and is situated across from a diorama of La Grande Station, the erstwhile train station (1893–1939) in Los Angeles to which it bears a striking resemblance (Masters 2013). This opposition of the train stations across from each other positions the viewer in between a dialogue of the two cities that carries on into the panorama itself, creating a third, simulated space combining a prior Shenyang with a prior and present Los Angeles into an imagined domain that preserves prior possibilities. It is this traveling through simulated space that is important. The simulated space both excavates and imagines the past alongside the real and material present. The experience of the panorama is caught in between these shifting temporalities and spatialities, traveling between Shenyang and Los Angeles, or Los Angeles and Shenyang, across intersecting imaginaries.

2 Introduction

This essay seeks to provoke new thinking of the traveling and theory of panoramas. It theorizes not only how panoramas are devices that provide travel through aesthetic immersion, but also considers how panoramas are built, physical objects that can be subjects of traveling. Additionally, it theorizes how panoramas, at least in their contemporary instantiation, can be conceptually formed from the complex interaction of ideas between people and places, such as the artists involved, where instead of a single or direct representation of a particular place, scene, or history, multiple layered representations and meanings can emerge. The essay does so through a case examination of the conceptualization and creation of the *Shengjing Panorama*. In this case, the panorama presents a re-imagining and aesthetic representation of one particular place and time, but is installed in a very different, and seemingly unrelated, place and time. Yet, we argue, it is exactly this disjunctive "interlapping" (Brathwaite 1974, 5; Roberts 2021, 28) of places, times, and imaginaries unloyal to any centralized historical narrative that gives *Shengjing Panorama* its power to evoke lost worlds in a way that is not prescribed to one reading (e.g. nostalgia or political victory), one place (e.g. Shenyang), or one identity, but instead opens up wider ground to theorize.

Shengjing Panorama derives from a multi-year collaboration between artists of the Velaslavasay Panorama and Li Wu, Yan Yang and Zhou Fuxian—painters, historians and professors from the Lu Xun Academy of Art in Shenyang, which originated from Mao Zedong's Yan'an-era (1935–48) mobilization of mass literary and art revolution. Within this collaboration there is a meeting of panoramic artistic traditions—the socialist, nineteenth century and the contemporary—as well as imaginaries about the cities that each are in—how the American artists imagined Shenyang and its history, how the Chinese artists imagined the city of Los Angeles. Rather than a one-way story of creation—the Chinese panorama going to America—it is instead the crossing of imaginaries that speak to an organic, integrated co-creation, where the perceptions of the artist and each other are blended together with the process of getting to know each other, personally, professionally and culturally, highly informing the *Shengjing Panorama* project. Ultimately this was an "artist-to-artist" collaboration, guided by the desire to create as felt in artist-driven "folk art environments," such as Los Angeles' own Watts Towers.

For *Shengjing*, a method of crossing imaginaries for its creation brings this discourse into an approachable, participatory form which includes the audience's experience and "treats visitors as co-creators in the process of knowledge production, not merely as passive consumers" (Wertheim and Wertheim 2002). An approach countering the top-down consumption of history-telling occuring in the state-sponsored panorama exhibits created by the Chinese state, the conception of the *Shengjing Panorama* was informed by the contemporary history of Shenyang that the artists lived through, that is, a city emerging from socialism in the late 1970s and 1980s, experiencing deindustrialization and changing economic conditions, and since the 1990s has experi-

enced postmodern and postcolonial debates that have influenced experiments in art, architecture, and academia. These lineages are also present within the panorama.

In 2017, upon completion, the 90-foot long painting was ceremoniously handed over to representatives of the Velaslavasay Panorama and transported to Los Angeles (Fig. 3). The connection between Shenyang and Los Angeles may be ambiguous and not fall into any major historical or contemporary iterations of China-US relations. Why Shenyang? Many would wonder. Unlike Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou that strike the major scales of China's modernization, Shenyang plays a minor scale of nostalgia for many suppressed memories and unrealized futures.

Fig. 3: *Shengjing Panorama* painted canvas handover ceremony in Shenyang, China at the Tiexi School for the Deaf on May 2, 2017. Image, Velaslavasay Panorama, 2017.

This essay draws on the traveling of *Shengjing Panorama* to contemplate on panoramas as a medium that transports ideas, people, and goods across times and spaces. Our interpretation of the traveling panorama builds on Edward Said's traveling theory and its ensuing expansion toward "traveling theorists" (Clifford 1989). A *traveling panorama* can be a theoretical tool for thinking about how a panorama operates as a grounded and site-specific interface for evoking complex and layered lost worlds. They complicate our physical, emotional, and epistemological engagements with multilayered landscapes. This has to do not only with what it is representing specifically but also with the publics that encounter it. In the case of the *Shengjing Panorama*, it engages with lost worlds that are both historically specific to the city's represented and evoked past (Shenyang) and parallel spatially through location and programming

(Los Angeles). In turn, theorizing the *Shengjing Panorama* as a traveling panorama can perhaps also help form a more open and generic knowledge that can be applied to understanding the way that lost worlds from the past are composed of similar complexities (postcolonial, postsocialist, changing and redeveloping), in order to better understand the present composition of places and cities, which can then be brought back to existing discussions of panorama as a device that provides "mobilized virtual" travel to another time and space (Friedberg 1994).

The subsequent sections are organized to delve into distinct facets of the panorama's genesis and significance. "Si(gh)ting the 'Lost World'" provides historical context, while "Recrafting Shengjing" examines how the evocation of *Shengjing Panorama*'s portrayal of the city was constructed. "Socialist Routes" explores the development and influence of Socialist-style panoramas on the Chinese artists' training, while "Traveling Connections, Intersecting Imaginaries" investigates the trans-Pacific collaboration between the Shenyang and Los Angeles based-artists. The logistics of creating, transporting, and installing the panorama are dissected in "The (Actually) Traveling Panorama: Shenyang to Los Angeles." "Interlapping Sound-and-Lightscape" examines how the panorama encapsulates elements from each city via the soundscape that soundtracks the exhibition space. Finally, "Traveling Publics" documents the diverse public engagements facilitated by the *Shengjing Panorama*. The essay concludes by summarizing key theories and contributions, emphasizing how panoramas can offer nuanced perspectives on past and present, engaging diverse audiences across space and time.

2.1 Notes on Naming

In the spirit of a lost world, *Shengjing Panorama* uses Shenyang's Manchurian name. The Ming Dynasty name "Shenyang" (literally "The Upper Bank of the Shen River") was revived during the warlord-era in the late 1920s. It suggests the city's gateway position to the region's signature Changbai (Long White) mountain range whose fertile river valleys nourished the Jurchen tribes that were a constant military threat to the Ming. Upon capturing Shenyang from the Ming, the Jurchen confederation leader Nurhaci and his descendents, who soon rose to found the Qing empire, renamed Shenyang "Mukden," meaning "the (place of) rising" in Manchu. "Shengjing" was its mandarin Chinese translation, literally "the flourishing capital" (Rogaski 2022, 75). Once the Manchus relocated the Qing capital to Beijing, a "Fengtian" ("Heaven-granted") government was established in Shengjing, indicating the siting/sensing of the emperor's dragon veins (18). These names carry geo-spatial measurements that have cosmopolitical connotations. In this article, we use "Shengjing" to refer to the temporal (1910–1930) and thematic domains of the panorama, operating as a palimpsest of the modernly defined massive metropolis of Shenyang. We use "Shenyang" to address the city from 1930 onward.

