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## CHINA IN DENMARK THE TRANSMISSION OF CHINESE ART AND ARCHITECTURE FROM THE VIEW OF JØRN UTZON'S DANISH SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

CHIU CHEN-YU, PHILIP GOAD AND PETER MYERS

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### Abstract

Danish architect Jørn Utzon's lifetime obsession with Chinese art and architecture is well known. However, *why* Utzon was interested in China and *how* he perceived Chinese art and architecture were not clearly explained in the previous studies. To answer the above questions with a better understanding of Utzon and his Danish socio-cultural background, the authors examines the experiences of the young Utzon and his connection with varied ideas and artefacts associated with China. The authors argue that the path leading to Utzon's reception of Chinese art and architecture can be traced back to the intermittent three-hundred-year connection between China and Denmark generally, and the legacy of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in particular. Together, these represent an amalgamation that assimilated diverse aspects of China taken by different people before and during Utzon's early career. This further provided Utzon with the impetus to construct his own understanding of Chinese art and architecture with his pivotal study trip to China in 1958. Thus, China could serve as both Utzon's aesthetic inspiration and confirmation for his architectural works.

Keywords:  
Jørn Utzon, transmission, China,  
Denmark, Chinese art and  
architecture

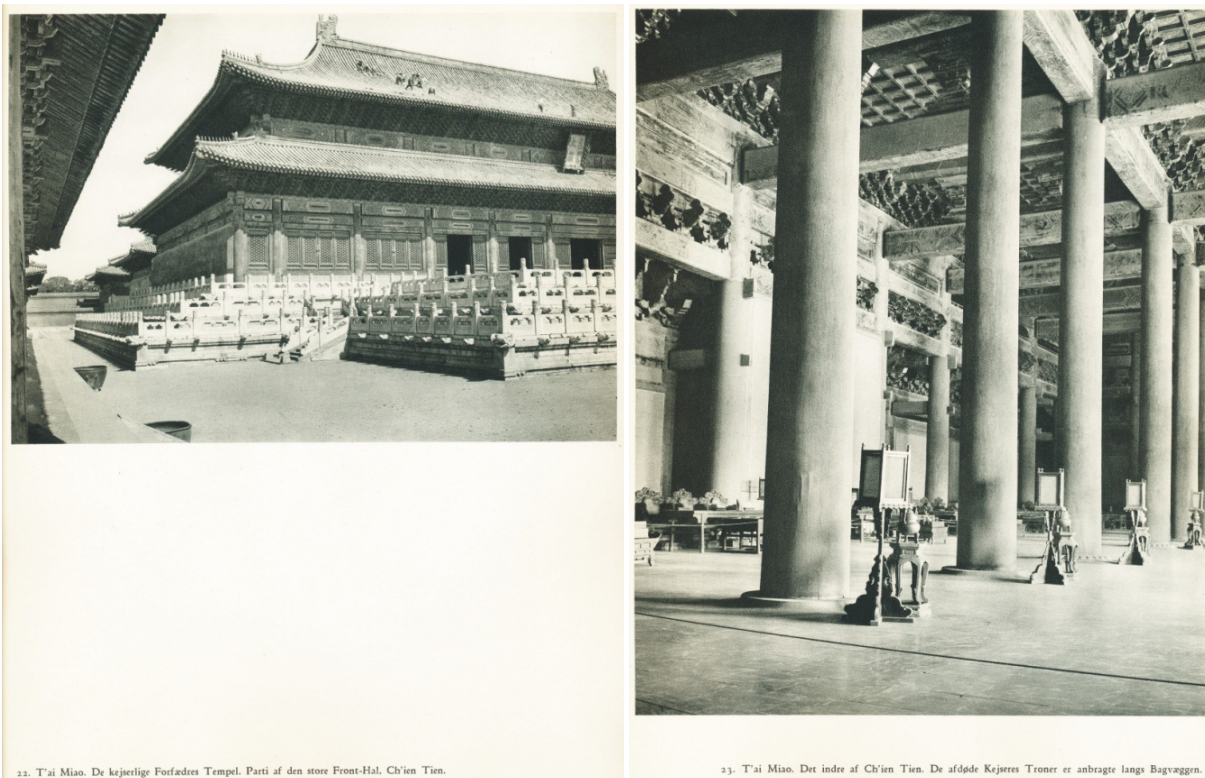
## Introduction

The year 2004 marked an important milestone in the career of Danish architect Jørn Utzon (1918–2008) when the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark launched the first retrospective exhibition of his lifetime work.<sup>1</sup> For this event, Utzon selected only two books as the summation of his architectural inspirations: one was the 1937-edition of *Billeder fra Kina* (*Images of China*) by Osvald Sirén (1879–1966); the other was the 1925-edition of an ancient Chinese technical treatise on architecture and craftsmanship first published in 1103 AD, *Yingzao fashi* (*Chinese Building Standards*)<sup>2</sup> (Bech, 2007). In a documentary film to commemorate the exhibition, Utzon alluded to the significance of *Billeder fra Kina* by presenting two lavishly-printed photographs of the Great Front Hall of the Ancestor Shrine in Imperial Beijing from this book (see Figure 1). The roof/earthwork juxtaposition shown in these photographs directly recalls Utzon’s now well-known sketch of “Chinese houses and temples”<sup>3</sup> in his 1962 manifesto *Platforms and Plateaus: Ideas of a Danish Architect* (see Figure 2) (Utzon, 1962, p.116). As one of the keys indicating the architect’s inspiration and vision for the Sydney Opera House (1956–66), Utzon explained his perception of Chinese architecture with his sketch:<sup>4</sup>

*Chinese houses and temples owe much of their feeling of firmness and security to the fact that they stand on a platform with the same outline as that of the roof or sometimes even of larger size, depending upon the importance of the building. There is magic in the play between roof and platform* (Utzon, 1962, p.116).

1. Utzon was fully involved with the preparation, after having repeatedly declined prior invitations. The information was from the interview with Utzon’s oldest son – Jan Utzon – in the Sydney Opera House in 2008.
2. The *Yingzao fashi* is a technical treatise on architecture and craftsmanship written by the Chinese author Li Jie (李诫; 1065–1110), in the mid Song Dynasty (960–1279 A.D.) of China. For the origin, content and purposes of the *Yingzao Fashi*, see Feng, J. (2012).
3. This sketch was first published in Utzon’s 1962 manifesto ‘Platforms and Plateaus: Ideas of a Danish Architect’ (Utzon, 1962) to indicate his inspiration received from Chinese building culture.
4. Later, in Utzon’s 2002 *Sydney Opera House: Utzon design principles*, he republished the same sketch to present his “vision” for the Sydney Opera House.

**Figure 1**  
T'ai Miao, The Great Front Hall of the Ancestor Shrine and its interior, Beijing. Sirén, O., 1937, *Billeder fra Kina*. København: Gyldendalske Boghandel, plate 22–3.



22. T'ai Miao. De kejserlige Forfædres Tempel. Parti af den store Front-Hal. Ch'ien Tien.

23. T'ai Miao. Det indre af Ch'ien Tien. De afdøde Kejseres Troner er anbragte langs Bagvæggen.

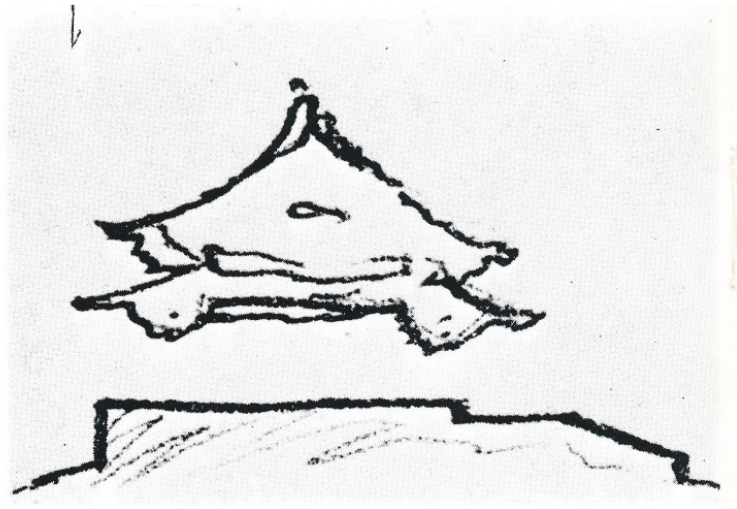


Figure 2  
Jørn Utzon, sketch for “Chinese houses and temples”, 1962, the monumental roof/earthwork juxtaposition indicating Utzon’s inspiration and vision for the Sydney Opera House.  
Utzon, J., 1962, *Platforms and Plateaus: Ideas of a Danish architect*. In: *Zodiac 10: International Magazine of Contemporary Architecture*. p. 116.

In fact, this is not the first time Utzon presented Chinese architecture as one of his important inspirational sources. In his first architectural manifesto, *Tendenser i Nutidens Arkitektur (Tendencies in present-day architecture)* (1947), co-written with Tobias Faber (1915–2010), two young architects delivered their severe critique on the failures of contemporary Danish architecture (Faber and Utzon, 1947, pp.63–64). Their text was followed by twenty-eight images and added captions, which demonstrate a variety of architectural ideas. Interestingly, these images contained four illustrations of Chinese architecture, including the historical temple – Tsingyang Zhai – in Taishan (Mount Tai), the Lingxiao pagoda at Tianning Monastery, the city wall and gate tower of Yongding Gate at Beijing and the vernacular building in Yunnan province. These four images significantly reflect young Faber and Utzon’s appreciation of Chinese architecture through their varied readings (Faber and Utzon, 1947, pp.64–67).<sup>5</sup>

Served as the aesthetic confirmation for his architectural works, the ideas of Chinese architecture further appeared in Utzon’s descriptions of his creations. In 1953, Utzon’s statement for his own house at Hellebæk (1950–1952) near Helsingør presented his embrace of Chinese-inspired dualism – a studied juxtaposition between stereotomic loadbearing yellow brick walls and tectonic timber roof frames painted black:

*In traditional Chinese architecture, the constructions are all visible; the elements have been divided up into male, bearing, and female, borne, and this system is also carried through in the treatment of colour* (Weston, 2002, p.61).

In the same year, for his competition design for the Langelinie Pavilion at Copenhagen, Utzon described his rationale for proposing a “pagoda-like structure”:

5. These images include the historical temple – Tsingyang Zhai 青陽寨 – in Taishan 泰山 (Mount Tai) from Ernst Boerschmann’s *Picturesque China, Architecture and Landscape* (1925), the Lingxiao pagoda 凌霄塔 at Tianning Monastery 天寧寺 from Osvald Sirén’s *Billeder Fra Kina (Images of China)* (1937), the city wall and gate towers of Yongding Gate 永定門 at Beijing from *Billeder*, and the vernacular building in Yunnan province from D’hélène Hoppenot’s *Chine (China)* (1946). Today, these books are surviving in Jan Utzon’s collection.



[...] The tower construction chosen with the pagoda-like structure and the circular design with the means of communication at the centre provides rooms with pleasing shapes, is statically ideal with very short distances from the service rooms at the centre and – in contrast to a tower with bearer constructions in the facades – had facades with unbroken stretches of window (Western, 2002, p.55).

Utzon's words directly recalled his looking at Chinese pagodas in *Chinesische Architektur* (1925), written by German architect and historian Ernst Boerschmann (1873–1949). Today, Utzon's two-volume book is still with his notes and sketches for the Langelinie project.<sup>6</sup>

While more evidence suggests the role of Chinese architecture in Utzon's early career as both the aesthetic inspiration and confirmation of his architectural works, the questions of why Utzon was interested in China and how he perceived Chinese art and architecture are not properly answered.<sup>7</sup> Although some scholars have pointed out a few key figures who could have played an important role in young Utzon's perception of China, the work of these figures and how they influenced Utzon are almost unheard and unknown in previous studies.

To answer the above questions, the authors surveyed *The Utzon Archives* at Aalborg and the collection of Jan Utzon in Saunte, Denmark, and interviewed Jørn Utzon's family and close friends. The authors seek to clarify young Utzon's artistic debt to China, by closely examining his early perception of Chinese art and architecture. This paper argues that young Utzon's affinity with China was intimately connected to his Danish socio-cultural background within a specific cross-cultural context. The scope of this paper is to understand young Utzon's perception of China as a significant example of cross-cultural knowledge making, dissemination and transformation between China and Denmark. The paper also contributes to the potentially rich historiography on the relationship between the maturity of Utzon's architectural artistry and his own growing understanding of Chinese culture.

Indeed, Utzon's reception of China represents a matrix of cultural transmission between China and Denmark; a subtle manifestation of cross-cultural influence and mastery of design within the history of modern architecture. Together, these should represent an amalgamation that assimilated diverse aspects of China taken by different people and represented by varied media before and during Utzon's early career. As one would expect, the path leading to Utzon's reception of Chinese art and architecture can be traced back to the intermittent three-hundred-year connection between China and Denmark in general and the legacy of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in particular.

6. The author found this book with Utzon's notes and sketches for the Langelinie project inside Jan Utzon's collection at Saunte, Denmark.

7. Few scholars have already briefly alluded young Utzon's perception of China without realising its crucial facts, as well as the important role of few key figures in Utzon's understanding of China. See, Françoise Fromonot's *Jørn Utzon, The Sydney Opera House*, Richard Weston's *Utzon – Inspiration, Vision, Architecture*, and J.J. Ferrer Forés's *Jørn Utzon, Works and Projects*.

## Trade and shipping

Trade and shipping best describe the relationship between China and Denmark from the seventeenth to twentieth century (Bramsen, 2000, pp.53–63). The three hundred years of intermittent interrelationship has influenced and stimulated the social and cultural life of Denmark.<sup>8</sup> This trade also influenced the popularity and later unpopularity of certain styles of decorative arts, applied arts, tea culture, furniture and garden designing (Bramsen, 2000, p.12).<sup>9</sup> Together, they contributed the emergence of Nordic Chinoiserie and the establishment of Anglo-Chinese gardens in Denmark.<sup>10</sup> Among them, Utzon noticed and further studied the famous Chinese Pavilion and its picturesque setting located at the Frederiksberg Garden in the 1922 book *Det Chinesiske Lysthus: Frederiksberg Have (The Chinese Pavilion: Frederiksberg Garden)*, written by Danish architect Alfred Marinus Andersen (1895–1985).<sup>11</sup>

As a transformation of the previous Anglo-Chinese gardens in Denmark, when opened in 1843, Tivoli<sup>12</sup> included two Chinese pavilions, a Chinese bazaar and a railway station in the Chinese style, all with light timber constructions painted in rich colours (Lopdrup, 2008, p.96). With similarly picturesque settings and elaborated Chinese styles, Tivoli reflects the popularization and secularization of Nordic Chinoiserie (Oxfeldt, 2005, p.67). In young Utzon's time, the two most significant applications of the Chinese style in Tivoli were the Pantomime Theatre (1874) designed by Jens Vilhelm Dahlerup (1836–1907) and the Sino-Japanese Tower (1900) designed by Knud Arne Pedersen (1862–1943) (see Figure 3). The former was an open-air theatre fronting a stage with its Chinese-inspired facade; the latter was a restaurant tower on the small lake with a Chinese-inspired menu. Unlike Danish *Post-Classicism* (1850–1885) with its more moderate use of historical references, Dahlerup's theatre and Pedersen's tower strongly recalled the contemporary European Historicism and its endeavour to attain a correctness of classical style by adopting Chinese monuments as the prototypes (Millech and Fisker, 1951, pp.354–355). With the elaborated handicraft and polychrome stucco decoration, the two works accurately interprets a Chinese style with many sophisticated details, such as bracketing units, latticework and roof details, done with the help of early photographs of classical Chinese architecture. Dahlerup's and Pedersen's works in Tivoli served as inspirational sources for Utzon's Sydney Opera House design (1956–1966) (see Figure 4) and Langelinie Pavilion competition proposal (1953) (see Figure 5): the former a monumental theatrical setting with Chinese-inspired built forms and colours; the latter a multi-floor restaurant on the water front in central Copenhagen.<sup>13</sup>

8. For more information about the trades between China and Denmark, see Ole Feldbæk's *The Danish China Trade*, in Krog, O. V. and others (2006, pp. 322–327).
9. For issues about Chinese influence on Danish social and cultural phenomena, also see Thomas Lyngby's *Danish vogue for things Chinese in Skougaard*, M., Mentz, S., and Lyngby, T. (2008, pp.38–49).
10. These gardens are including: the first Chinese garden in Dronninggaard with three Chinese Pavilions designed by architect Andreas Kirkerup (1781–86), the Chinese garden on the island of Mon near Liselund designed by Antonie Bosc de la Calmette (1752–1803) and the gardens of the Frederiksberg Palace (1799–1800) designed by Andreas Kirkerup. For more information, see Clemmensen, T., and Mackeprang, M. B. (1980, pp. 220–234 and 263–266).
11. *Det Chinesiske Lysthus* is surviving in Jan Utzon's collection at Saunte, Denmark.
12. Tivoli was established by Georg Carstensen (1812–1857), designed by architect H.C. Stilling and built on the old fortification area with the permission of Christian VIII (1786–1848).
13. This was confirmed by Utzon's son, Jan Utzon, in author's interview in Sydney, Australia, 2008. For more details see, Chiu, C., Myers, P. and Goad, P. (2015).



Figure 3  
The Pantomime Theatre (1874) (above) designed by Jens Vilhelm Dahlerup (1836–1907) and the Sino-Japanese Tower (1900) (below) designed by Knud Arne Pedersen (1862–1943) at the Tivoli Gardens.

OWN PHOTOGRAPHS.



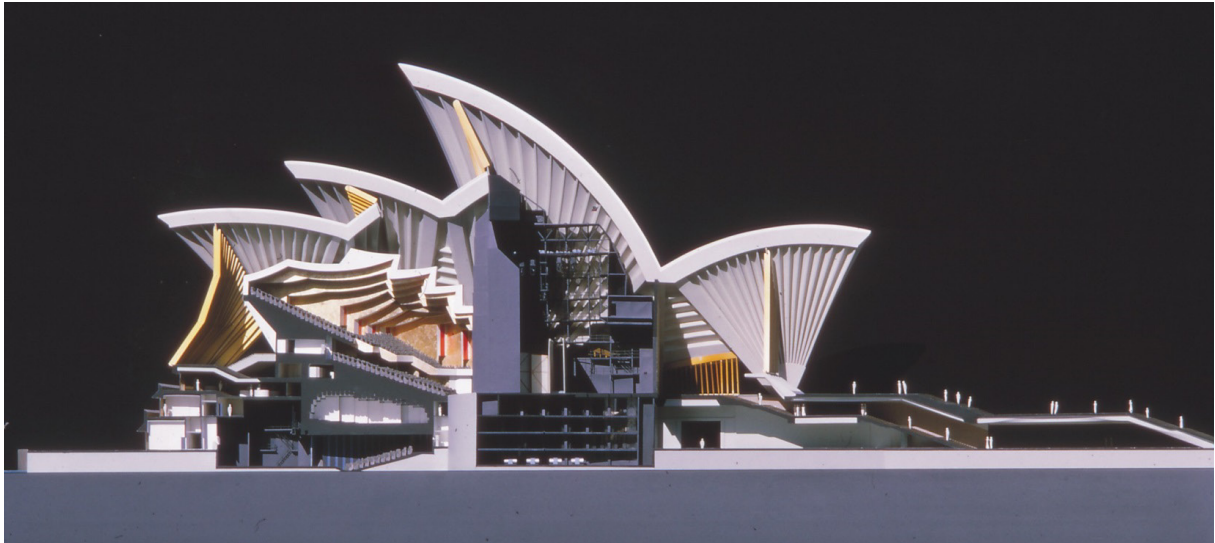


Figure 4  
The illustration showing Utzon's colour scheme for the acoustic ceilings and walls in the Major Hall of the Opera House inspired by a decorative coating style – yellow, red and white – on two bracketing sets in Utzon's Yingzao fashi.  
THE UTZON ARCHIVES, AALBORG UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.



Figure 5  
The wooden model of Utzon's 1953 competition proposal for the Langelinie Pavilion, Copenhagen, Denmark, photograph published in Zodiac 5.  
THE UTZON ARCHIVES, AALBORG UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.



In 1864, China eventually opened its ports to Denmark, after first permitting England in 1842 and then France and the United States in 1844, after China's defeat against Britain in the First Opium War (1839–42). This brought the success in international business for Danish companies, which benefited many cultural exchanges between Denmark and China in young Utzon's lifetime. For example, Robert Christensen, an engineer with the Great Northern Telegraph Company, published his travel literature *Kineseren I sit Rige (Chinaman in his Kingdom)* in 1947. As one of young Utzon's favourites, this book recorded young Robert Christensen's observations on everyday life in China in great detail. Published with numerous photographs taken by the author in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Kineseren I sit Rige* reflected the author's cultural sympathy for China and "Chinamen", both of which had suffered from the World War II. Christensen wrote: "No people deserve more sympathy than the Chinese, and no people have been previously judged so incorrectly as the Chinese" (Christensen, 1947, p.12).<sup>14</sup>

Another example is the conduit between Denmark and China provided through Carlsberg – a highly successful brewery both in China and worldwide. Its success enabled the establishment of the New Carlsberg Foundation, the largest of such institutions in Denmark, which assisted the establishment both at *Nationalmuseet* (The Museum of National History) in 1878 and at *Kunstindustrimuseet* (The Museum of Decorative Art – today's Danish Museum of Art and Design) in 1895. The Nationalmuseet documented, collected and published the archives of the Danish Monarchy's relationship with China, which was politically beneficial to the relationship between Denmark and China in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century (Clemmensen and Mackeprang, 1980).<sup>15</sup> The Kunstindustrimuseet began a significant collection of Chinese arts and crafts, as well as related international movements, such as Chinoiserie, Japonism, French Art Nouveau and Neo-Chinoiserie. All these collections were always available to Danish designers associated with the Royal Danish Academy.<sup>16</sup> Utzon's uncle, Aksel Einar Utzon-Frank (1888–1955), a well-known sculptor and professor at the Royal Danish Academy, was one of its board members (1928–43).

### China as legacy of the Royal Academy

Under the influences of China-Denmark trade and shipping, the Royal Academy, founded as The Royal Danish Painting, Sculpture, and Building Academy in 1754, has continuously revealed the work of its heroic figures with the inspiration of China and a so-called Chinese style. These figures' creative representations of China suggest another view of Danish building culture. This illuminates an understanding of Utzon's approach to Chinese building culture, as part of a legacy his generation received from the Royal Academy, and defines an important tendency in the history of Danish architecture.

14. Philip Drew had mentioned this book in his interview with Tobias Faber. See Drew (1999, p.115).

15. The foundation also supported the related exhibitions and publications between China and Denmark, for example, *Treasures from Imperial China, The Forbidden City and The Royal Danish Court* (2006), and *China in Denmark 1600–2000* (2008).

16. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

After the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15) and fall of the French monarchy, there was a strong reaction against Roman-Imperial Classicism throughout Europe (Faber, 1978, p.114). In Denmark, architects were now searching for other historical references to confirm their national identity. The most notable example is the Thorvaldsens Museum (1839–48) by architect Gottlieb Bindsbøll (1800–1856). This museum was established for the celebration of Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen's (1770–1844) return from Rome, as well as to house his collections and original works. Bindsbøll's inspiration for this building was taken from Prussia, Pompeii, Greek and even Egypt; his masterpiece shows Danish architecture moving towards a free historic style, a more exotic expressivity of a "Golden Age" (Millech and Fisker 1952, pp.26–41). This free historical style also acknowledged the French Revolution (1789–99) and the quest for citizenship and inalienable rights, as part of Denmark's pursuit of its own nation-state identity. Historically, young Utzon's pursuit of China in the 1940s – the otherness of his historical references, set against the clichéd dominant post-war tendencies, directly recalls the Zeitgeist of Bindsbøll's time.

Son of architect M.G. Bindsbøll, Thorvald Bindsbøll (1846–1908), who was a member of the Royal Academy (1861–62), continued his father's liberal classicism and exoticism within a very personal selection of historical styles. Whilst influenced by the contemporary British Arts and Crafts Movement, Japonism and Neo-Chinoiserie, and publications such as the 1886 *Japansk Kunst (Japanese Art)* by Danish art critic Karl Madsen, Thorvald Bindsbøll also revealed a primitivism and symbolism in his ceramic works. Bindsbøll's work was deeply separated from the German and French Art Nouveau of his time.<sup>17</sup> As a heroic figure in Denmark's *Skønvirke* (Arts and Crafts) movement, Thorvald Bindsbøll's primitivism and symbolism influenced the works of Utzon's uncle Einar Utzon-Frank and the eminent Danish artist Asger Jorn (1914–73), as well as their searching for their own China, and both certainly inspired Utzon to pursue his own China with its similar analogies.<sup>18</sup>

Architect P.V. Jensen-Klint (1853–1930), an admirer of architect M.G. Bindsbøll as well as a leader of the Danish Arts and Crafts movement, *Skønvirke*, was the master builder of *Grundtvig Kirke* (Jensen, 2009, pp.34–77). Jensen-Klint built the trolley bus waiting room at Trianglen in central Copenhagen (1904–07) in his own mixture of national romanticism and Neo-Chinoiserie. No doubt, Utzon was aware of this curious pavilion (Jensen, 2009, pp.110–118). Unlike earlier Danish Chinoiserie, Klint intentionally used load-bearing brick construction with a projecting roof above a clerestory of vertical mullions. This combination of an undulating roof and the curved profile of the brick piers recalled the Chinese Pavilion at Drottningholm Palace in Sweden. Together, they were devised by Klint to oppose the prevailing historicism and Neo-Classicism in Denmark from the 1910s to 1930s (Jensen, 2009, pp.34–77).

17. For more information, see Henrik Wivel's 'Form and Thought, Thorvald Bindsbøll and Danish Ceramic Art around 1900', Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen's 'In a Manner of Speaking', and Peter Brandes 'Some thoughts on Thorvald Bindsbøll' in *Thorvald Bindsbøll, Ceramic Works* (1997).

18. More discussions on Utzon-Frank and Asger Jorn are in the later part of this article.

Notwithstanding, Klint's synthetic Chinese style also refers to French Neo-Baroque and the English Arts and Crafts with its fine craftsmanship and deliberately heavy construction.

As a follower of Thorvald Binsedbøll, and a rival of P.V. Jensen-Klint, architect Johan Carl Christian Petersen (1874–1923) revealed his China in a clearer and more critical expression with his Neo-Classicist approach. In his seminal 1909 article “Porcelæn” (Porcelain), Carl Petersen criticized Danish “cultural collapse” since the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and praised the glory of ancient China, by comparing the porcelain of both countries (Petersen, 1909, pp.134–143). To Petersen, after thirty years of Japonism and its influence in Denmark there had been little improvement (Petersen, 1909, pp.134–143). Petersen suggested that the closing stages of Japonism should have stimulated the emergence of Neo-Chinoiserie (Petersen, 1909, pp.134–143). In Petersen's *Stoflige Virkninger* (Textural Effect) from 1919, “ancient China” and its porcelain production once again became the exemplification of his ideal art creation with its perfect expression of “design, colours, proportions and textural effect” (Petersen, 1919, pp.253–257). Petersen's criticism and romanticism associated with China most probably influenced Utzon's own Chinese architectural manifestoes.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Carl Petersen's critical appreciation of China distanced his work from the dominant Japonism and anticipated young Utzon's own relative disinterest in traditional Japanese architecture in the 1940s, albeit it being much better known to his generation (Drew, 1999, p.516).<sup>20</sup>

While Petersen's design for the Faaborg Museum (1912–15) is one of the hallmarks of modern Neo-Classicism in Denmark, it also shows important analogies with traditional Chinese building. At the entrance, above the Doric columns and an arched opening, the slightly curved, hip roof and projecting eaves have a Chinese reference (Gelfer-Jørgensen, 1994). Moreover, the interior walls of Petersen's Archive Room were decorated somewhat akin to a gold-leaf oriental screen. Again, in his 1917 book *Dansk Kunsthandel* (Danish Art Gallery), in collaboration with Kaare Klint (1888–1954), son of P.V. