

Research on the Construction Process and Architectural Style of the Great Hall of the People

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Abstract:

New China was established on a poor and blank basis. The Chinese government has led the people of all ethnic groups across the country in arduous national construction. In the first ten years after the founding of New China, China completed the transformation of New China and implemented two five-year plans. Although it has gone through some detours, it has also achieved historic results. In the context of difficult economic environment and limited material conditions, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of New China, in order to showcase the achievements of New China, the country implemented the Ten Major Construction Projects in Beijing, the Great Hall of the People being the first these ten projects. The construction time of the Great Hall of the People was short, the efficiency was high, the construction process was complicated and difficult, and the architectural style is a concentrated representative of the architecture of new China.

Keywords: Great Hall of the People; Construction Process; Architectural Style; New China

I. Architecture of Late Qing and the Republic of China

With the gunshots of the Opium War, China passively opened its doors. Thousands of years of farming civilization was destroyed by strong ships and guns, and Western industrial civilization was gradually implanted in China. Since then, China has repeatedly ceded land for compensation. Foreigners began to build consulates, banks, hospitals, religious sites, schools, commercial banks and other buildings in Chinese cities. A few years later, a large number of buildings with the characteristics of Western industrial civilization emerged in cities in mainland China. By the time of the Republic of China, the country's urbanization rate was only 10%. Except for the buildings built by foreigners, most cities kept the traditional architectural forms that evolved from the buildings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. This was the inheritance and development of the "imperial palace-style" Chinese architecture inherent in the feudal period, and had become the main style of the official buildings and municipal planning and constructions of the government of the Republic of China. Examples include the Central Hospital on Zhongshan East Road in Nanjing (now the General Hospital of Nanjing Military Region), the Central Museum (now the Nanjing Museum), and the Central Hotel, Dahua Cinema (formerly Dahua Theater) on Zhongshan South Road, Central Stadium (now Nanjing Institute of Physical Education), Jiangsu Post Administration in Xiaguan, etc. In other words, during the Republic of China, traditional Chinese-style buildings and pure Western-style buildings coexisted. Although the Chinese and Western styles are obviously abrupt in the architectural appearance of some cities, this is the true appearance of historical development.

In the context of abrupt coexistence and collision of Chinese and Western architecture, from the end of the Qing Dynasty to the beginning of the Republic of China, some European and American missionaries and architects explored a modern architectural heritage that is referred to as "classical pseudomorphism" by scholars nowadays. For example, the Huaishi Hall of Shanghai St. John's University is the earliest example. It was Francis Lister Hawks Pott (Francis Lister Hawks Pott), the president of the university founded by this missionary who determined its style. He requested that the curvaceous beauty of the traditional Chinese roof be preserved, and most of these buildings have Western-style pendulum clocks installed on the surface of the building. Fu Jen Catholic University is also a representative of this type of "classical pseudomorphic" architecture. Celso Benigno Luigi Cardinal Costantini, the religious leader sent by Vatican to China, praised Fu Jen Catholic University's architecture as a transformation and innovation of traditional Chinese classical architectural forms. ^[1] Peking Union Medical College Hospital was acquired by the Rockefeller Foundation and rebuilt and expanded in 1921. The regular and symmetrical entrance plaza with western geometric patterns and the rigorously framed Chinese-style large-roof buildings form a harmonious and solemn complex of magnificent buildings. The traditional gatehouse is set against the arc-shaped white marble railings, giving it a special momentum. Although these buildings did not adopt the wooden column load-bearing structural system, in the facade design, the architect still created

the image of the wooden column with fine lines. At that time, Western architects designed a large number of buildings with European and American neoclassical style, romantic style, and Art Deco style in China, such as the HSBC Tower and the Sassoon House in the Bund in Shanghai.