3 Si(gh)ting the "Lost World" of Shengjing

Early twentieth-century China stood at the crossroads of a non-Han empire's fall, a full colonization with foreign investment on industrialization, and a bourgeois society with opaque possibilities of political autonomy. What distinguishes Shengjing from the other metropoles on China's east coast was its being a political and economic center of an expansive borderland the size of Germany, Poland, and France combined, or that of two Texases (Rogaski 2022, 8). Spanning north-south from Siberia to the Bohai Gulf, and east-west from the Pacific Ocean to Central Asia, Manchuria's territory at high Qing exceeded far beyond the northeastern borderline of the People's Republic of China today. Merchants from around the world brought to Shengjing myriad languages and countless kinds of goods (Schlesinger 2017). Ruth Rogaski argues in her seminal work *Knowing Manchuria* (2022, 12) that there has never been a solid ground to claim who was native and who was settler, and whose knowledge of the land (and landscape) was indigenous and whose was imperial. Defying all tendencies of binary thinking, Manchuria was "a series of 'nested' imperialisms that encompassed the landscape in layered and interpenetrating hierarchies."

Panorama as a way of seeing, knowing, and remembering—of influencing the discourse of identity and history through creating knowledge of landscapes—runs directly into the question of coherence. Whose coherent view of the landscape does it represent and at whose expense? While it is not uncommon for a panorama painting to represent conflicting parties and contested territories, for instance, the depiction of a battlefield, re-presenting Shengjing in the 1910–1930 period entails a contextualized understanding of the city as the metropole of many intersected frontiers that would later fade. Shengjing was the center of many peripheries (Fig. 4). Each of those peripheries retained irreducible identity tensions with its respective imperial centers predominantly within Asia—Qing/China, Chosŏn Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and Russia—but also
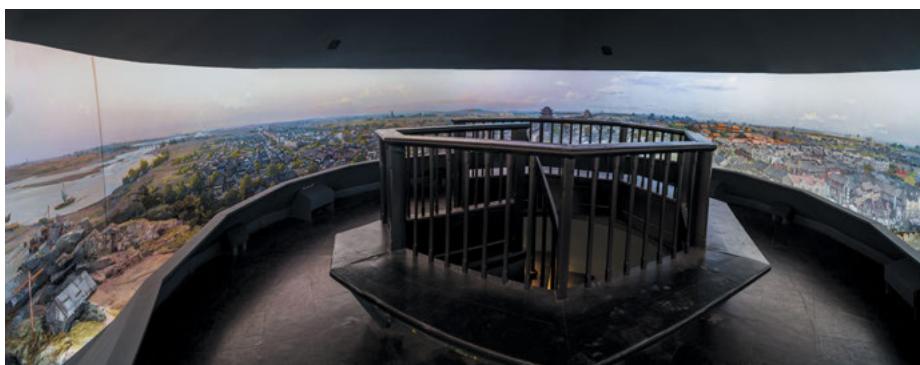

Fig. 4: Platform view of *Shengjing Panorama*, a 360-degree painting of 90 ft. circumference (27.43 meters) with *faux terrain*, completed 2019. Image, Forest Casey, 2021.

in Great Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. Only under Japanese occupation (1932–1945) did Manchuria have distinct "'international' boundaries" as a puppet state (Rogaski 2022, 7), Manchukuo, a political entity that the People's Republic of China (PRC) vehemently characterizes in history textbooks, films, and documentaries as a predetermined "lost" case. Manchuria's highly volatile and disaggregated regional identities, as well as the disparity between its boundary and that of the PRC, make "the very moniker of 'Manchuria' . . . a political suspect enterprise" that needs to be obscured or erased from the PRC's grand historical narrative to give way to the myths of inevitable historical progress and inviolable sovereignty (Rogaski 2022, 7). In other words, the memory and knowledge of "Manchuria" in general, and of "Shengjing" in particular, needed, and still need, to be repressed and lost selectively.

For the reasons above, "lost" is the key characteristic of seeing, listening to, and comprehending early twentieth-century Shengjing, not so much a nostalgia that longs for restoration as an identity very specific to Manchuria's cartographic uncertainties that haunted every settlement. Very importantly, what made a unique Shengjing was not a hybridity of established and coherent identities one can find in the imperial centers; rather, Shengjing was an assemblage of divergents, fragments, and crosscurrents, a spheric local place. In this light, Shengjing may seem antithetical to the coherent view a panorama brings forth, coherent not just in spatial dimensions but also in the mapping of the past's move into the present, or historiography. And yet, a panorama can also take this challenge to become a critical pedagogical tool that disorients the viewing/knowing of the landscape by reopening the plurality of the past.

Picking up the obsolescent name "Shengjing" not only evokes memories of a "flourishing capital" whose lineage extended to more time-spaces than present-day Shenyang, but also stirs in the "political suspect enterprise" to peruse the multiplicity and contestation of Manchuria's landscapes. By shifting the inquiry from "what was" to "what could have been," we view *Shengjing Panorama* as a place-based knowledge production that diverges from the "homogeneous, empty time" of modernist metanarrative (Benjamin 2019, 205). As a "walk-in assemblage" of historically and recently recorded images and sounds, *Shengjing* in the Velaslavasay Panorama engages its viewers in an empathetic si(gh)ting of ambiguous territorial boundaries amidst robust everyday life in what Fa-ti Fan calls a "cultural borderland." It re-presents the city of Shengjing as a highly contested terrain where knowledge transaction and negotiation took place "between metropole and colony, between colonies, and among Europeans, creoles and autochthons" (Fan 2007, 215)—also noting, as Rogaski warns, it was not Europeans but Asians that played a predominant role (Rogaski 2022, 13).

Drawing on the historical and continuous struggles to control the "knowing [of] Manchuria," we analyze the creation of *Shengjing Panorama* as a case of recrafting the landscape among historical attempts to open up questions about the mechanism of landscape-mediated knowledge production: What is known and unknown? What does it entail to know an elsewhere and elsewhen? What dynamics of relationship does it insert between the viewer and the view/viewed? If panorama, like film and other mass

media tools, is devised to create a "knowing" spectator by engendering a fantasy of mobility though virtual traveling, what might be lost in this kind of "knowing"?

4 Recrafting Shengjing—The (Un)commonground of the Manchuria Landscape

Shengjing's landscape and the kinesthetic knowledge extracted from it were simultaneously a political product of frontier scheming and a Benjaminian phantasmagoria of imperialist politics that led to two world wars. The mode of knowledge production of the Manchurian landscape through sensing, mapping, documenting, sampling, and storytelling sent back to the empires the illusion of being present in "the here and now" (Mourenza 2010) where the present and the imagined future were collapsed through mass media-facilitated fetishism of commodities. The Manchurian phantasmagoria reflected the shift to a different approach to extracting the region's natural resources that was reshaping the world of empires, "a shift from commodities to meet the demand of court elites and luxury markets to fossil fuels and agriculture to meet the demand of industry and mass armies" (Rogaski 2022, 18).

The era of *Shengjing Panorama* (1910–1930) is setting up a "hyper cosmopolitan" backdrop of a mix of cultures and ideas (Fig. 5). When the Japanese were at the helm of Manchukuo, the Manchurian landscape was then purposed into a "golden land of opportunity" to promote the region for the Japanese to relocate and get an ethnic stronghold, a version of its own "Manifest Destiny" as experienced here in the American West through land grants and homesteading. As Edward Denison and Guangyu Ren note in their study of the coordinated work of Japan's Manchukuo government and its film industry, "Manchukuo became a film set on which the drama of Japan's imperial project was played out in glorious detail and projected back to a thirsty public at home and overseas." Thinly veiled under a promise to enlighten "foreign people" with Manchuria's evolving situation, Japan's production of tourist "brochures, maps, pamphlets, posters, and books and the production of features films and documentaries" aided the empire's visualization of "a place to experience the future—a land of modernity fashioned by Japan's benevolent and guiding hand" (Denison and Ren 2016, 61).

After World War II, portraying Manchuria continued to be a political act to territorialize "Chinese" sovereignty. The Battle of Jinzhou in 1948 marked the Chinese Communist Party's securitizing China's northeast at the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek-led Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), an event that forty years later became the subject of the PRC's first 360-degree panorama museum. The project, directed by the central and regional military commissions and painted by Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts, was to fulfill patriotic education. In the years following the PRC's founding in 1949, the state arranged mass sketching tours that sent practicing artists to China's scenic borderlands, including Manchuria's signature semi-active volcano, Mount Changbai. Those
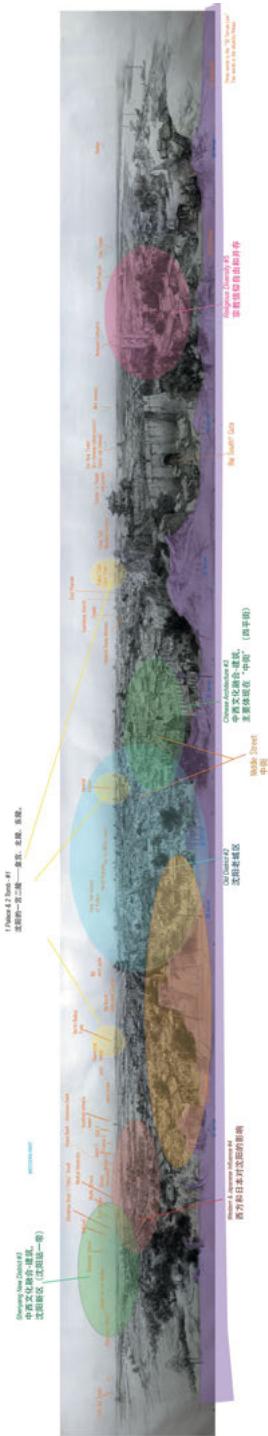
Fig. 5: Black and white final *Shengjing Panorama* composition sketch (Li Wu, Yan Yang, Zhou Fuxian, Artists, 2015) with activity zones and points of interest. Colored labeling and added graphics by Guan Rong and Sara Velas. Diagram courtesy of Velaslavasay Panorama, 2015.

tours were intended as an educational apparatus to absorb the suspect "bourgeois" Chinese artists into the post-1949 proletarian Chinese socialism to become "cultural workers" (Ho 2020, 4). Asked to understand landscape sketching as revolutionary praxis that aligned the individual with state ideology, the traveling artists were to "recognize and envisage socialist life as palpable" both as art creators and as a medium through which the state spoke to the public (5).

In all these iterations of Manchuria, landscape is not simply a static object to be represented. Rather, it has offered the site, material, and instrument of world-making through people's traveling, transaction, displacement, appropriation, and settlement. Following Rogaski's (2022, 19) treatment of Manchuria as a "spatial assemblage" that accommodates a plurality of knowledge- and place-making, we now turn to the crafting of *Shengjing Panorama* as a visual historiographical project that assembled seemingly unlikely partnership between Shenyang and Los Angeles deriving from the peripheries of contemporary panorama practices.

5 Socialist Routes

Backtracking *Shengjing*'s creation, the very idea of this panorama would not have been conceived without the artists on both the Los Angeles and the Shenyang sides traveling to places, in physicality and imagination, that decentralize their respective institutional training to engender a third space. In 2005, the International Panorama Council (IPC) partnered with the Lu Xun Academy in Shenyang to host the Thirteenth Annual International Panorama Conference (IPC 2023). This event connected Sara Velas, founder of the VP, and the three future *Shengjing Panorama* painters (Fig. 6). Velas reunited with two of them again at the 2012 IPC conference in Bulgaria. A year later, an Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts Curatorial Fellowship flew Velas to multiple Chinese cities to study the state-sponsored panoramas, including Shenyang, Beijing, Jinan, Zhengzhou, and Jinggangshan (Mao's revolutionary cradle before Yan'an). Each city bears a benchmark memory of a military event that the Chinese Communist Party underscores as a major step to its inevitable leadership of a new republic.

On one of those trips, Velas took a detour to Pyongyang in North Korea to visit the panorama *Taejon Liberation Operation* completed in 1974, a battle during the early years of the Korean War. It was the same North Korean panorama that a Chinese artist and curator visited in 1979. Xia Shushen was a member of the first museum delegation the Chinese government and military sent overseas, to North Korea, to visit a panorama. That experience led to Xia becoming an earnest advocate for building war-themed panoramas in mainland China and bringing the IPC to Beijing, its first non-European location, in 2001 (Xia 2001). According to Xia, the delegation to Pyongyang was assigned the task to seek new methods of building museums in China at the dawn of the country's cautious and gradual opening to

Fig. 6: Attendees of the Thirteenth International Panorama Council Conference in Shenyang, China, September 22, 2005. Printed photograph from the collection of author Sara Velas.

the market economy (Xia 2014, 6). Foreseeing the imminent danger of a sudden ideological collapse and economic dependence on the United States, the Chinese leadership held tight onto continued, and possibly diversified, patriotic education programs that would retain the metanarratives of nation-building as the younger populations were incentivized to aspire for professional and economic growth (Hoffman 2010). Xia, collaborating with the Chinese People's Revolutionary Military Museum, led a second panorama trip to the Soviet Union in 1987, in preparation for creating China's first 180-degree semi-panorama in Beijing, *The Marco Polo Bridge Event*, to commemorate the beginning of the Second Sino-Japan war in 1937, and the first 360-degree panorama painting, *The Capturing of Jinzhou*, a decisive battle in Manchuria in 1948 during the Chinese Civil War (1946–49) that paved way to the Chinese Communists' nationwide victory (Xia 2014). The latter project was painted by numerous artists including a few from the Lu Xun Academy, a move that the school made ostensibly to renew its institutional commitment to the party-led patriotic education by revitalizing its origin story in Yan'an.

The traveling of Chinese panorama artists in the 1980s, a decade where many Chinese intellectuals sought to reconnect with the "Chinese Enlightenment" era (contemporaneous with the depicted time in *Shengjing*), formed a cultural transaction route of North Korea-Soviet Union-China that was both rooted in and growing beyond the socialist revolutionary art praxis. Given the extent to which the state and the military were involved in the battleground panoramas' production, the socialist route exemplifies the use of virtual landscape as a top-down initiative of political and emotional territorialization—a way of prescribed knowing. The war-themed landscapes in the

Chinese panoramas are distinct from those that encourage the commodification of the visible. The former are sacred, unquestionable, and do not tolerate different interpretations. The spectator is not going to become a flâneur/flâneuse who wanders aimlessly and leisurely in the virtual world, but rather a disciplined and surveilled subject of the state. The feeling of being seen is a mandatory experience in the Chinese panorama museums. Oftentimes, one or two security guards stationed in the rotunda cast the surveillor's gaze on the spectators. The "imaginary illusion of mobility" that Anne Friedberg describes in *Window Shopping* (1994) still applies, only that it is not for consumerism and voyeurism, but patriotism.

Geographically, Shenyang was where Velas's traveling intersected with the working orbits of the Chinese panorama artists. But the slightly wayward pursuit of artist built folk art environments that loosened the institutional and mainstream grip on both parties served as an aesthetic middle ground. In other words, established professional and institutional support conditioned the Shenyang-Los Angeles partnership, but the latter was also readily becoming its own life and engaging new audiences. The *Shengjing Panorama* painting derived from this partnership embraced the aesthetics of the ephemeral from its design and would embark on a journey abroad.

6 Traveling Connections, Intersecting Imaginaries

As teachers and artists, Li Wu, Yan Yang and Zhou Fuxian had participated in large-scale patriotic panorama projects initiated by the state and organized by the central and regional military commissions, much like *Storming Jinzhou* and *Jinan Campaign Storming of Heavily Fortified Positions in the City* that Velas visited (Li 2017). They displayed unprecedented focus, skill and dedication to this media form, fomenting in Velas the idea to create a collaborative work that would negotiate an artistic and thematic space on the periphery of the Chinese state-sanctioned panoramas. The providence in finding each other and experiencing (and experimenting) a mostly wordless exchange of reverence and like-mindedness laid the foundation for the *Shengjing* project that would be integrated into future projects of the VP. Into whatever would come out of this mutually anticipated collaboration the partnering artists inscribed their curiosity and imaginaries of each other's city's cultural aura along with a historicized critical affection for their own cities.

The subject matter of *Shengjing Panorama* was chosen collaboratively and grew out of discussions on the architectural history of Shenyang, the use of the panoramic art form in the past and present, and the context of where the panorama was planned to be exhibited—inside the Union Theatre. The years 1910–1930 resonated for many reasons, including the fact that these years were the heyday of the Union Theatre (built 1910). It was also a time when amateur photography, practiced occasionally by traveling missionaries and emissaries from various European countries, allowed for

an abundance of visual material for the painters to use to reconstruct the "lost world" of Shengjing. Two interrelated questions may have been crucial to the design of the panorama as the subject, not destination, of transnational traveling: What kind of "virtual" world will *Shengjing* allow its viewers to peek into? And in return, what kind of philosophy of mobilized sighting will the panorama like its viewers to nurture in a sight that denormalizes their bodily sense of place as fixed and bounded, and of time as linear and homogeneous? We argue that in inviting the audience to experience what Harri Mäcklin (2022) calls the "paradox of aesthetic immersion"—be[ing] in two worlds at once, and yet . . . not properly in either"—*Shengjing Panorama* is designed not to tell "a tale of two cities," but rather to evoke new or renewed transurban connections unbounded by the frame of nation-state (Robinson 2016, 3–29).

Velas secured the partnership of Guan Rong, long-time friend and painter of the *Grand Moving Mirror of California*, to join the project and assist with actualization and translation. Velas and Rong visited the artists in Shenyang multiple times and toured significant locations that would later be integrated into the painting, including the mansion of Marshal Zhang, the Zhaoling Tomb in Beiling Park, the Imperial Palace Museum and Shenyang Railway Station. Other documentation and research was conducted at the Guangdong Movie Park, a Hollywood/Universal Studios-style backlot where buildings of various time periods were constructed for the purposes of filming historical dramas and epic costumed television series. It was an inverse to how Hollywood set pieces and indulgent theatrical designs were repurposed into the architecture of Los Angeles' New Chinatown in the 1930s when the construction of Union Station railway depot displaced the Chinatown community.

In spring 2015, the painters sent digital images of three sketches done on paper showing various iterations of a view of Shengjing. The first focused on landmarks such as the towers and gates of the city wall, the Wenxiang Pavillion and the Confucius Temple. The second sketch emphasized public life, including the five "Largests" on Central Boulevard—the largest department store House Ji Shun Si; the largest shop that sells watches, clocks and glasses, Heng De Li; the largest pharmacy Tian Yi Hall; the largest stationary shop Li Zhan Xin; and the largest imported goods store Tong Yi Cheng. The third sketch focused on eight particular scenes of Shengjing—Nurhaci's Tomb on Tianzhu Mountain surrounded by pine trees and cedar trees; local dignitaries appreciating lotus flowers; merchants shuttling goods on Shen Water (Shen Shui, known as the Hun River today) during summertime, to name a few. Curators and artists settled on a fourth variation that incorporated elements from all three sketches, with a focus on everyday life over the officially ceremonial.

The final installation consists of a 360-degree painting displayed in the nineteenth-century style with an umbrella obstructing the top edge of the canvas and sculptural *faux terrain* interrupting and concealing the bottom edge to create the illusion of a limitless view within an encompassed domain. The *faux terrain* features houses, lamp posts, foliage, the remnants of the old city wall, horses, chickens and people – getting their hair trimmed, selling vegetables, having their fortunes read. Uti-

lizing architectural methods of perspective representation, the painting is divided into the four cardinal directions to illustrate the local customs and culture of Shengjing during the time period of 1910–1930, including: religious ceremonial practices, marketplace and trading methods, foreign-designed and native historic architecture, transportation hubs, rituals of public life, and the diverse scope of the city (Fig. 7). The painting is a close approximation of the city's geography and features four gourd-shaped Buddhist pagodas dating back to 1643, in the east, west, north and south (which remain in the city today) to help viewers pinpoint their direction. The final painting depicts more than 300 people and over 1000 buildings based on extensive research conducted at city archives and through consulting with local historians.

Contrasting this final work with *The Capturing of Jinzhou* mentioned above, which represents the normative socialist ideal of panoramic art for the socialist nation, can help develop a better understanding and reading of *Shengjing Panorama*, both in how it differs from what came before and how this difference is the result of the specific "traveling" that the artists made in their movement towards its creation (Fig. 8). Since *The Capturing of Jinzhou*, China produced ten more 360-degree panoramas reminiscent of the nineteenth-century style (Li 2017; Xia 2001). Li Wu, Yan Yang and Zhou Fuxian worked on most of them. *Shengjing*, however, diverges from the rest for it travels, embraces the ephemeral instead of the permanent, and does not subscribe to the teleological narrative of nation-building. It prompts us to begin inquiring about the "routes and roots" (DeLoughrey 2009) of panoramas—whether the traveling of panoramas may be an overlooked aspect of this mass media form invented to illustrate a world in motion. That *Shengjing Panorama* is designed to be part of LA raises new hope of creating symbiotic relationships between travel and place.

