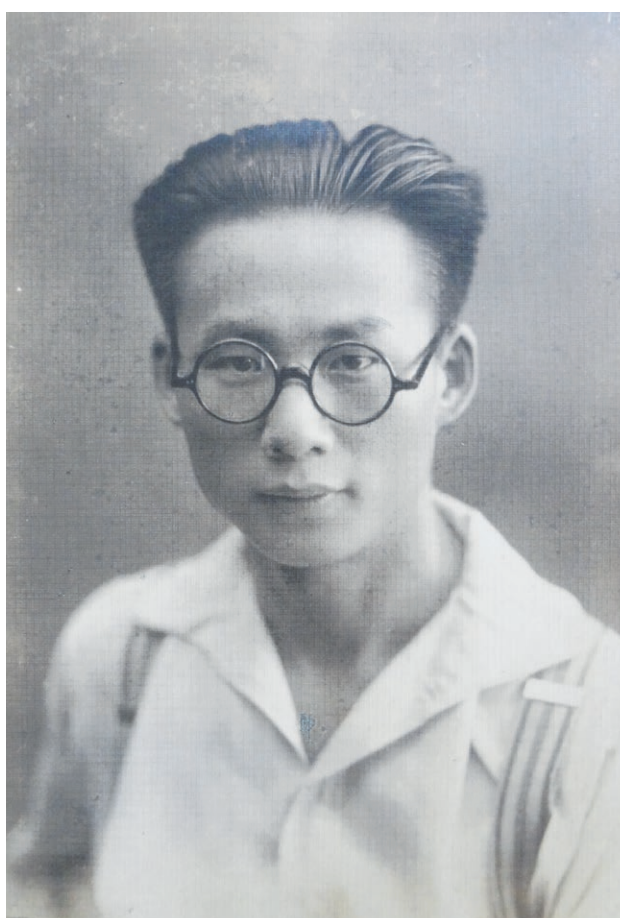


'The Chinese Art Deco architect of the 1925 Paris Expo' – My grandfather



It is my honor as family historian to tell you about my maternal grandfather Liu Jipiao (劉紀標) 1900-1992, whose life spanned 3 continents and a century of history filled with upheaval and transformation. He was born in China, educated in Paris, returned to China to help rebuild a nation and fled to America to live out the rest of his life. My grandfather left our family his artwork, furniture, photos and blueprints that he produced in America. From this collection, childhood stories, and published works, I am piecing together his story.

Jennifer Wong

BEFORE SHARING HIS LIFE, I'd like to introduce my family. My mother, Gayook (Liou) Wong, Liu Jipiao's eldest daughter, came to America at age 3. Her recollections have been invaluable in stringing together events. She was diagnosed with cancer around the time our research began; we believe this project has given her purpose and a deeper understanding of her father, and thankfully, she has been cancer free for over a year now. My brother Matthew, a business major from University of Virginia, has been archiving the artwork and running the business side of our endeavor. And I am an East Asian Studies major from Wesleyan University, Connecticut. I wanted to learn Mandarin, live in China and meet family I never knew. It never occurred to me that my education would be useful in helping my family 25 years later. With every piece of information discovered, we reclaim more of Liu's story and together, reshape our family legacy.

I have two paintings that hang in every bedroom I've had since 1990. My grandfather framed everything himself. Times were tough so he used any materials he could get his hands on. My paintings, for example, were mounted directly on press board, no glass. Liu knotted the string on both ends, drilled holes in the pressboard and threaded it through the back. One day the string broke and I was left wondering how to fix it without damaging the art. This is when it occurred to me to not only have it framed 'properly', but to also digitize it before it aged any further; in fact, it then came to mind that I should digitize ALL his paintings. One thing led to another. I started talking to friends about preserving the artwork. One suggested I find a grad student to help with the research. She wrote to her professors and the University of Southern California (USC) East Asian Library responded. They were interested in digitizing Liu's work for their database.

Our research often progressed in this manner. I found a dissertation online about Liu's work in Paris, wrote the author, who sent me to Professor Steinhardt of University of Pennsylvania, who referred me to her co-editor Dr Jeff Cody, Senior Project Specialist at Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles. (They had collaborated on, *Chinese Architecture and the Beaux-Arts*.) Dr. Cody met us at the Getty, where

we browsed the *Exposition Internationale Des Arts Decoratifs Et Industriels Modernes A Paris 1925*, a catalog from the Paris Expo 1925, Chinese Section. My grandfather had participated in this exposition, designed the catalog cover and was responsible for the exhibit design.' (Fig. 2) This was the first time we saw an example of his work that pre-dated his time in America.

The catalog also included a glowing review of Liu Jipiao's contributions to the art world:

— M. Liou is one of those rare spirits invulnerable to the real vulgar life, and similar to the immaculate white lilies on the pond. [...] What a difference between him and the old artist. His execution method, modeling, colors and style, makes him a true modern artist.²

It was exciting and poignant. My mother broke down and cried. My grandfather rarely spoke of his previous life, and we didn't know him as a young man. Grandma used to say he was a very important and incredibly talented high official in Chiang Kai Shek's government. To us, he was a silent, sometimes bitter man, who came alive when he had a brush in his hand. But here was something we'd never seen before, created by someone we didn't know: a motivated young man with hopes and dreams of modernization that he poured into his art. For me it was exhilarating, a promise of things to come. If we found this catalog, maybe we could find more!



Liu Jipiao (4 June 1900-15 April 1992)
On 4 June 1900, Liu Jipiao was born in Meizhou, a northern region of Guangdong, to an affluent family that owned a silk dye factory employing 500 workers. A recognized child prodigy, Liu was drawn to the nearby porcelain factories of Jingdezhen, the 'Porcelain Capitol'. In 1971, Liu wrote:

— The most interesting section to me, since I always like to paint, was the decorating room. Six members of the second generation worked in this area [...] extremely quiet, with dignity and skill, each artist enjoyed his work; some artists specialized in birds, some in dragons. [...] much of my ability in

Fig. 1 (above left): Liu Jipiao as a young man ca.1923.

Fig. 2 (below left): Cover designed by Liu Jipiao of the catalogue for the Chinese Section of the Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, Paris, 1925.

Fig. 3 (above right): Postcard of the Chinese entrance, designed by Liu Jipiao for the Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes (Published in 1925 by Armand Noyer).

china painting came directly from those six artists—how to prepare the color, how to apply it correctly with a firm and steady brushstroke, and the graceful outlining.³

During his adolescent years, Liu went to Shanghai to study Chinese and Western painting. At the age of 19 his family sent him to Europe to study. According to articles published in the 1920s, Liu traveled through Europe with Lin Fengmian (林風眠) and Lin Wenzheng (李金發), meeting up with other Chinese artists such as Xu Beihong (徐悲鴻). A strong bond was formed early on, ensuring that these young men would somehow work together in the future. After living in Berlin for 6 months, Liu settled in Paris to study French. He told my mother no one studied at L'Ecole if he was not fluent in the language. In 1922 Liu enrolled at L'Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts under the tutelage of Ernest Laurent (1859-1929), a neo-impressionist painter and one-time collaborator of Georges Seurat. The more Liu and his cohort studied Western Art, the more they were fascinated by the prospect of combining Eastern and Western principles to create a modern art form. They hoped to strengthen and revitalize China, which was still struggling to unify after much political upheaval.

In 1923, dissatisfied with the two-dimensionality of painting, Liu switched to architecture. He felt that the powerful complexity of architecture could fulfill his inner needs, not as a profession divorced from art, but rather as a field of study related to fine art:

— The artistic spirit of old architecture has progressed and revolutionized. If you lose this spirit, you lose the ability to create new art that is of value. Contemporary creators must work together to find a new road. [...] They must invent and discover, as in the West, thereby inventing a new art, style, and manner of doing things. Art and science are central to architecture, working together.⁴

The concept of architecture as a profession was relatively new in a rapidly changing China. Projects were government commissioned, designed and built by unknown craftsmen following traditional rules. Liu sought to meld 'art' with the 'science' of architecture, redefining the profession of 'Architect' to incorporate an artist's creative and innovative ideas. 'Architecture as Fine Art' was a major theme in Liu's life as he struggled to embody both artist and architect.



Fig. 4: Hangzhou National Academy of Art, ca.1928. Professors and Family. From Left to Right, back row: Liu Jipiao, (sixth from left), Lin Wenzheng, Li Shuhua, André Claudot, and Lin Fengmian (third from right). Front Row: Cai Weilian (far left), Mrs. Claudot holding infant Danielle Li, Alice Lin, Li Shuhua's wife. (All others unidentified).