The Origin of New China's Ten Buildings

In 1949, New China was founded, and then China completed the tasks of economic recovery and transformation of the new China in three years. Subsequently, China began its first five-year plan. The first five-year plan, which started in 1953, was completed in 1956 ahead of schedule. During this period, China has made great achievements. Among the five five-year plans before the reform and opening up, it was a period with the fastest economic growth and social development and the best benefits, and initially laid the foundation for China's agriculture and industrialization. In 1956, China's first aircraft manufacturer successfully trial-produced its first jet aircraft; During the "First Five-Year Plan" period, only 146 of the "156 projects" were put into construction. The construction of another 4 projects was postponed, and another 6 projects did not turn into reality from the drawings. However, it was still the largest and most effective period of industrialization in China since modern times, and most of the projects were completed on schedule or ahead of schedule. In the entire national income, the proportion of state-owned economy, cooperative economy and public-private partnership economy rose from 21.3% in 1952 to 92.9%. A large number of important projects were completed. Within five years, a total of 55 billion yuan in capital construction investment was completed, and 46.05 billion yuan in new fixed assets, equivalent to 1.9 times the total value of fixed assets owned by the country at the end of 1952. The Second Five-Year Plan encountered huge fluctuations in the execution process. The "Second Five-Year Plan" was actually divided into two phases, the "Great Leap Forward" and the adjustment period. The "Second Five-Year Plan" proposed high targets that future generations would see absolutely impossible to be achieved. The industrial growth rate and the agricultural growth rate were respectively 3 times and 7 times the actual growth rate during the First Five-Year Plan period, and the main industrial and agricultural product indicators were both about 10 times that of 1952. Practical results show that the implementation of the "Second Five-Year Plan" had failed, no indicator was completed, and the average number of actual completions was only 19%. During this period, industrial growth fluctuated sharply, agricultural growth regressed, which, combined with the impact of the three years of natural disasters, resulted in a large number of abnormal deaths of Chinese people. [2]

In the middle of the second five-year plan was the tenth anniversary of the founding of New China. Facing the domestic and international environment, especially the complicated international environment, in August 1958, the CPC Central Committee held an enlarged Politburo meeting in Beidaihe and decided at the meeting: to celebrate the upcoming 10th

anniversary of the National Day, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China decided to rebuild Tiananmen Square and build a number of public buildings in Beijing to commemorate the National Day and demonstrate the great achievements of New China's construction to the Chinese people and the world. This work was led by Premier Zhou Enlai and specifically in charge by Wan Li, the deputy mayor of Beijing. In 1958, Wan Li conveyed to the Beijing Municipal Government a notice from the central government on preparations for the tenth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, calling for the construction of the Great Hall of Ten Thousand People, the Revolution Museum, the History Museum, the Science and Technology Museum, the Art Exhibition Hall, the National Grand Theater, the Military Museum, the National Cultural Palace, the Agricultural Exhibition Hall, the Industrial Exhibition Hall, etc. This was the first time that the concept of "Ten Buildings" was proposed. In the original public building plan, some buildings were postponed (such as the Art Museum), some were cancelled (such as the National Theater, and the Science and Technology Museum), and some were not included in the ten projects at that time, but were later constructed (Such as the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse), some were supplemented later (such as the Beijing Railway Station, the Overseas Chinese Tower, the Minzu Hotel, and the Workers' Stadium). The ten buildings that were finally constructed were different from the original concept, including the Chinese Revolutionary History Museum, the Great Hall of Ten Thousand People (later renamed the Great Hall of the People), the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution, and the Minzu Hotel, the Culture Palace of Nationalities, the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse, the Overseas Chinese Tower, the National Agricultural Exhibition Hall, Beijing Workers' Stadium and the Beijing Railway Station, with a total construction area of 640,000 square meters. Among them, the Overseas Chinese Building was demolished and rebuilt in 1988, and the other buildings have kept their architectural appearance at the tenth anniversary of the National Day. On the eve of the 10th Anniversary of the People's Republic of China, under the difficult domestic economy and the tense political situation abroad, China has concentrated the nation's human, material, financial and intellectual resources to design and construct ten major architectural plans, and through the close cooperation of national forces, from September 1958 to September 1959, China completed the tasks within an incredible one year, which can be regarded as a miracle in the history of human architecture. Today, the ten buildings are still the name cards of Beijing and even the whole country, with far-reaching historical significance and political influence.

II. Preparation of the Great Hall of the People

(I) Guiding ideology

The Great Hall of the People is the most representative of the ten buildings. State leaders and people all had high expectations for its construction. People hoped that whether from the perspectives of external appearance or internal function, or from the perspective of political symbols and practical use, it could reflect the superiority of New China's system, reflect the five thousand years of history in China and the heroic spirit of people of New China, reflect the great achievements of New China's construction in the past ten years, and reflect the essence of the architectural art and culture of the Chinese nation.

During the three-year economic recovery period and the reconstruction period of New China, the government did not put forward architectural theories. The architectural ideas at that time mostly continued the design ideas before the founding of the People's Republic of China, attaching importance to the basic functions of buildings and saving economic costs to the greatest extent. During the first five-year plan period, China and the West were basically cut off. In terms of national governance model and social construction, China had adopted the strategy of "leaning to one side", namely learning from the Soviet Union, and the architecture circles began to introduce the "national form with content of New China" from the Soviet Union. Out of the cherishment of traditional Chinese architectural paradigms and theories, Liang Sicheng, the famous architect, published the theory of "sticking to the national forms" in the first issue of *Architectural Journal*, the first national architectural journal in New China, in 1954. Soon, a number of completely antique public buildings with no innovation emerged across the country, such as the Friendship Hotel in Beijing, the Changchun Institute of Geology, and the Great Hall of the People in Chongqing. In 1955, China went to the other extreme. Because of an opposition to the extravagance and waste in architecture, the "big roof" and heavy-decorated architectural paradigm of classical buildings were widely and severely criticized because of their huge cost. At that time, the architects were rather confused: the national paradigm was seen as extravagant and wasteful, and modernism was regarded as a "bourgeois" style. People didn't know where to go and couldn't find a direction. Fortunately, Mao Zedong put forward at the enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee on April 28, 1956: "The contending of a hundred schools of thought should become China's policy for the development of science and the prosperity of literature and art", which aroused strong repercussions in the literary and scientific circles, and the thoughts of architects became active again. Later, after experiencing the anti-rightist movement in 1957, the designers fell into silence again.

In 1958, the Architectural Design Institute and designers received the design task of the National Day construction project, and they felt both excited and depressed. What excited them was that they could contribute to the construction of the new China, and what made them depressed was what kind of design the new China needed? Classical or modern? Chinese or

foreign? What were the criteria for judging waste and saving? Designers felt very distressed when they were making design proposals. In September 1958, at the National Day Project Mobilization Conference, Wan Li said that designers should dare to think and do things, they must design in accordance with Chairman Mao's thought of "a hundred schools of thought contending", and the so-called ideas "against waste" and "against big roofs" could be put aside. If the designers thought that glazed tiles and large roofs could be designed to a new level and height, they could try to innovate; if there were better forms, designers could study. He pointed out that in terms of architectural style, designers must attach importance to beauty, taking Chinese aesthetics and Chinese standards while having modern characteristics; national forms must be innovative, and national styles must be maintained; designers and working people must have patriotism and national pride; he hoped that designers would carry forward the spirit of collectivism and the advantages of communism, concentrate their wisdom, and build a group of world-class buildings. Wan Li's speech is a booster for the designer, allowing the designers to put aside their worries and strengthening their confidence in innovation. Peng Zhen, then the first secretary and mayor of Beijing, was very concerned about the architectural design of the Great Hall of the People. He has studied with the leaders of the Beijing Urban Construction Committee and the Planning Bureau for many times, and instructed that the design of the Great Hall should inherit and develop the traditional elements and Chinese style of Chinese architecture, and at the same time absorb all the good technologies and methods from abroad; it should embody the thinking of "people-oriented", "things for my use", and "serving the people", making workers, peasants, and intellectuals feel the atmosphere of majesty and the people as masters as soon as they entered the Great Hall, and it must not make people feel depressed. The guidance of Wan Li and Peng Zhen was the leading design idea for the construction of the Great Hall of the People and it also established the style for the design of this building.

(II) The birth of the design proposal

Beijing Architectural Design Institute participated in the design of the Great Hall of the People together with 34 architectural planning and design institutions in Beijing and more than 30 famous architects and experts from across the country. In just one month, with their supreme standing and dedication, designers displayed, presented, observed, discussed, and studied, learned from each other's strengths and optimized the proposals. After seven major revisions to the proposals, eight representative proposals were determined and sent to universities and research institutes across the country to solicit suggestions for revisions. Later, on the basis of the solicited opinions, the designers further revised and perfected the proposals. Beijing Architecture Design Institute, Tsinghua University and Beijing Urban Planning Bureau each made a comprehensive proposal on the basis of the original eight proposals and submitted them to Premier Zhou for approval. On October 14, 1958, Premier Zhou Enlai reviewed these three

comprehensive proposals in Zhongnanhai. After repeated comparisons and opinion solicitation, the proposal designed by Zhao Dongri and Shen Qi of the Beijing Urban Planning Administration was finally selected. ^[4] In December 1958, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee held a discussion meeting about the National Day construction project plan and determined the design proposals for a series of projects such as the Great Hall of the People. This meeting clarified the details of the location, size and height of the Great Hall. Its location was fixed on the west side of Tiananmen Square. As the venue for the National People's Congress and the country's major political and cultural events, the Great Hall should be large in size. Its volume should meet the needs of use, and it could be slightly taller than the Tiananmen Gate Tower and the Monument to the People's Heroes.

