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The spatialization of time and history in the skyscrapers of the twenty-first century in Shanghai

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Abstract

This article aims to find out to what extent the skyscrapers erected in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in Shanghai, follow the modern program promoted by the State and the city and how they play an essential role in the construction of the temporary discourse that this modernization entails. In this sense, it describes how the city seeks modernization and in what concrete way it designs a modern temporal discourse. The work finds out what type of temporal narrative expresses the concentration of these skyscrapers on the two banks of the Huangpu, that of the Bund and that of the Pudong, and finally, it analyzes the seven most representative and significant skyscrapers built in the city in recent years, in order to reveal whether they opt for tradition or modernity, globalization or the local. The work concludes that the past, present and future of Shanghai have been minimized, that its history has been shortened, that it is a liminal site, as its most outstanding skyscrapers, built on the edge of the river and on the border between past and future. For this reason, the author defends that Shanghai, by defining globalization, by being among the most active cities in the construction of skyscrapers, by building more than New York and by building increasingly technologically advanced tall towers, has the possibility to devise a peculiar Chinese modernity, or even deconstruct or give a substantial boost to the general concept of Western modernity.

Keywords: Skyscrapers, Shanghai, Modernity, Time, Globalization

Introduction

This article tries to find out to what extent the skyscrapers raised at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first in Shanghai follow the modern program promoted by the State and the city and how they play an essential role in the construction of the temporary discourse that this modernization entails.

In this regard, four general objectives are pursued:

- (1) Describe how the city seeks modernization and in what concrete way it designs a modern temporal discourse.

- (2) Find out what kind of temporal narrative expresses the concentration of its skyscrapers on the two banks of the Huangpu, the Bund and the Pudong.
- (3) Analyze the most representative and significant skyscrapers built in the city, to reveal whether they opt for tradition or modernity, globalization or the local.
- (4) Compare Western and Shanghai modernisations.

With these objectives in mind, we have divided this work into two sections, preceded by an introduction and finished by conclusions, (I) the modernizing drive of China and Shanghai and (II) the skyscrapers of the Pudong contemplate those of the Bund: nostalgia for the past that build the future. In turn, these sections have been divided into a series of subsections dedicated, respectively, “western modernisation and the

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spatio-temporal characteristics of late modernity”, “To modernity and capitalism” and “modernity and the conception of time in Shanghai” and “skyscrapers, symbol of western and eastern capitalist modernity” (“the futurization of skyscrapers”) and “the skyscrapers of Shanghai, between tradition and modernity, between globalization and attachment to the local” (“the geographical space and time of the Shanghai skyscrapers” and the analysis of 5 skyscrapers).

These skyscrapers have been selected from specialized online pages¹ and from a large architectural literature and have been sought to be representative and significant of the set of buildings built in the city in the last years of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.

The modernizing momentum of China and the city of Shanghai

Western modernisation and the spatio-temporal characteristics of late-modernity

From the beginning, the concept of modernity has been marked by a certain indecision (Martuccelli, 1999: 9), ambivalence, contradiction (Bauman and Tester 2002), complexity (Thiebaut, 1996: 312 ff), polysignification (Latour 2012: 27) and multivoicedness. In fact, modernisation has been identified, simultaneously, as a typical-ideal construction, as a specific type of social structure, as an idea or ideology, as a vital experience, as an unrepeatable temporal specificity, as a historical epoch and as a socio-cultural or historical project. In this sense, it is considered to have brought about the shift towards modern societies of a “complex character” and to have entailed a break with traditional ways of life (Koselleck 1993, cp. 12; Habermas 1985: 28; Habermas 1998: 266–267; Girola and Olvera 2007: 7; Girola 2007: 64).

However, despite the difficulty of making it concrete, it is possible to establish some clarifying lines of thought about what modernity represents. The first very often associates modernity with the identification of contemporary society and the present (Martuccelli 1999: 9), so that it almost always designates, in one way or another,

the passing of time, the arrival of a new and ultimate regime, accompanied by an acceleration, a rupture or a revolution of time (Koselleck 1993, cp. 12; Habermas 1998: 266–267; Girola 2007: 64; Latour 2012: 27).

The second characteristic feature of modernity is its multidimensionality. Classical sociologists thought that society could be described since a single salient element: C. Marx believed that it had to do with the development of capitalism, M. Weber that it was linked to rationalisation, and E. Durkheim with the division of labour in the industrial order. Today, however, there is a tendency to consider the multiple dimensionalities of modernity. Thus, after the failure of the hegemonic abstract universalism, a more concrete (Joas 2016) and polyphonic universality dominates today, in which, alongside the global, the local also plays a decisive role. It is therefore not surprising that modernity is declining in the plural, that “multiple modernities” (S.N. Eisenstadt 2017), “postcolonial modernities” (S. Randeria 1999) or the “variety of modernities” (W. Schmidt 2007) are proliferating.

Thirdly, modernity is the result of a series of parallel social transformations (Busquet et al. 2015: 115). At least this is what one of its most prominent researchers, Jürgen Habermas, argues in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1989: 12), for whom “the concept of modernisation refers to a sheaf of cumulative and mutually reinforcing processes: to the formation of capital and the mobilisation of resources; to the development of productive forces and the increase in labour productivity; to the establishment of centralised political powers and the development of national identities; to the spread of rights of political participation, forms of urban life and formal education; and to the secularisation of values and norms”. Modernity therefore affects institutions and the way in which each of these factors identified by the classics plays its role (Giddens 1993: 24).

In terms of its temporality, it has unfolded in two sequential phases—modernity and post-modernity—but they are deeply connected, although at first, they were considered different. Modernity proper runs from 1890 to 1930 (Bell 1992: 117), although it lasts until 1973, and involves, on the one hand, the overthrow of the “rational cosmology” of Western thought and the transformation of its ideas about the subject, the object, space, and time. But on the other hand, modernity maintains the desire for order and the logic of structures (Lash 2007: 13–29), which manifests itself in state bureaucracy, in the Fordist factory, in the pact between capital and labour and, politically, in National Socialism, Fascism and the October Revolution (Debord 2003: 104).

¹ Skyscrapers list: <https://www.google.es/search?xsrf=ALeKk036Vind3XDxwzsKkrDzic96YgXqcA:1594028185802&q=skyscraper+list&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiSgpveqbjqAhWStHEKHbHtDEYQ1QIoB3oECAsQCA>.

Skyscrapers word: <https://www.google.es/search?xsrf=ALeKk036Vind3XDxwzsKkrDzic96YgXqcA:1594028185802&q=skyscraper+world&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiSgpveqbjqAhWStHEKHbHtDEYQ1QIoAXoECAsQAg>.