Liu Jipiao (aka Teipeiou Liou in France), along with his friend Lin Fengmian, were able to test their modern theories of East/West art at the Strasbourg Expo of 1924, a precursor to the more renowned Paris Expo of 1925. As the 'architect and general decorator' of the Paris Expo, Liu flexed his artistic and architectural muscles. Both were clearly evident in the interior designs he created for the installations. Due to the heavy Art Deco influences, many scholars call Liu one of the earliest 'Chinese Art Deco' architects. (Fig. 3)

In 1927, after graduating from *L'Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts* Liu returned to China. He was reunited with his friends Lin Fengmian and Li Jinfa (李金發), who had also recently returned from France. All believed that cultural exchange was the key to strengthening and modernizing China and that education was necessary to achieve that goal. Liu realized success would depend on the support of leading academics such as Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), who had returned from America, and Li Shiceng (李石曾) and Li Shuhua (李書華), who had returned from France. They also garnered approval from Zhejiang province government officials. A year later in 1928, the National Hangzhou Art School started to enroll students [200]. Lin Fengmian was appointed principal; Liu Jipiao academic dean, and concurrently, departmental head of architecture and design. Li Jinfa was professor and head of sculpture.⁵ (Fig. 4)

In addition to teaching, Liu began planning the West Lake Exposition 1929, which built upon his experience in Strasbourg and Paris. As main architect, Liu donated 6 months of his time believing that China's exposure to the modern age was an important step in her growth as a nation. "In the exposition, Liu crossed the domains of fine arts and architecture, transplanting the western Deco style [...] which differed dramatically from the traditional industrial architecture." His Educational Pavilion served as an architectural precedent for the more recent Shanghai Expo Pavilion in 2010.

1929 Liu launched the construction company Da Fang (大方), with offices in Hangzhou, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, and partnering with Li Zhongkan (李宗侃), the son of Li Shiceng, who

had also received his architectural education in France. Other French connections that helped Da Fang succeed came from Liu Jiwen (劉紀文), Nanjing's mayor, and We Daoming (魏道明), head of the city's public works. Together they built thoroughfares and villas for government officials. Liu proposed several European influenced designs for the new Government Capitol Plan. (Fig. 5)

In 1932, Liu launched his architectural firm of the same name in Nanjing, building modern style structures including his three homes in Shanghai, Nanjing and Guangzhou. That same year, he married my grandmother Pan Fengxiao (潘鳳簫). An artist in her own right, she was a petite woman, considered a beauty in their social circles. They were a very active couple, horseback riding, traveling, dancing, hunting and socializing. My grandmother told us how they entertained high-end clients and important officials late into the evenings. Liu drove his clients around town in one of the first European automobiles he had imported, with the name of his company painted on the side.

But in 1937, under the threat of Japanese invasion, Liu closed his businesses. He was appointed Lieutenant General and Chief Architect in charge of fortifying Guangdong. He redesigned Humen Fortress with bunkers and air raid shelters. In 1938, when Guangzhou was overrun, he fled back to Meizhou, then to Guangxi, Macao and, by 1942, Shanghai. By then my grandmother was pregnant with my mother, Gayook. Due to several earlier miscarriages she remained bedridden in the family's Shanghai home, until the birth on 25 March 1943.

Eventually, Liu's connections with the Guomindang became problematic with the emergence of the Chinese Communist Party, and so in January 1947 my grandparents and mother fled China. At first they boarded an airplane, but were warned by one of Liu's students that the Communists knew where they were, and so he helped them reroute onto the *General M.C. Meigs*, bound for San Francisco and sailing from Shanghai that night. Liu left his second daughter, Gaylon, (18 months old) with his mother-in-law, thinking he would soon return. Not only did my grandfather leave my aunt, but also most of his wealth and possessions, including the three homes. Both the Shanghai and Guangzhou houses were

eventually sold, but the Nanjing house (9 Yihe Lu) is now the main office of the Confederation of Charities of Jiangsu Province.