III. The architectural style of the Great Hall of the People

(I) Discussion about the style

Since the idea of constructing the Great Hall of the People was put forward, discussions on the design style had been going on, and the debate was fierce. Because the site of the Great Hall of the People was in the Tiananmen complex, there was a lot of controversy in the architectural design circles regarding the unification of the style of the Great Hall itself with the style of surrounding buildings, including the Tiananmen. One point of view is one-sidedly that ancient western elements could not be used, nor could modern western elements or too old Chinese elements. Another view was that this kind of absolute opinion would hinder the innovation and development of architectural art, and hinder the pace and speed of the construction of New China. When the people with lofty ideals were depressed, Mao Zedong, Peng Zhen, Wan Li and other national and municipal leaders successively delivered speeches to put the discussion on architectural styles back on the right track. From today's perspective, this track was the dialectical relationship between "inheritance and development, integrity and innovation". Architectural forms should not be divided into ancient, modern, Chinese and foreign, there was no such thing as a "capitalist" or "communist" form, and there were no absolute architectural elements that could or could not be adopted; the architecture of New China should reflect the heroic spirit of the Chinese people, a new society, a new system, a new atmosphere, and a new future; they should swallow and absorb all things, discard the dross and take the essence. The Great Hall of the People must have the characteristics of Chinese classical architecture, but also the innovative temperament of New China. It must inherit the advantages of Chinese and foreign ancient buildings and surpass them.

(II) The architectural style of the Great Hall of the People

On September 9, 1959, Mao Zedong visited the construction site of the Great Hall of the People, which was about to be completed. He renamed the "Great Hall of Ten Thousand People" as the "Great Hall of the People", meaning that it's the people's hall for discussion and

politics. This building shouldered a great historical mission. In the article "A Great Decade," Zhou Enlai commented on the completed Great Hall of the People in this way: "The exquisiteness of the Great Hall of the People not only far exceeds the level of similar buildings in China, but it is also a top-level building in the world."^[5] The designers themselves described the Great Hall of the People in this way: first, it absorbed the essence of ancient and modern Chinese and foreign architecture. It was a modern building as a whole, but it had absorbed many traditional Chinese architectural elements in the pillars, eaves, foundation, bottom and other places, giving it a shocking huge volume and magnificent aura. Secondly, its architectural form reflected the idea of "people-oriented, things for humans". For example, the design of the steps adopted a widening and multi-step method, making the building magnificent and approachable. The outer walls used a bright light yellow tone, which was different from the depressive dark red tone of ancient Chinese buildings. Third, the architectural form of the Great Hall was coordinated and unified with Tiananmen Square. The height of the main body of the Great Hall is slightly higher than Tiananmen Square by 3 meters and slightly higher than the Monument to the People's Heroes by 9 meters. However, because Tiananmen Square is in the center, the Great Hall is on one side of the square and the distance is far away, making the height of the Great Hall not prominent and maintaining the majestic feeling of the Tiananmen Gate. In addition, the Great Hall used a flat roof instead of a large slope roof to distinguish it from Tiananmen Square and coordinate with it.

After lasting turmoil in the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, the development of modern Chinese architecture was a collision of China and the West filled with chaos. It did not integrate them organically and could not find a foundation. After the founding of New China, in an era of an international relation that "leaned to one side" and domestic economic difficulties, the design of the Great Hall of the People took only one month and the construction took only 380 days. The fast construction process and the good effect it achieved were indeed a miracle; the Great Hall of the People is majestic and magnificent. Its architectural style is an outstanding representative of modern Chinese architecture inheriting the essence of traditional architecture, and it truly reflects the superiority of the system of New China; the Great Hall of the People is a concentrated reflection of the social development and civilization progress of New China. It carries the national sentiments of the Chinese government and the people of all ethnic groups in the country, marking the arduous journey of New China, and representing the great achievements of the construction made by New China.

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