Likening immersive media to portals is not a new metaphor. But getting beyond the abstraction of traveling theory—a metaphorical, disembodied postcolonial empathy for the "Other" place that is sometimes related to the immigrant theorists as "home"—has been the ironic struggle of postcolonial traveling theorists who reinforce and live in the neoliberal power of the western university that colonizes and gentrifies its surrounding neighborhoods. What is critical about *Shengjing* is that it is an event the VP curates to nurture its relationship with local neighborhoods and its dedication to understanding and showing them as porous places. *Shengjing Panorama* creates aesthetically "radical" connections, through a palimpsestic faux landscape, to multiple colonial Chinas that are ironically alienated by new knowledge-production colonies around universities where empathy with place hardly becomes less academic and "metaphorical" (Mäcklin 2022). As Pheng Cheah has enumerated, the fragmented colonial Chinas within Qing's proper included "colonies (British Hong Kong, Portuguese Macau, Japanese Taiwan) and territories leased to Russia, Britain, Germany, and France, where Chinese sovereignty was suspended . . . treaty ports with foreign settlements governed by extraterritorial law and areas of foreign residence that facilitated imperialist interests without full colonization, as well as coastal and inland zones of foreign colonial influence adjacent to European colonies" (Cheah 2022, 11).
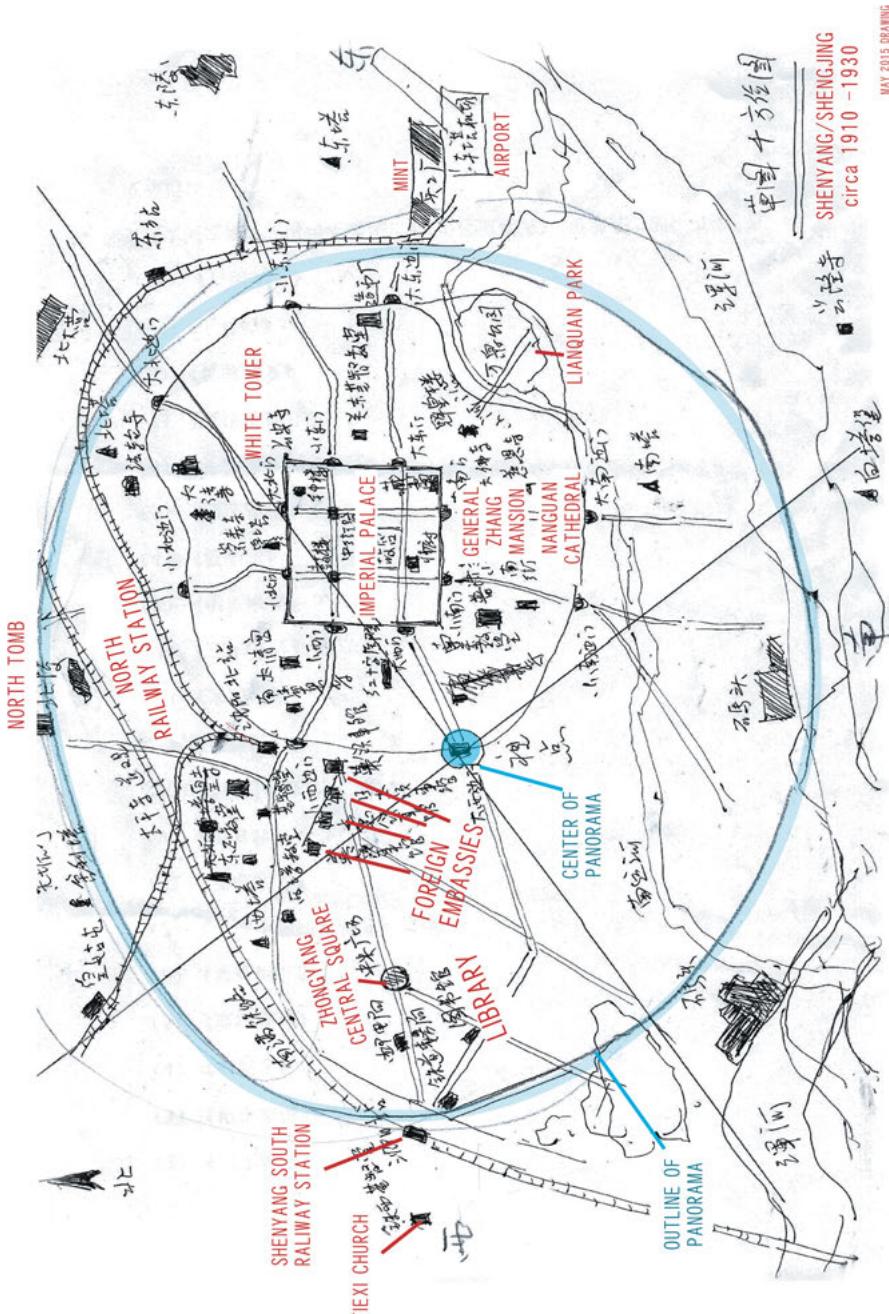
Fig. 7: Li Wu, black and white sketch showing an overhead view map of planned *Shengjing Panorama* highlights with colored labeling by Guan Rong and Sara Velas. Diagram courtesy of Velaslavasay Panorama, 2015.

Fig. 8: Excerpt of *The Capturing of Jinzhou* (Song Huimin, Xu Rongchu, Gao Quan, and others, Painters, Xia Shushen, Curator, 1989) painting and terrain, compared with an excerpt of *Shengjing Panorama* (Li Wu, Yan Yang, Zhou Fuxian, Painters, Sara Velas and Ruby Carlson, Curators, 2019) painting and terrain. Images, author Sara Velas, 2005 and 2019.

These transoceanic Chinese (is)lands configured an archipelagic shape of Sinosphere, a cultural and literary domain loosely and intimately connected through the lingua franca of the Chinese. Notably, as an event, *Shengjing* initiates these connections from within the VP but has no obligation to make the VP a particularly Chinese space. In fact, evoking imaginaries of all these different colonial Chinas at once and chaotically, the VP has deterritorialized China, in both geographical and imaginary terms. In doing so, it also releases "China" from the position of a spectacle, the real/perceived "Chinatown" with an infinite interior that has historically imprisoned all Chinese to be performers to a white western cosmopolitan audience (Yu 2020).

7 The (Actually) Traveling Panorama: Shenyang to Los Angeles

Re-presenting a multiply-colonized city in motion, *Shengjing Panorama* itself traveled across the Pacific Ocean to arrive at the Velaslavasay Panorama. After being created in Shenyang, in the gymnasium of the Tiexi School for the Deaf—a specialized high school for hearing-impaired students—it embarked on the journey to LA in May 2017. Rolled up and crated in preparation, the logistics were handled by a company seren-dipitously named Guochuang Global 360 logistics. The crate was loaded into a truck and driven to Beijing (Fig. 9). There, it was loaded onto an airplane as cargo and flown to LAX airport. Then, it was processed and delivered to a warehouse in Pa-coima, where Sara Velas and the VP's technical collaborator Oswaldo Gonzalez trans-ported it to the Union Theatre for installation.

Fig. 9: Loading a crated *Shengjing Panorama* at the Tiexi School in Shenyang, China preparing for transport to Los Angeles, CA, USA on May 11, 2017. Image, Velaslavasay Panorama, 2017.

The VP is located at an intersection of LA's Spanish and Anglo urban planning grids, a junction where the two colonialisms' specific histories, orientations to the world, languages-scapes meet. In the early 1900s, both LA and Shenyang were heavily impacted by railway boosterism. Japanese investment in Shenyang also created an intersection of mapping angles. Grounded in the meaningful multiplicity of colonial histories that wired Shenyang and LA, it becomes evident that we are not seeing the *Shengjing Panorama* as a hybrid of distinct nineteenth-century European and American, twentieth-century Soviet, and postsocialist Chinese "genesises" of panorama art training, but as an artwork that takes on a coherent life of its own, like the city it depicts, growing an inter-marginal identity "with a history and a discrete geographical contour" (Crossley 2000, 49). To be clear, the artists' practices, ethos, and aesthetics undoubtedly come from within the traditions of training, but that should not prevent us from recognizing that the starting point of the *Shengjing* project was outside the traditions. Materially, the neighborhood that the University of Southern California has partially colonized and named "University Park," and imaginarily, the well-known and less-known cultural aura of the two cities with shared tales of colonial metropolitanism, conditioned *Shengjing*'s creation. In this light, *Shengjing Panorama* is comparable to the postcolonial, postmodern traveling theories that do not naturally associate location (of their assemblage) with a stable home or pledge to a common experience with a cultural center or past tradition (Clifford 1989). And yet, no less important, it is a material built environment, not a metaphorical empathy, that exists to make peculiar kin with place.