Skyscraperspage: https://www.google.es/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiSgpveqbjqAhWStHEKHbHtDEYQFjABegQIARAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fskyscraperpage.com%2F&usq=AOvVaw3JWg7FffjakzWgQozK3_g.

Skyscrapers center: <https://www.skyscrapercenter.com/>.

The emporis skyscrapers: <https://www.google.es/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.emporis.com%2Fawards&psig=AOvVaw15QWzjDZGve426M-GcnTJe&ust=1594115522191000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=2ahUKEwjUHNyrcrbjqAhVH0RoKHQogBKgQr4kDegUIARCRAQ>.

“Postmodernity” would be the time after the 1973 oil crisis and up to the present day. It is a phase of decomposition, uncertainty and successive crises and collapse; the last colonies come to an end, but it is also the end of socialism and the ideologies that have left the capitalist system practically alone on the scene of world economic power (Hobsbawm 2001:403 ff.), including—as will be seen—China. Well, according to some post-modern thinkers, this stage would come to replace a finished modernity. However, as has been pointed out, we must be very cautious and not affirm taxatively that we are in a different period from that of modernity, since we lack sufficient evidence to affirm that our condition is post-modern (Lyon 1997: 21 and 151). Rather, it is likely that postmodernity constitutes a ‘symptom’ and not a ‘fresh solution’ (Latour 2012: 76 and 111), that it constructs a private-collective time and space that is embedded in the larger time and space of modernity and that it is delimited by those who have problems or doubts with the latter, by those who want to test it and by those who wish to inventory its conquests, as well as its unsolved dilemmas (Féher 1989: 9).

On the other hand, the term “postmodern” is currently losing force and is being replaced, from the Social Sciences, by others that grant continuity to modernity, while adjectivizing it: “late” (as opposed to “early”), “reflexive”, “contemporary”, “accelerated”, “liquid”, “fluid”, “risky” and “hypermodern” modernity (Bauman 2003: 122–138; Lipovetsky et al. 2006: 10 ff; Olvera and Sabido 2007: 145; Busquet et al. 2015: 116). Moreover, the plurality of definitions also characterizes the economic system that is at the basis of this second modernity: “post-industrial society”, “consumer society”, “multinational capitalism”, “late-capitalism”, “access capitalism”, etc. (Jameson 1985: 167). Continuing along these lines, in this paper, I will use the term “tardomodernity” to name the second phase of modernity in which, in the context of a multinational and global capitalist system such as China’s, the skyscrapers of Shanghai are built. As will be seen, the spatio-temporal vision of these skyscrapers is similar to that of the West, although with differentiating nuances, which is why it is convenient to make a conceptual map of space and time in late modernity, both in the West -which I am going to do next- and in China -which I will do later-.

In Western late modernity, the spatio-temporal transformations of early modernity intensify, giving rise to a series of far-reaching effects on society and architecture itself. In brief, these variations would be as follows:

- (1) Social systems are unanchored, social relations are reordered (Giddens 1993: 28) and space and time are also unanchored, separated, or made discontinuous (Calinescu 1991: 15; Giddens 1993: 32–38), while they lose their fixed character, adapting to local customs (Bell 1992: 114). Ultimately, space is annulled by time (Harvey 1998: 267).
 - (2) Time accelerates (Beraiain 2008: 106 and 160), to the point that it even “commits suicide” (Bauman 2003: 122–138), which is accompanied by the triumph of becoming (Baumer 1985: 379 ff.), of the incessant flow (Calinescu 1991: 15; Picó 1988: 21–23) and of the impossibility of being (Lash 2007: 13–29). All this entails an enthronement of novelty, change (Calinescu 1991:15; Bauman and Tester 2002: 110–1; Latour 2012: 111) and continuous innovation (Wittrock 2007: 304–5).
 - (3) There is a simultaneity of times, so that “nothing is lost forever”, while previous stages are preserved by reorganising and juxtaposing themselves under new conditions (Bellah 2017: 22 and 49, 104 and 135).
 - (4) Temporal dimensions have lost their natural limit (Ortega y Gasset 2008: 120) and, thus, past, present, and future have been minimised (Beraiain 2008: 106 and 160). The present, for example, is exalted, contracted (Ortega y Gasset 2008: 120) and retracted (Maffesoli 2000: 55–92), in such a way that it is minimally dilated a few years further back and further forward, to the point that it becomes a discontinuous instant, an “eternal transit”, elusive and of an ephemeral, fleeting and evanescent intensity (Shattuck 1991: 292; Thiebaut 1996: 313 ff. Baudelaire 2004: 91–2; Roche, 2009), which does not leave a deep mark on the future. The more distant past, for its part, is generally forgotten (Koselleck 1993: 21–40), so that it can hardly become consciousness of the future (Ortega y Gasset, 2008: 120; Jaspers 2017: 53); for its part, the cyclical rhythms of Nature have been expelled and dominated (Horkheimer and Adorno 1994: 60 and 70). Finally, the idea of progress, of the future, has been abandoned (Nisbet 1996: 17–26; Bauman 2005: 30) and the future ‘volatilised’ (Marramao 1989: 80–127), while futurism—a simulacrum of the future—has been mythologised through advertising and media strategies (Baudrillard 1970: 301 ff).
- In short, the disconnection between the past, the present and the future explains why, in the West, History has entered a state of almost “weightlessness”, free from the burden of its past and its future (O’Connor 2012: 27), and has therefore become frozen.

Modernity and capitalism in Shanghai

The modernization of Shanghai, begun in the nineteenth century, when it is already a global city, in contact with Europe and America (Gamble 2003: 65), while, in the early twentieth century, it became the financial capital of the Far East (Terranova 2003: 261). Not for nothing, at that stage it can be compared to modern New York and even be called the “Paris of the East”, without forgetting that its visual culture adopts hybrid characters made up of European, Chinese, Japanese and American mixtures. This modern glamor abruptly fades with the communist victory of 1949, when foreigners and wealthy Chinese flee the city, and their night-life disappears (Lagerkvist 2010: 225; O’Connor 2012: 19). After Deng Xiaoping’s visit to the city, in 1992, it was designed as one of China’s special economic zones, thus beginning its development, its macro-urbanization (Mendoza 2013: 23) and resuming its modernization program. Then, it begins its physical metamorphosis, particularly in the Pudong area, located east of the Huangpu River.

Currently, Shanghai is still one of the Chinese cities most influenced by western culture and, in addition, it has adopted the English language in business, in the main newspapers and on television programs, without forgetting that the cities are highly visible in the city multinational North American product logos such as Coca Cola, Pepsi, Seven Up, Visa, McDonald’s, Subway, KFC and the like (Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 34).