For a year the family traveled across America sightseeing, ending their trip in New York City. By 1949, the Communists had taken over China and return was impossible. They settled in Manhattan. Cut off from China, faced with racism, unable to practice architecture or speak English fluently, Liu's job opportunities were limited to restaurant or laundry work. He invested in one of the first automated laundromats, eventually opening a second in the outer boroughs. By 1953 he sold both to a friend and purchased a chicken farm in New Jersey.

In 1955 my aunt was finally brought to America; it had been 8 years since they left her as a baby. The family would have to adjust and get to know each other again. There were other challenges as well. Unable to keep up with the high production and lower prices of large industrialized companies, the farm went bankrupt. The family struggled to survive. In order to make ends meet, my grandparents became massage therapists. My mother remembers working all hours, often going hungry, her father depressed, sometimes suicidal. My grandmother became the strength that held the family together.

It wasn't until the 1960's that Liu returned to what he loved. Liu resurrected his architectural skills, by working under the architect Sergey Padukow. He designed St. Vladimir Memorial Orthodox Church in Rova Farms, and other residential and commercial buildings in New Jersey. A few years after my birth in 1965, my grandfather retired and began a prolific period of painting oil, porcelain, watercolor and designing furniture. His portrait of President Lyndon Johnson was sent to the White House and is now at the Lyndon B. Johnson Memorial Library. During the last two decades of his life, Liu returned to what he loved most, painting, teaching and promoting intercultural awareness. He taught and exhibited locally. (Fig.6)

My grandfather had always believed that he'd live to be 92, because both his father and grandfather lived until that age. Liu Jipiao died 15 April 1992, two months shy of his 92nd birthday. We hope that our work honors his memory.

On a personal note

In February 2013, Dr. Jeff Cody gave a presentation about Liu Jipiao at the *Institut national d'histoire de l'art's* conference in Paris: 'Architectural Exchange: Europe and East-Asia, 1550-1950'. We showed at the National Heritage Board of Singapore's Art Deco exhibit hosted by the Urban Redevelopment Board. This autumn sees the opening of the Paris exhibit, 'Art Deco style Made in France', at *Cite de l'Architecture & du patrimoine* (16 October 2013-17 February 2014). It describes Liu as the "Chinese Art Deco Architect of the 1925 Paris Expo."

Understanding Liu's triumphs and struggles has allowed us to understand ourselves better as individuals and as a family. We were also surprised to discover the significant role he played in Chinese Modernism. Unfortunately, much information about this pivotal period has been lost or destroyed. Recently there have been efforts to preserve this part of Chinese history. We hope our research can in some way contribute to this cause.

My family is incredibly grateful to the wonderful people who have helped us research and translate, and who have encouraged us to continue Liu's story. We hope to raise sufficient funds to travel to China and Taiwan to search through building records, view his architecture and search for original publications and artwork. We would appreciate any ideas or information you may have to further our search. We are chronicling everything on our website and hope to eventually publish and lecture, forwarding Liu Jipiao's dream of intercultural exchange through art.

Contact us at info@liujipiao.com; find out more about Liu Jipiao and our discoveries at <http://liujipiao.com>

Notes

- 1 Catalogue Cover and illustrations of the 'Section Chine', *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, Paris, 1925 (Fig. 2)
- 2 Lin Wenzheng [Ling-Vincent, President d l'Association des Artistes Chinois en France] Catalogue of the 'Section Chine', *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, Paris, 1925, p.35-36.
- 3 Liou Kipaul [Liu Jipiao] 'China Painting by Chinese Artists', *Ceramic Arts and Crafts*, August, 1971.
- 4 Liu Jipiao, 'The Past and Future of Chinese Architecture', *Dongfang zazhi/Eastern Miscellany*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 25 January 1930, p.133-139.
- 5 Li Do, *Shanghai World Expo China Pavilion of the Biggest Challenges: Inspiration*, 29 April 2010, <http://blog.sina.com.cn/liuguangdou> [accessed August 2013]
- 6 Fei Wenming, 'Transplanting "Art-Deco", Blossoming "Architecture as Fine Art"', A Discussion of the Architecture Design of Liu Jipiao', *Journal of Nanjing Arts Institute*, February 2011, p.140.



Fig. 5 (left): Rendering by Liu Jipiao, "Office Building", Part of the Nanjing Capitol Plan ca. 1930.

Fig. 6 (inset): Porcelain painting by Liu Jipiao, "Red Pagoda", 1971.