It is worth interpreting the traveling panorama as a methodology of knowledge production, one that can be situated among other contemporary methods of transporting, superimposing, blending and stitching together multiple landscapes that transgress normalized boundaries, whether natural, built, or imagined. These meth-

ods include 360-degree cameras, virtual reality, and augmented reality. But it is also important to cast a critical eye on the consumerist subjectivity and the (techno-)neoliberal fantasy of individual mobility in these virtual travels and landscape-surveying. Rather than simply getting lost—to be a flâneur with princely privilege to override the reality/fiction boundary and to feel at home away from home (Baudelaire 1964, 34)—there needs to be "a field guide to getting lost" (Solnit 2006). It is a flâneuse's walk, a semi-structured, open-ended programming that properly disorients the (gendered) spectator, pluralizes the "here and now," and encourages her to "place [herself] as closely as [she can] to the environments" (Rogaski 2022, 15) while cognizant of, and respecting, the impossibility of exhausting the knowledges of a place. Such is the VP's approach to panoramas, museums, programming, and art in general.

The thematic focus of the VP, including events and exhibits, shifts to incorporate every new panorama while preserving ephemera and residue of what came before in fragments and refractions. The *Nova Tuskhut* (2014–2024), an immersive exhibit of a late nineteenth/early twentieth century Arctic explorer's hut with a painted diorama of the terrain and a 12-minute day-to-night cycle, was created as a companion for and remnant of *Effulgence of the North*, the Arctic panorama, before that 360-degree painting was removed to make way for *Shengjing*. A recreated section of *Panorama of the Valley of the Smokes* (2000–2004) hangs above a diorama of the *Tswuun-Tswuun Rotunda*, the demolished former home of the VP on Hollywood Boulevard. These remnants point to the ever-erasing progression of urban renewal around LA and every major city, including Shenyang. The Union Theatre has survived these many years and punctures its historical influence into curatorial decisions, including the era depicted in *Shengjing Panorama* (1910–1930), which begins with the year the Union Theatre was built – again the past and present Shenyang and LA are emerging from and submerging under the other (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10: A visual example mapping past and present Shenyang and LA. *Los Angeles, Shenyang, Shengjing and Hollywood as Palimpsest,* digital collage by Sara Velas, 2022. Image courtesy of author Sara Velas, 2022.

8 "Interlapping" Sound-and-Lightscape

When depicting the archipelagic territory of the Caribbeans, the Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite employs the term "interlapping." Different from *over*lapping, *inter*-lapping describes "an unpredictable cutting back and forth, as well as a type of mutual overlap or, better, of mutual palimpsest" between two locales or typologies of place (Roberts 2021, 28). We borrow this term to illustrate the layered sounds and sights of Shenyang and LA that repeatedly emerge in the other. Through this example we are able to behold a fuller picture of the Velaslavasay Panorama's programming methodology and aesthetic episteme that engage its visitors with unbounded, entangled, and palimpsestic places.

The panorama has a 40-minute light and sound cycle that recreates with archival and present-day sounds the merchant's shout and the street physician's bell, the pebbles ground by wheels of a passing wagon or motorcar, the birdsong of a Red-billed Leiothrix, the ferryman's singing by the dock and the departing train's long whistle, distorted helicopter noise and electronic music from a boombox that disrupt the "eternal" image, shifting the narrative from "what had been" to "what could have been." The city remembers, in the archives and in a fabricated landscape elsewhere, even though that world is long gone.

The composite soundscape composed by Berlin-based artist Moritz Fehr combines contemporary field recordings taken in Shenyang and Los Angeles into a third, virtual space: *Shengjing Panorama*. The 16-channel speaker system includes one "container" sound file that is fed into all of the individual speakers, with disparate sounds layered and spatially dispersed to create a panoramic ambisonic surround sound. The container is a singular, 40-minute field recording taken during golden hour in Griffith Park, the largest park in LA. Processed recordings of a musical improvisation by musician Wu Wei on the Sheng, Guzheng and percussion create a polyphonic resonance with the far reaching past as proto versions of the sheng were found from 1100 BCE. Some field recordings were made during 2015 and 2017 trips to Shenyang at locations including the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Middle Street and Beiling Park (location of the Zhaoling Tomb), the largest park in Shenyang. A car horn can be heard, a live recording of a 1920s Franklin from the bespoke collection of Dydia DeLyser and Paul Greenstein, who doubles as the VP's neon restorer, both being frequent collaborators on events and projects. Most panoramas around the world utilize a voiceover narration in their soundscapes describing what the painting represents or what the viewer sees, but the project of *Shengjing Panorama* is to interlap these cities, to transgress the borders and to create an environment that can be felt in the body more than known through textual history.

The soundscape is synced with a light cycle designed by Taiwanese-born and LA-based artist Chu-Hsuan Chang, representing a shift between night, day and beyond (Fig. 11). The light cycle is a tool to illuminate the veiled qualities of the painting, exploring transformations of hue and tone that the oil paint makes under changing light, sometimes losing its vibrant color and becoming close to black and white. The

Fig. 11: Chu-Hsuan Chang, Lighting Designer, Moritz Fehr, Sound Designer, 40 minute sound and light cycle of *Shengjing Panorama*, completed 2019. Image, Velaslavasay Panorama, 2022.

top lights have a circular sequence that mimics the passing of clouds across the sun, referencing the early days of the panorama when skylights were utilized to illuminate the painting and thus transformed in real time as the weather changed. Many viewers are convinced the painted canvas itself is rotating, when the only real movement is the body of the viewer. In these moments, the viewer confuses their body with the painting and vice versa, or interlaps them.

9 Traveling Publics: *Shengjing*/Velaslavasay as Public Interface

In exploring the multifaceted interactions within the realm of the "Traveling Publics," this final section of the paper delves into the dynamic relationships that have unfolded with the public since the inauguration of *Shengjing Panorama* in 2019. Since that opening, many people have traveled to the panorama and the panorama has traveled, at least in imagery and through a variety of presentations to many places. In this way, the Velaslavasay Panorama exists as a unique public interface that weaves together diverse publics near and far through its events and programming. From the individuals physically traveling to the panorama to its presence in various media, conferences, and academic circles, the panorama becomes a catalyst for constructing

publics around significant themes such as colonization, media histories, minor cosmopolitanisms, and urban change, all projected through the lens of the lost world.

The Chinese painters made their maiden voyage to the United States for the opening of *Shengjing Panorama* and to place finishing touches on the terrain and canvas in between trips around the city to places like Forest Lawn Museum to see Jan Styka's *Crucifixion* panorama, The Autry Museum of the American West, Universal Studios and to more far-reaching iconic destinations like the Grand Canyon. *Shengjing Panorama* was unveiled to the public at 8:08 pm on June 1st, 2019 during the event "Shengjing Panorama Limited Express," wherein the gardens and grounds of the VP were "transformed" into a train station platform with buskers, dubious wrist watch dealers, roaming puppeteers from Bob Baker Marionette Theatre, snack cart vendors, ticket takers and passengers in transit (Fig. 12). French fries were offered to the guests, procured in bulk from Pete's Burgers, the neighborhood eatery since 1972. Various sounds rang out throughout the entire space indicating travel: bells rang at random intervals, a disembodied voice called out time tables through the loud speaker and the conductors (with digital voice amplifiers) shouted directions on and off the "platform." Guests were given boarding passes (only eight people were allowed in the panorama exhibit at a time) and station agents, costumed by longtime collaborator and artist Lun*na Menoh, roamed around with timetables alerting ticket holders of their impending journey. The following week marked the first regular open day of the new regime; to formalize the moment a ribbon cutting ceremony was officiated by the three painters with three pairs of large scissors. This event was co-led by neighborhood official Aurora Becerra from the University Park Action Coalition, a group fighting against local displacement and advocates for community resources, and representatives from West Adams Heritage Association. Both organizations advocate for preservation and conservation in the VP's historic neighborhood.

Occasionally emigrants of Shenyang stumble into the VP and are astounded to see a facsimile of their hometown. They will locate their old neighborhoods and point out what is most familiar, relaying the accuracy of the layout and their ability to grasp their orientation within the conjured space. Other visitors who have not yet had the pleasure of visiting Shenyang in-person produce interesting interpretations of what the view might be: some hear the name and confuse it for Shanghai, some have said Los Angeles' or San Francisco's Chinatown, always keen to notice the mixture of architecture that problematizes their understanding of "a view of a city in China," especially the domineering presence of the Sacred Heart Cathedral. These (mis)perceptions on the one hand are evidence of Shenyang's obscurity beyond China, but on the other, attest to the recurrence of colonial Chinese "(is)lands" overseas strung together by their common fragmentedness. Contrary to the pleasurable paradox Baudelaire's "perfect spectator" feels to be at home away from home, seeing but comfortably hidden from the world he travels (Baudelaire 1964, 34; Friedberg 1994, 29), the VP's visitor may experience various degrees of disorientation as the sights and sounds of *Shengjing* recalibrate the route the visitor usually takes from wherever they call "home" to knowing "China."
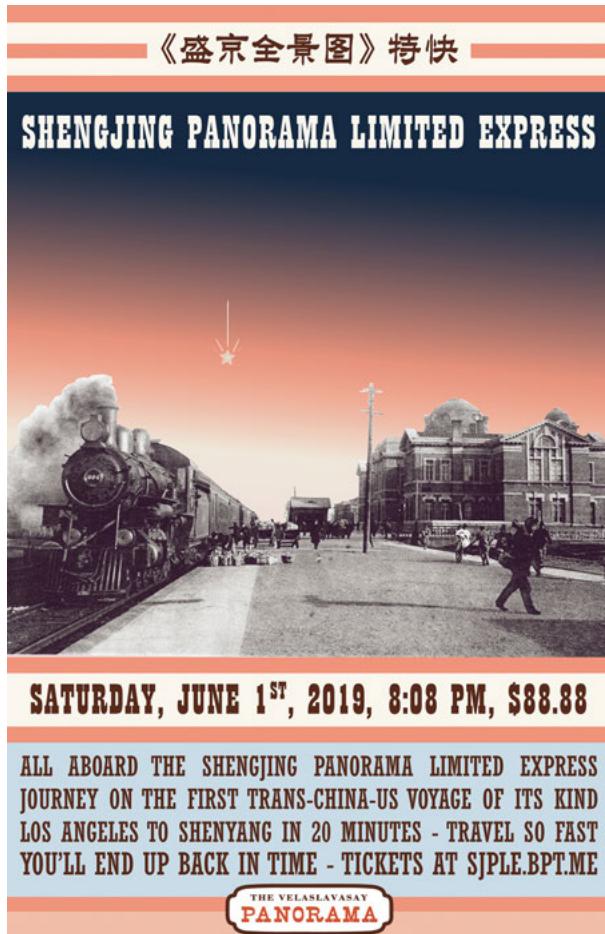
Fig. 12: Sara Velas, poster for "Shengjing Panorama Limited Express," an event to officially debut *Shengjing Panorama* held June 1, 2019. Image utilizes archival collage elements and digital typography. Image, author Sara Velas, 2019.

The fractals of colonial Chinas that *Shengjing* presents and connects with defamiliarize the imagined "homogeneous, empty time" of China. The virtual world, open to the traveler but containing inaccessible amalgamation of urban temporalities and infinite, unconsumable horizons, redirects the "paradox of aesthetic immersion" (Mäcklin 2022) to the gendered, physically and psychologically locatable body of the imperfect spectator.

An integral part of the project's design is to have *Shengjing Panorama* evade the grip of the male-dominated, homogenized state narrative in what the China historian Gail Hershatter calls the "campaign time" and embraces instead the unarranged, chaotic, and plural lived times (Hershatter 2011, 4). That the Velaslavasay Panorama is run by women artists and curators contrasts the nearly all-male crew of the Chinese

painters; nor can we take for granted the eminent presence of women in the LA/ American (and European) art world. The history of the flâneuse, the feminine/feminist kinship with the city, prepared the creation and operation of the VP. While the VP space is not purposefully gendered, its curators, executives, and programmers are not derived from the nineteenth-century male painter and poet that Baudelaire deemed the flâneur. Indeed, it is the history of the flâneuse of museums and cities that is discernible in the panorama space and its surrounding art programs. Of the women who produced the VP's public interface, the lead "conductor" for the debut *Shengjing* event was writer-comedian Megan Koester, a frequent VP collaborator, and pivotal female artists involved in the installation included Guan Rong, Sara Velas, Ruby Carlson, Bridget Marrin, Anna Tanner, Andy Cao, Sara Bautista and Ava Salzman.

When visiting a landscape in the flesh, a flâneuse in an unknown city is rarely confronted with its immediate historicization but given an opportunity to absorb the environment and let the landscape speak for itself, presenting itself in a way that reveals more about the viewer than the view. *Shengjing Panorama* evokes the memory of Michael McMillen's first full-scale tableaux *Central Meridian*, a theatrical simulation of a garage the artist created for the 1981 LACMA exhibition *The Museum as Site: Sixteen Projects*. "One of my goals originally was to build a time machine that would take the viewer out of the museum and into another space instantly," McMillen says. "We go from light to dark, day to night, and another time." Detritus, castoffs, and objects found around the streets of LA constituted a "walk-in assemblage" where history came close to the visitor in a neighborly environment. "It's a persona that every viewer constructs in their own mind based on the artifacts," McMillen says. "I think [the viewers] are really as much a part of the work as the artist. They really complete it" (Nguyen 2021).

Since the unveiling in 2019, events at the VP create an indexing of ways to "experience" Shengjing in LA, in terms of lost worlds steeped in early 20th century industrialization. There was a three part film screening, *Electric Shadows On Penglai Mountain (*2021), showing films made in China that explore loss and everyday life in their own way. *Spring In A Small Town* (1948) opens with a woman wandering along ruins of the city wall in Jiangnan in the aftermath of the Second Sino-Japanese War; *Scenes of City Life* (1935) has iconic scenes illustrating the magic of film and cinema-going in vibrant Shanghai; and *For Fun* (1992), depicts life among members of an aging opera society in a rapidly decaying/redeveloping Beijing. The opening sequence of the film is a long tracking shot (suggestive of a filmic moving panorama) of the busy Beijing streets in the late afternoon that reads like an effort to preserve the landscape in a place and time as an archaeological record as much as a tool for setting the context of the film.

These events traverse landscapes across space and time, pinging between Los Angeles and cities in China, carving routes taken by travelers for generations, some known and many unknown. In February 2021, the VP unveiled a video made in collaboration with Bob Baker Marionette Theater as part of their annual festival celebrating Bob Baker's (with his life partner Alton Wood) legacy since 1963 of presenting and

creating his own DIY universe of marionettes. For the video the VP gave a tour of *Shengjing Panorama* to Happy The Dog (led by Alex Evans) and had Happy watch a short film in the theatre made with members of the Shenyang Visual Archive (SVA), a group of autodidact archivists who explore their city to unearth historic architecture and pre-twenty-first century public infrastructure. In the video a representative from the SVA discussed the architectural history of Shenyang Railway Station, deeming it a mixture of German Baroque Revival style and British Victorian.

The position of all of these events is from the perspective of the wanderer, the flâneuse, the passerby who regards the city and questions its aesthetic arrival as much as their own origin/destination. This way of looking and traversing applies to landscapes abroad and at-home, placing both loci into the position of the knowable unknown. With this perspective in mind hanging heavily during the lockdown of the pandemic in 2020, the VP devised a performance event designed for the passerby called *Union Square Florist Shop*, a recreation of an imaginary mid-century florist shop (that opened in 1937) whose innerworkings and everyday tasks such as cleaning, floral arranging and dubious financial dealings, were visible from the street through the ample lobby windows, lit like a theatrical stage. Passersby were allowed to watch from the sidewalk for as long or little as they would like but not enter the space as a radio-broadcast soundscape of decayed ballroom music and consumer-driven ads played outside. The performance incorporated the Union Theatre's own architecture as a lead character, the façade designed with the spectator in mind and the lived experience of LA streets.

On February 9, 2020 (the last in-person event before the COVID-19 pandemic), a Lunar New Year celebration was held at the VP with musician Sue Chang from LA groups Spring Thunder Music Association and Chinese Kwun Opera Association performing the Ur-hu. Sara Velas gave a presentation of the making of *Shengjing Panorama* and Paul Greenstein (who contributed to *Shengjing Panorama*'s sound installation and periodically restores the VP's neon marquee) gave an overview of images and recollections from his LA Chinatown archive he had acquired since late 1978 when he began booking punk shows at Madame Wong's restaurant, in the original 1938 Rice Bowl location (Wojciak 1979).

As we reflect on the "Traveling Publics" it becomes evident that the *Shengjing Panorama* serves as more than a mere visual spectacle but instead has become a site for interfacing with a variety of publics. In this way it is a catalyst for transcending geographical boundaries and fostering connections. In laying the groundwork for transpacific conversations, collaborations, and travels between Los Angeles and Shenyang, the panorama emerges as a powerful agent in forging these complex dialogues (cross-cultural, cross-temporal, cross-conceptual). Its influence extends beyond the physical space, resonating through social media (Instagram), in features of publications such as the *Los Angeles Times*, conference presentations, and academic circles through ongoing publications and research projects. The panorama not only gives back to the feral-DIY Los Angeles art practice, it emerges from on the VP's end, but

also engages with a diverse set of communities, arts organizations, and historical initiatives in Los Angeles through programming, and contemporary Shenyang, such as the Shenyang Visual Archive. In effect, this active process of generating and engaging with lost worlds becomes a living bridge that spans across time and space, addressing present-day concerns in Los Angeles, Shenyang, and beyond. The panorama's continued impact highlights its role as a dynamic and evolving interface that propels us towards a future characterized by increased connectivity, collaboration, and understanding.

10 Conclusion

This essay has explored how the *Shengjing Panorama* transcends the conventional narrative of panoramas that depict a single place and time to present something that theorizes a more open-ended consideration of how to present a lost world. It centers on how the S*hengjing Panorama* was generated from the relationship between the two cities—Shenyang and Los Angeles—that were central to its conception, creation, and installation. We argue that it is this reciprocal exchange of ideas, concepts, ethos, aesthetics, and practices traveling through the artists and the overall project, which has given this particular panorama the power to evoke and theorize a multi-layered and multi-dimensional lost world. The exploration of the historic Shengjing-Los Angeles pairing, through the medium of panorama, rather than existing as a random combination of places, instead becomes a methodological and heuristic tool for revealing interlapping stories, histories, and theories of colonial metropolitanism across space and time (Fig. 13). In this way, *Shengjing Panorama* not only evokes the lost world of the past but theorizes its ongoing impact on the present and beyond.

Fig. 13: View from the rooftop of the Union Theatre, home of Velaslavasay Panorama, Los Angeles, California, USA, May 2020. View from the rooftop of the Liaoning Hotel, looking out on Zhongshan Square, Shenyang, China, May 2017. Images, authors Jon Banfill and Ruby Carlson, 2020 and 2017, respectively.

In particular, by centering the concept of "travel" (and traveling theories) in different ways, from the conceptual or theoretical to the real and physical, we develop a way to think about how all these different resonances come together to make the final experience.

The various types of travel discussed—historical, aesthetic, conceptual, interpersonal, physical and logistical, and the travel of the public to it—coalesce to form the theoretical concept of a "traveling panorama." This multifaceted notion encapsulates the panorama's layered meanings of travel, offering conceptual tools for engaging with both specific and generic aspects of lost worlds, and the composition of cities and places, the interconnectedness of places and ideas.

Most productive is the meeting through the travel of three traditions, or modes, of panoramic art—the state socialist art school of Chinese revolutionary praxis, the feral-DIY version of Los Angeles, and the European traditions mediated between them. Here a coherent, rather than hybridized, tradition of artwork emerged from within the reflexive effect of each other's ideas, which is still being unpacked within the way *Shengjing Panorama* continues to be theorized and hosts public events.

Two significant takeaways emerge from this exploration. Both emphasize the interconnectedness of these seemingly disparate locales through themes such as cultural hybridity, colonization, and modernization. Firstly, the *Shengjing Panorama*, and the larger Velaslavasay Panorama project, serves as a vehicle for visitors to comprehend something about elsewhere, offering a unique lens through which to view Shenyang's past. However, this is done in relation to their contemporary experience of being within Los Angeles. Secondly, this relation in turn enhances the experience of thinking of Los Angeles by fostering an immersive engagement about Shenyang's past that corresponds in a loose but productive way with Los Angeles's past of the same time.

In this way, the experience can prompt contemplation of Los Angeles's own lost worlds, remnants of which exist within both the built environment and the visible/invisible social divisions that exist in the neighborhood environs that surround the Union Theatre. The public nature of the experience becomes apparent when the evoked lost world mingles with the tangible reality of the city, creating a double vision. One enters from the sunlight, into the immersive darkness of Shenyang's lost past, then emerges back into the sunlight of LA with senses redefined by the experience of immersive travel. This relationship parallels the interplay between a film playing in a dark theater and the existence of the city outside—a cinematic experience that echoes the Union Theatre's history, and cinema as a portal or threshold to other worlds.

Through its immersive power, *Shengjing Panorama* transcends the boundaries of time and space, inviting viewers to participate in the perpetual journey of understanding lost worlds and their relevance to the present. *Shengjing Panorama* provides viewers with an opportunity to question their individual orientation with the past and present, offering a lens through which to engage with history without imposing

predefined answers. Beyond its role as an art form, it becomes a versatile tool, serving as a pedagogical provocation, experience, object, interface, optical illusion, event, and even a dream.

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Ruby Carlson is a Curator, Writer and Director of Programs at the Velaslavasay Panorama. From 2015–2018 she served as the elected Secretary of the International Panorama Council. She studied literature and linguistics at George Washington University and is an award-winning cinematographer for media and fine art projects. Since 2010 she has participated in PLACE, a critical return to the discovery of Freud and its construction in the topology introduced by J. Lacan.

Weiling Deng is Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Digital Humanities at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont. She received her Ph.D. in Social Sciences and Comparative Education from UCLA. Her research and teaching interests include Global Asias, archipelagic thinking, traveling theory, gender and race in technology, engaged pedagogy, and applied humanities. She has published on *South Asian Review*, *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and academic anthologies including *Postcolonial and Postsocialist Dialogues: Intersections, Opacities, Challenges in Feminist Theorizing and Practice* (2021).

Sara Velas is the Founder, Co-Curator and Artistic Director of the Velaslavasay Panorama, a nonprofit museum and garden she established in the year 2000 to present experimental immersive experiences and variations of media popular before the invention of cinema. An artist, graphic designer, curator, gardener, and native Los Angeleno, she is active on the Heritage Committee and Advisory Board of the International Panorama Council. Ms. Velas is a member of the Los Angeles Breakfast Club and is significantly involved in architectural preservation efforts throughout Los Angeles. Born in Panorama City, California she received her BFA from Washington University in 1999.

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