Furthermore, while Shanghai intends to join the global economy, quickly achieve its status, communicate with the world, and do so through its economic prosperity, scientific and industrial advancement has been remarkable. Certainly, since the 1990s, a development process has been carried out that combines service industries and high value-added industries to become one of the world-class manufacturing centers. But, along with this manufacturing production, it also originates from professional information and advertising, financial and insurance services, as well as those related to commercial activity. In addition, the Shanghai-Pudong airport is the largest air hub in China, as it handles the highest volume of tons of cargo, while the port is the busiest in the world, not in vain, it is a maritime anchorage and fluvial by which heavy materials and merchandise are transported.

On the other hand, Shanghai also plays an important role in stock demand, I+D research, consulting and technical design, and originality of relevant industries. As a result, it has become a pole of attraction for corporate headquarters, design industries and research

institutes. In fact, by the end of 2010, 149 countries and districts (including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) had invested in the city, and 305 transnational corporations and 213 banks and international investment companies had established their headquarters. No wonder it is today one of the world’s most exporting metropolises, a world-leading manufacturer, and a global economic center, whose gross domestic product per capita is much higher than the Chinese average. Nor should it be surprising that, in 2020, it reached 27,014,899 inhabitants,² one of the most populous cities in the country, and that, in just two decades, it has become the new center of Asian finance, together with Hong Kong, Singapore and Tokyo.

This is the result, no doubt, of the will and drive of Shanghai, but also of the desire of the Chinese leaders to assume its reconstruction as a key policy to lead the nation in the new century. In any case, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the city itself has become an international company (Zhao 2006: 336; Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 22–6; Boronat et al. 2016: 63–4; Al-Kodmany 2018: 6).

Modernity and the conception of time in Shanghai

The Shanghai of the 20 s and 30 s has a strong identity, both modernist and local, defined in what is known as the “Shanghai style”, whose basic aesthetics is art deco. Thus, China no longer needs to borrow its own image of Hong Kong or Singapore, as Shanghai creates a third way in which European modernism and advanced Western technology are mixed with traditional Chinese materials and local crafts. For this reason, the personality of the city is defined as “Haipai”, a word that refers to a modernity that is linked to the desire to create something new to three trends—towards the market, popular culture and hybridization—and innovations in form, the rejection of ornament and the tendency to abstraction (Pan 2009: 219).

Furthermore, this stage constitutes an authentic “Golden Age”, an era of business flourishing, of Western presence and of cosmopolitanism, abruptly interrupted with the communist triumph of 1949. This leads to the fact that, in the memory of many citizens, it is considered a stigma that stage since it is not included in one of the “three great periods in the history of Shanghai”. And this is because it is believed that then it lost its role as an international center of growth and development for more than 40 years, due to communist policies. But, in the early 1990s, the city resumes its lost future, opens

² See website <http://poblacion.population.city/china/adm/shanghai/> (consulted on 2/06/2020).

up to foreign investment and modernization, and hence the feeling that it lives is that the missed future has been re-launched (Lagerkvist 2010: 225).

It is not surprising, then, that the city has put together a narrative that diverts attention from colonialism, capitalism, nationalist “betrayal”, and communist “martyrdom” so that the new Shanghai would no longer be in the shadow of its capitalist past and imperialist—the previous phase of modernization built in the 20–30 s, to become a cosmopolitan city in which new, clearly modern Chinese forms emerge, along with those from the West and Japan (O’Connor 2012: 17–9).

This hybrid modernization is currently connected with the logic of flexible capitalism and with the change to materialism exercised in the post-Mao era. And it is that the rapid transition that the city is experiencing is redefining the time structures of socialism to adapt them to the market economy and to the changes of capitalism from production to consumption. Indeed, Shanghai is experiencing, at the same time, industrialization, and post-industrialization and this can be seen in its grandiose project of spatialization of time, in its peculiar way of intertwining it and, ultimately, in its desire to stop the future, as will be seen below.

In fact, the renewal of modernity that the city has made has peculiar characteristics, since the base of it has been settled on a nostalgia for the Old Shanghai, colonial and republican, of the 20 s and 30 s and for a management from the past transformed into an image capital (O’Connor 2012: 16 ss), into a city brand. The fundamental instruments used have been new technologies, material culture and the media, which have reconstructed the fragments of a mythology that drives the future that has energized the collective imagination. With them, nostalgia for modern Shanghai has served as a progressive force to lead it to the future, so that, paradoxically, that longing for a time when the future was lost becomes the engine fuze of a resumed destiny.

In this regard, Shanghai establishes a “bridge to the future”, continuing a dialogue between the old and the new and managing, in an original and complex way, the relations between the premodern, modern, and postmodern universes. In fact, in urban space multiple temporalities coexist, the linear, the timeless and the instantaneous intersect and interweave, graphically encode, and visualize the past, the present and the future and, in short, form a palimpsest of different times: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. In this way, the identity of the city of the present is shaped, specifically, in the heart of the city, on the Huangpu River, which—as we will see later—symbolizes the intermediation between “the past” and the “future past”. Now, in this temporal discourse, the near and far, the then and now,

are relativized, the instantaneousness of a timeless time is generated and the rediscovered future dissolves and is lost. Without forgetting that the futuristic aspirations and convulsions of the memory of the city repeat a certain rhythm, reflect a broader vision, a cultural anxiety for time, an unfinished process, and a willingness to catch up with the West (Huysen 1995: 6; Pan 2009: 223; Lagerkvist 2010: 223).

Hence, by invoking modernity in Shanghai and doing it in its own way, one wonders if it is really building an alternative modernity. For example, Lee vigorously defends that the city goes beyond mere “mimicry” and considers that its cosmopolitanism is not superficial. Furthermore, he understands that he is building a new “imagined community” through a possible alternative to modernity, situated between the Chinese tradition and the colonial imitation (Lee 1999: 45–50).

O’Connor, for his part, believes that the city is inserted into a “disorderly modernity”, since Shanghai had to be abruptly updated because, precisely, when nostalgia was transformed into a political program, at that time, it was evaporating the long-awaited city—what happens, for example, with the shikumen, the traditional architectural style, turned into a memory image, just when it is disappearing. This reminds us that “memory”, in itself, is selective and fissured and that, on occasions, it is indistinguishable from amnesia (O’Connor 2012: 16 ff) or from oblivion (Todorov 2013: 18), in as long as this is the one that makes that possible (Ricoeur 2010: 574–5). For other authors, the answer to the question posed is that Shanghai is ordering a space and time of “retromodernity” and hence its heritage is not so much a longing for the past as an integral component of a futuristic movement. For this reason, the relationship between nostalgia and the future that Shanghai establishes embodies “the crisis of that structure of temporality that marked the era of modernity with its celebration of the new as utopian, as radical and, irreducibly, as other” (Huysen 1995: 6; Lagerkvist 2010: 221).

But let us see what kind of modernity the skyscrapers of Shanghai embody and, above all, its extent in them and in the city as a whole.

The Pudong skyscrapers contemplate the bund skyscrapers: the nostalgia of the past that builds the future

Skyscrapers and futurization

The first skyscrapers in Shanghai are an “imported” product, “introduced” instead of “created” by China (Al-Kodmany and Ali 2012: 45; Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 23), a “pirate” copy of the tall American buildings. Therefore, they are not the result of the development of Chinese construction technology, but a process of reproduction



Fig. 1 The Pudong Telecommunication Tower. Photo of the author

of Westerners (Tangbin 2012: 691–3), not in vain, they recreate the Beaux Arts style. Let us remember, in this regard, that, according to B. Anderson, all communities are imagined, that is, “inventions” that are available for “piracy”. True, they possess a sense of parallelism or simultaneity, which, in the specific case of America, had led their peoples to feel “duplicity,” which explains why nationalism arose earlier in the new world than in the old (Anderson 2005: 24, 182, and 216 and 219). Applied this thesis to the first stage of the creation of North American skyscrapers, there are clear ties between the old continent and architects such as Le Baron Jenny, Louis Sullivan, Daniel Burman, or John Root, since all of them had completed their university studies in Europe. It is not surprising that, initially, the North American skyscrapers copy, “pirate”, the European styles, although, little by little, these links with time are blurred (Mory 2012: 133) and find their own style.

When you visit the city, you have the feeling that you are facing the future and that you have traveled forward. Not surprisingly, in addition to the imposing skyscrapers, large screens and multimedia facilities abound in its urban landscape, as the city has become an important information and communication center in the Asia–Pacific (Fig. 1) area. Likewise, thousands of people move through its streets in a continuous movement, many of which carry the latest artifacts, from the most modern means. Therefore, futuristic visions are spatialized in the city (Lagerkvist 2010: 229), in such a way that the prolongation of the future has been anticipated, invading everything with its overwhelming plasticity, including the imagination of Westerners (Fajardo 2005: 36).

Skyscrapers fulfill, in this futurization, a decisive function. Above all, because its forms are futuristic and symbols of modernization, traditional industrial civilization and Western and, in recent years, Chinese capitalism. True, in the post-industrial era, skyscrapers no longer represent a sign of urban modernization in Europe and America, but they do in China and, therefore, in Shanghai. Hence, if there were no iconic high-rise buildings, the city could not be considered prosperous, powerful, or civilized (Tangbin 2012: 693; Al-Kodmany and Ali 2012: 57–8; Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 24).

In this regard, it is very revealing that the skyscraper constitutes a cultural symbol and a capitalist project, while the former draws attention to what it “means” and, the latter, to the logic that brings people and materials together, a temporary agreement that produces economic value. This is so because skyscrapers not only embody the rationality of space, methods, and modern organizations, but they constitute a materialization of these organizations. Thus, their growth is based on that of the bureaucracy and its rationalist organization since these buildings constitute forms of industrial capitalism and testimonies of the complexities of the division of labor and the logic of capital accumulation. That is, they are money-making machines in big cities, they celebrate commercial success and the accumulation of individual wealth, and they become an outstanding marker of the contemporary economic cycle, with its recurring crises and recoveries. In addition, they bring with them a decisive boost from industry and the entire dynamic economy behind construction, as evidenced by the use of modern construction methods, the adoption of efficient abstract forms, the predominance of functionalism and the planning of many projects—infrastructures, fundamentally—in large urban neighborhoods. Finally, not being built or occupied by individual corporations—with a few exceptions—but by groups of investors such as rental properties, they house many international companies with offices, banks, world trade centers, 5-star hotels, commercial spaces, brand stores, boutiques, restaurants, gyms, and multi-screen cinemas, which has made them multifunctional thanks to globalization. All this without forgetting that, through their high panoramic views, they offer a vision of the world, from and to capitalism (Zhu 1999: 97; Thornton 2012; Tangbin 2012: 691–2; Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 24; Parker 2015: 217–230).

In short, “skyscrapers are the definitive architecture of capitalism” (Willis 1995: 181).

On the other hand, the modernity of Chinese tall buildings is expressed through scientific and technological advances, always embedded in the economy (Noble

1999: 79) and, more specifically, with the technical and structural systems of repetition and mutation, characteristic of the industrial revolution and which are precisely those that have allowed high-rise buildings (Cabas 2011: 205). Thus, the skyscraper represents an acclamation of modern construction technology and the cult of technological power (Huxtable 1988: 8; Sarli 1999: 15) and, in sum, it can be considered as a synthesis of two converging trends, coming from modernity: a techno-industrial one, marked by economic rationality, and an artistic one, with a scientific or objective reduction of form (Roche 2007: 98).

Modernity is also on display in the skyscrapers of Shanghai, insofar as they represent China's national pride in regaining its status as a great world power and in expectation of international recognition. In fact, they have become an important image of the country's and the city's modernization policy, the results of the reform and the "successes" of the new open-door policy, as well as the most appropriate method for displaying the goals and triumphs of that era of reform. Coupled with this, Shanghai views the tall towers to remake its image, to relive its glorious past and to become a global city. In fact, these buildings are its great promoters (Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 22 and 31–2), as their names denote, related to the economic state of the country, with the desire to achieve world recognition and with an image of growth and national progress; they even bear the name of the city or region itself—Shanghai Tower, Shanghai World Financial Center and Shanghai Weelock Square—(Tangbin 2012: 693; Chen 2017: 36–40).

Consequently, Shanghai has been among the most active cities in skyscraper construction and has the highest profile of Chinese cities (Gaubatz 1999: 1151–4). Specifically, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, it has added 156 skyscrapers to the 69 it previously built, so that there are now 3,000 skyscrapers in the city, more than in New York. In fact, it has broken the urban horizon line of this last North American city, as well as those of Chicago, Miami, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. In addition, another 2,000 buildings have been built in recent years, including 3 of the 5 highest, the Shanghai Tower, the Shanghai World Financial Center, and the Jin Mao, and 16 with a height of more than 250 m.

For this reason, Shanghai is known as the Manhattan of the Far East, its history echoes that of China and is considered the key to understanding the progression of the skyscrapers and the architectural history of its country (Fajardo 2005: 36; Tangbin 2012: 692; O'Connor 2012: 16–17; Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 26 and 38; Al-Kodmany 2018: 16).



Fig. 2 Semi-colonial zone of the Bund. Photo of the author



Fig. 3 Bank of China. Bund. Photo of the author

The skyscrapers of Shanghai, between tradition and modernity, between globalization and attachment to the local

The geographical space of the Shanghai skyscrapers, time, and history

The skyscrapers that are the subject of our analysis are located in two fundamental areas of Shanghai, located respectively on one side and the other of the Huangpu River, which serves as the connection axis: the Bund, an elegant neighborhood of semi-colonial (Fig. 2) origin from the 1920s and 1930s., with art deco buildings among which the Bank of China (Fig. 3) stands out, and was founded by the English, and, the Pudong, built since the 90 s of the last century, which seems to look



Fig. 4 Dive view of Jin Mao from SWFC. The vision of overcoming and dominance of capitalism. Author photo

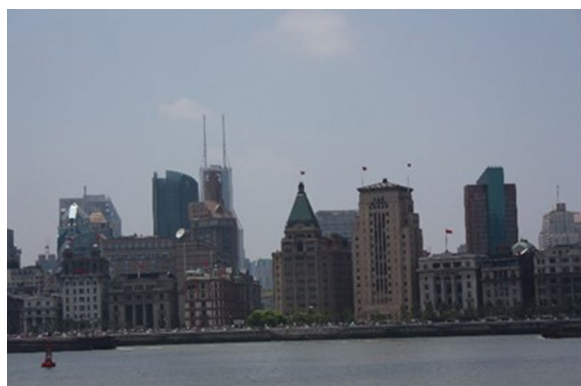


Fig. 5 The Bund from the Huangpu River. Photo of the author

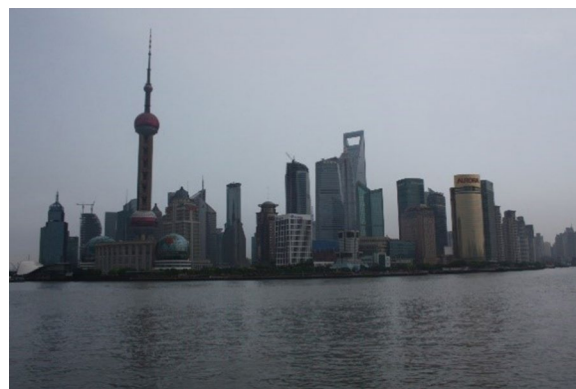


Fig. 6 Vision of the Pudong, from the Huangpu River. Photo of the author



Fig. 7 The Huangpu River and its two banks: the Pudong and the Bund Photo of the author. Source:<https://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/cl/02-284701/shanghai-tower-rasys-craper-mas-alto-de-china-alcanza-su-altura-maxima/520405bde8e44e949b000182>. Consulted 07/07/2020.

and surpass the colonial buildings of the Bund complex (O'Connor 2012: 16–23; Vilaró 2016: 84–6).

In Pudong, the newest district, three skyscrapers stand out, the Shanghai Tower, the adjacent Jin Mao Tower, and the Shanghai World Financial Center (SWFC). As will be seen below, together, these three buildings make up a temporary narrative of the city, since, while the design of the Jin Mao Tower (Fig. 4) pays homage to China's past and that of the SWFC signifies its recent economic growth, the Shanghai Tower symbolizes a beacon of the country's bright future.³

³ See <http://globalgrind.com/2008/11/29/shanghai-tower-breaks-ground/> and https://web.archive.org/web/20090315053529/http://www.gensler.com/uploads/documents/pr_081128_Shanghai_Tower_11_24_2008.pdf. Consulted on 01/07/2020.

To this temporary discourse would be added the role of the river, considered in the city as the bridge between the semi-colonial past and the future, between nostalgia for the past (the Bund) (Fig. 5) and the futurism that drives it (the Pudong) (Fig. 6). But, since the river is at the center of both banks (Fig. 7), it should be inferred, on the one hand, that it is a border and liminal space and, as such, enables the meeting between the two. On the other hand, it can also be seen -according to the ancient Chinese belief- as an image of the temporal flow (Zhang et al. 2019: 138) and, more specifically, of a present situated in the middle of the past and the future, of a time that never is, that is eternally to become.



Fig. 8 The Shimao International Plaza. Photo of the author



Fig. 9 The Jin Mao. Photo of the author

Wan Xiang International Plaza, Shimao International Plaza, Ingenhoven Architects, Düsseldorf, 247 m, (Designed in 1995), 2001–2006

This tower (Fig. 8), located on Nanjing road, on the west bank of the Huangpu River, in the Puxi area (the district where the Bund is located), in the old city of Shanghai, is labeled within the artistic style known as “modernism” and is organized according to the principles of *Feng*

shui. Furthermore, its iconic shape derives from the cultural expression of buildings constructed with structural systems, which makes it possible to adequately capture the city’s dynamic economy. Likewise, the planning of the building incorporates efficient energy and natural ventilation in the façade, based on technical principles developed in Germany (Höweler 2003: 45; Wright 2008: 120–1).⁴

The Jin Mao Tower, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, 491 m, 1998

Built in the Pudong district, in the special area of Shanghai, the style of this skyscraper “revitalizes the oriental” (Fig. 9), through the models and decorative elements of the Chinese and local tradition. Specifically, it designs the profile of a traditional pagoda with a biomorphic shape, resolved with the rhythmic staggering of its roofs in sixteen sections, finishing off the upper floor of each section with a dense overhang and with the ornamentation of these floors. And, although it does so on an exaggerated scale, it tries to culturally root the building on the urban horizon, through its stylish stainless steel and glass façade, which aims to evoke the art deco design of the Bund. In addition, the crowning of the building is also reminiscent of art deco, while suggesting a lotus bud and the texture of huge, typical Chinese bamboo scaffolding.

Along with this, all the elements of the building follow the rules of *Feng shui*, through the number 8 and its multiples, present in the pilasters – 8 and 8 –, in the 8 verticals that follow the segments with decreasing height and in each segment, which is one eighth higher in height than the adjacent one that continues it. In addition, officially, it has 88 floors, although in reality with another five floors above. Well, this number and its multiples symbolize good omen, fortune, wealth, and prosperity, as exemplified by the crown of the building, which means “a lot of gold” and which touches the sky on the 88th floor, a sign of double good luck.

However, despite its apparent attachment to tradition, the Jin Mao has a futuristic character, while symbolizing the modernization and strength of the country and the city, as well as its global drive and the cult of technology. The first is achieved, mainly, through its surface, as it reflects changes in light during the day, while at night its illuminated culmination gives the building a futuristic air. At the same time, the steel and glass staircase confirm the intention of the designers to offer an image of the modern aspect of the construction, not for nothing the high tower constitutes a “symbol of

⁴ See also https://www.ecured.cu/Shimao_International_Plaza Consulted 01/07/2020.



Fig. 10 The Jin Mao is located among other skyscrapers with contemporary design. Photo of the author

the modernization of China”, represents the economic thrust of the country, transformed in recent years into an economic superpower. This is expressed by this skyscraper more than any other previously erected, since it is recognized as one of the most important in Chinese architecture for its design, without forget that it has become an icon, a brand of Shanghai itself—it is a true city within the city—and of the country as a whole.

But, if it has succeeded, it has been thanks to globalization, since it assumes a multifunctional character, typical of late modern architecture, as evidenced by the offices of its first 50 floors or the 6 floors for shops and services, while the other levels are occupied by a luxury hotel, the Grand Hotel Hyatt. In addition, the arcade at its base houses a six-store shopping center, with shops and services, a conference hall, a concert hall, and several nightclubs, to which is added a parking lot for 1000 bicycles. The international attribute of the skyscraper comes from the fact that the design has been commissioned by the Chicago team, Skidmore, Owins and Merrill, because it houses the foreign hotel, the tallest in the world, since it is the largest building in mainland China and the third highest on the planet.

The modernization of this skyscraper (Fig. 10) is also evident in its technological advances, not for nothing has it been called the “technological pagoda” for various reasons. First of all, because, being founded on a loving bed—without rock pavement, it needs very deep foundations, which reinforces its solidity, capable of resisting



Fig. 11 The Plaza 66 complex. . Consulted on 06/07/2020 Source: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plaza_66

typhoons of up to 200 km per hour, also thanks to its “tube in tube”; Similarly, it can withstand earthquakes, which are common in the area. On the other hand, the construction has its own power plant, water treatment plant, a drinking water plant, and an integrated telecommunications system. In addition, it uses highly advanced technological materials, such as stainless steel and glass, used in its coating (Sarli 1999: 22; Teranova 2003: 261–265; Höweler 2003: 24; Pineda 2004: 308; Dupré 2005: 117; Spirito and Terranova 2008: 188; Wright 2008: 108; Al-Kodmany and Ali 2012: 49; and Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 28).

In sum although the analogy that the building establishes with the traditional Chinese pagoda certainly seems effective, some authors (Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 36) question that it is really based on the lucky number, since there are more plants that overflow to the 88th floor, which means that interest or function have neglected value and ancient belief. And this supposes a serious cultural estrangement and not an improvement of the sense of place. That is why this building is a contradictory cultural iconography and, simultaneously, a successful combination of modern and vernacular spirit (Lagerkvist 2010: 229; Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 28) and a brilliant synthesis of Western engineering design with ornamentals motifs of the East (Wright 2008: 108). In this sense, it represents a mediator between traditional local design and the type of global building, between the orientalist and the westernist, between the nostalgic and the futuristic (Höweler 2003: 24; Tangbin 2012: 694).

The Plaza 66 Building. Nanjing Xi Lu, Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates PC, 288 m, 2001

The building (Fig. 11) stands along the historic shopping street, Nanjin Xi Lu, one of the oldest arteries in downtown Shanghai. The granite of its base and its height are compared with the fabric of the traditional Chinese city. For the rest, he composes a three-dimensional collage sculpture, with curvilinear shapes that bring it closer to the Baroque. In addition, the spiral of the composition is topped by a translucent glass lantern, a dramatic crown typical of theatrical Asian skyscrapers, which constitutes a reference to the art deco of American skyscrapers, such as the Empire State Building or the Chrysler Building.

The towers, on the other hand, dialogue with the vertical city and, by embracing the serpentine forms influenced by the forces of the vortex, they relate to the vibrant and dynamic street in which the complex rises. And, in it, dominate the curves, concave and convex, chosen to express the vitality of the center, compared, in this sense, with a vortex. Moreover, the complex constitutes a multifunctional center, since it contains offices and shops, while, in the basement, there are public spaces, a shopping center, areas for culture and free time and an underground parking.

On the other hand, this multifunctionality corresponds to the composition by parts of the square, as if it were an assembly of forms, a collage of volumes, each characterized and distinguished by its own geometry, the use of materials, its dimensions, and a different usage, in relation to the multiplicity of scales that are present in it.

Finally, the architectural forms retain a liminal state, physical and symbolic indicators of the future. It is not by chance that Plaza 66 is the tallest skyscraper in Puxi, a “smart building” that houses the JW Marriott hotel and whose roof, finished with a lantern that lights up at night and is visible from far away, achieves that his figure appears very light, stylized and apparently floats on the tower, as if he were weightless or as if he rose in an unrealistic way (Álvarez 2001: 464–467; Höweler 2003: 146; Spirito and Terranova 2008: 63–6; Lagerkvist 2010: 229).

Shanghai World Financial Center, Kohn Pedersen Fox, 492 m, 2008

In the original design of the architect, later varied in its execution, earth and sky are related, since the latter builds an abstract association between Chinese cosmology in which the earth is comprised of the square of the base and, the sky, represented by the circle of the hole that opens at the top of the tower and that some authors interpret as the window to the sky, as a Chinese moon



Fig. 12 SWFC. Photo of the author



Fig. 13 The multinational companies of the SWFC. Photos author

gate -the entrance in the form of a full moon of local houses- or as an analogy of the sun nascent (Höweler 2003: 75). But, although, in principle, this oculus was thought as if it were a symbolic circular opening, nevertheless, it has been replaced by a trapezoidal hole (Fig. 12) that, although it makes its image more banal and less slender and symbolic, is more accepted by the local population and easier and cheaper to do. Besides that, it also performs the important function of reducing the pressure of the winds and allows the tower to reach 492 m (Spirito and Terranova 2008: 190).

What the base of the building tries, through the stone-clad podium and the dimension of its spaces, is to create a human scale denied by the high tower. In addition, this base has a shopping center and a large entrance hall



Fig. 14 The strong contrast between traditional architecture and SWFC. Photo of the author



Fig. 16 SWFC as a design object. Photo of the author



Fig. 15 The magnet attractor that is addressed to four cardinal points of the Earth SWFC. Photo of the author

that organize the flow of people to the different activities that take place on the upper floors (Spirito and Terranova 2008: 190).

Accordingly, the SWFC can be said to incorporate national and local symbols that fundamentally express an attachment to modernity rather than tradition. Hence it is understood (Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 38)

that, in this skyscraper, tradition has been undervalued and globalization has been praised, which is a “threat” due to its separation from the past and its ignorance of identity of the place and the heritage architecture.

In this sense, it is located in the special economic zone of Shanghai, in the Lujiazui district, in the heart of the Pudong area, where numerous skyscrapers of the most diverse forms are installed and which are the headquarters of the most important Chinese multinationals (Fig. 13), in addition to luxurious hotels and residences. Thus, conceived to be once the tallest building in the world and to symbolize the economic development and emergence of China (Fig. 14) as a global economic superpower (Fig. 15), it represents one of the greatest icons of the Asian urban world (Höweler 2003: 75; Spirito and Terranova 2008: 188; Lagerkvist 2010: 229).

It also highlights its profile, simple, elegant, and slender (Fig. 16), which is opposed to the articulated figures of the other Towers. True, its shape is original, strange, “monstrous” and it is located, uprooted, within the global landscapes. For the rest, it looks like a sculpture with “playful geometry”, as its glass and steel facade emphasize the monolithic simplicity of the volume, as if it were a design object deprived of functional, architectural or decorative elements, in fact, it has no windows or impostes. Thus, it becomes a “singular object” that finds its own image in the world of design, rather than in that of traditional local constructions or in the usual boxes of the International Style. The analogy with the typical figures of the objects of design resides, on the other hand, in the investigation that it carries out



Fig. 17 The Shanghai Tower. Source: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torre_de_Shanghái#/media/Archivo:Shanghai_Tower_2015.jpg. Consulted on 06/07/2020

on apparently elementary forms, but that in reality are complex, insofar as they respond to “geometry in its pure form”. In effect, its apparent external simplicity corresponds to a great planimetric complexity, due to its progressive reduction towards the top, so that each floor is different from the next and each one responds more effectively to the various activities that take place inside as it is a multipurpose complex: the offices and conference rooms on the lower floors, a luxurious hotel with 300 rooms on the upper floors, restaurants and a panoramic terrace corresponding to the hole that opens at the top of the tower, a base that is underground and houses an underground garden that takes refuge from noise and surface contamination, and a five-story pedestal, which houses a large shopping center and conference rooms (Pedersen 1997: 12; Höweler 2003: 75; Spirito and Terranova 2008: 189–190; Wright 2008: 120; Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 27).

The Shanghai Tower, Gensler, 561.3 m, 2015

This tower (Fig. 17), located in Lujiazui, an area of Shanghai that was farmland, was designed based on its vernacular houses, *shikumen*, in which the rooms are arranged around a community in an open space, which makes up a *lilong* or a neighborhood. However, when the design of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM)—a Chicago architecture and engineering firm—translated this concept vertically, the benefits of the traditional concept were lost and the desired sense of community

diminished (Al-Kodmany et al. 2013: 35). And it is that the Shanghai Tower basically wants to become a symbol of the future of China: “This tower is symbolic of a nation whose future is full of unlimited opportunities,” says Qingwei Kong, president of Shanghai Tower Construction & Development Co., Ltd. In this sense, the building has high technology, since it designs the 120-degree spiral shape that spreads the wind throughout the building and that includes a “double skin” that isolates it, while the funnel shaped roof stores rainwater and the wind turbines provide enough electricity to power the exterior lighting of the building.⁵

Conclusions

The Huangpu River or the present, the Bund or nostalgia for the past and the Pudong or the future

In response to the objectives proposed in this article, it has been proven that the modernization of Shanghai is unique for its temporary speech with a strong ideological burden (Van Dijk 1998: 16–9), with which it spatializes time, building the future through nostalgia for the past. In this way it becomes a cosmopolitan, modern and hybrid city that defines its identity. Not surprisingly, industrialization and post-industrialization coexist simultaneously, premodern, modern, and late modern conceptual universes are intertwined, the past, the present and the future are juxtaposed and, ultimately, the desire to stop the future is projected.

Precisely in the construction of this temporal narrative, the skyscrapers of the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first in Shanghai play an essential role, as their analysis declares, since they become a means to remake their image, relive their glorious past and become a futuristic and global city. In this regard, there are three final considerations.

The first that most skyscrapers are located around the Huangpu River and the two districts on its banks, the Bund and the Pudong, which reveals precisely that modern temporal discourse. That is right, the river itself is a symbolic, liminal natural space that exhibits an image of the temporal flow and, particularly, of a present that is eternally to become. Not in vain, it is conceived in the city as the bridge, between the semi-colonial past and the future, between nostalgia for the past -the Bund- and futurism -the Pudong-. Here the four most important skyscrapers, -the *Shanghai Tower*, the *Jin Mao*, the *WFC* and the *Tomorrow Square*- express this ideal of the future.

⁵ See <http://globalgrind.com/2008/11/29/shanghai-tower-breaks-ground/> and https://web.archive.org/web/20090315053529/http://www.gensler.com/uploads/documents/pr_081128_Shanghai_Tower_11_24_2008.pdf Consulted on 01/07/2020.

On the other hand, some of the most characteristic skyscrapers of late modern Shanghai play, in their forms, with this temporal narrative that intertwines the past and the future. This is the case, for example, with the Jiushi Corp. Hqtrs., Open towards the Huangpu River, the historic Bund and the Pudong; with Jin Mao and Plaza 66, who use the art deco style to link with the Bund; with the Jiushi Corp. Hqtrs; or with views of the SWFC that look to all sides and, especially, towards the Bund, as if wanting to overcome it and even dominate it.

The second temporary consideration is evidenced by the high towers of Shanghai that are arranged between tradition and modernity, between globalization and the local. This is what happens with the *Shimao International Plaza*, the *Jiushi Corp. Hqtrs* and with *Plaza 66*.

Two prominent skyscrapers in the city perfectly exemplify the ambivalence that defines them, the Jin Mao and the SWFC. The former is a contradictory combination of the modern and the indigenous, of Western engineering and Eastern decoration, and is thus a mediator between the local and the global, between East and West, and between the nostalgic and the futuristic.

On the other hand, we could add that the excessive scale of the building breaks the horizontal-vertical harmony, symbol of the union of the earth and the sky, of the interweaving of Nature and Culture, characteristic of the vernacular architecture of the city, at the lean more for the vertical and, therefore, for the celestial. Of course, there are traces of an ancestral love of Nature in the recreation of the rhythms of growth and the physiognomy of vegetables, particularly of the lotus and bamboo.

As for the SWFC, in the original design of the architect, later varied in its execution, the earth and the sky are related and a Chinese circular moon gate is drawn, which, however, is replaced by a more economic and easier trapezoidal hole perform.. In this way, globalization has been privileged and exalted, while tradition has been devalued. To this is added that he looks more for his image in the world of design -as John Portman also does, in Tomorrow Square- than in that of traditional local constructions or in the usual boxes of the International Style.

Precisely this contrast between the traditional and the most representative style of architectural modernity, has led us to think if it is possible that, in Shanghai, a new vision of modernity is being born that combines ethics and Confucian humanism with science, capitalism and liberal political organization, thus differentiating Chinese modernity from classical Western. Furthermore, by constantly invoking modernity and doing it in its own way, it is worth considering whether it is building an alternative to the western style, if its cosmopolitanism

is not superficial, if it represents a third way in which European modernism and advanced western technology are mixed with traditional Chinese materials and local crafts and, ultimately, if it has been built a new “imagined community.”

In this sense, Shanghai’s early skyscrapers are a “pirate copy” of the American Beaux Art style, a style that survives in the most recent buildings. For example, the Jin Mao and el Plaza 66 show that, in the late modern period, the skyscrapers have not yet abandoned Art Deco and that, while expressing a nostalgia for the past, they opt for a cult of the future. On the contrary, SWFC and Tomorrow Square are clearly, without hesitation, betting on the future, without any regard to the past.

Consequently, the question remains whether the Shanghai skyscrapers have found a personality of their own or continue without breaking free from Western models.

Shanghai modernity or shortened history

In the context of this debate, we would like to end this work with some final reflections that may help clarify it. From our perspective, the “retromodernity”, the “hybrid modernity” or the “disordered modernity” (O’Connor 2012: 16 ss) that Shanghai exemplifies has weighty similarities with western modernity, but also dissimilarities of different degrees. Among the first, it stands out that, in both cases, modernity is ambivalent and contradictory (Bauman and Tester 2002) and that, although it has two phases -first or second or late modernity-, there is a simultaneity of times, so that space and time lose their fixed character and adapt to local customs. On the other hand, the present contracts, it expands minimally to the point that it transforms into a discontinuous instant and of an ephemeral, fleeting and evanescent intensity, which does not leave a deep mark on the future.

As for the past, it is awareness of the future because the human being cannot orient himself in it without going back to that one. For the rest, more than running towards the future or letting it flow freely, the city pretends, with its apparent advance, to retrace time. This means that the future is not in front of the present -as it would be normal-, but in the immediate yesterday and now, so that it becomes an anticipated and accelerated future, which does not finish updating itself, always in dizzying construction. That is why, like the past, it ends up fleeced and devoured-, just as Cronos does with his children, representatives of later generations. No wonder that Shanghai, in establishing a relationship between nostalgia and the future, embodies the crisis in the structure of temporality that marked the era of Western modernity.

To this is added that, with their propaganda slogans -“past as future”, “return to the future” and “forward to

the past”-, the temporal modalities -in the same way as in the West- have lost their natural limit and have entered an indeterminacy that leads to not knowing very well in what real time their citizens live: yesterday, today, or tomorrow? Finally, Shanghai and the West are similar in that they use advertising and media strategies in their futuristic mythology -this is what Tomorrow Square particularly does-; and in which institutions generate a continuous process of innovation, in which novelty and its future realization are pursued.

However, differences with the West also exist. Mainly, because the ideal of the future of Shanghai is more volatile if possible than the western and, perhaps, less utopian, since it is less emancipated from the past. This is explained by its retromodernization, which goes back to an immediate past and not to the more distant one, as the West does (Granés 2011: 23–86). In other words, it practically forgets pristine time, the origin of the city or of the ancient Chinese culture, which were only remembered, fragmentary and decoratively, in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, with a temporal reference of only 40 years, the past is divided, reduced to a short period of time and—in the case of the communist past—erased.

This does not mean that Shanghai has abandoned the closest proximity to the rhythms of Nature (Eliade 1965: 63–100) of its more remote past, as opposed to a western modernity in which it is always expelled and dominated. And, in the latter, we find echoes of the I-Ching China ethos, where the concept of alternative cycles of creation and destruction is expressed, the theory of reincarnation or the agricultural cyclical vision of time, conditioned by the passage of stations. In this regard, Shanghai -like the mythical thinking of antiquity (Cassirer 1989: 54), with its celebration of temporal coexistence, mediates between a series of opposites -old and new, urban, and rural, Western and Chinese, modern and late modern and industrial and post-industrial-, which show a particular need to (re)define itself, to find an identity of place in the global era, to develop economically and socially and to compete internationally. In this way, while the West has abandoned the idea of progress, for Shanghai it represents a fundamental engine of its advancement.

In summary, two powerful ideas can be concluded about the modernization of Shanghai. The first is that its resemblance to the West has led to its past, its present and its future being minimized, so that its concept of time has accelerated and even “suicide” (Bauman 2003: 122–138). Hence, the history of the city has been shortened, losing weight, although it certainly keeps alive social tensions or demands for collective justice. And it is that these coexist, losing steam, with the ideals of a brilliant collective consumption and with the pleasures and material liberties of urban modernity. Thus, it is explained that History has entered a state of almost

“weightlessness”; free from the burden of its past and future (O’Connor 2012: 27) and that it has been frozen.

The second idea, stemming from the differences between the modernization of Shanghai and the western one, has led the city, rather than being, to try to become. For this reason, it is no coincidence that it is a liminal site, arranged at the intersection of different empires and of different temporalities, as are its most outstanding skyscrapers, built on the edge of the river and on the border between past and future.

Consequently, insofar as Shanghai is defining globalization (Vidal y Llopis 2004: 137; Resico 2005: 198), in which it is among the most active cities in the construction of skyscrapers, in which it is built more than in New York and in which its tall towers are increasingly technologically advanced, has the possibility of devising a peculiar Chinese modernity (O’Connor 2012: 23), or even deconstructing or giving a substantial boost to the general concept of western modernity. Specifically, it could become “an ideal laboratory for global modernity, the privileged intermediary between “China” and “the West”, the best place to integrate the past and globalization and its future into a coherent narrative”. Thus, to “we have always been modern” (Lagerkvist 2010: 234), one could add “we have constantly pursued the future”, “we are persistently seeking to become”, “we are never”, or better, the “eternally we are the same”.

In short, it can be thought that the modernity of Shanghai, the more complex it becomes today, the more it overlaps the multiplicity of temporalities, the more it becomes a macro-city that, like all global ones, has no qualities (O’Connor 2012: 16 ff.). Perhaps that is why it is so different and, simultaneously, so similar to Manhattan.

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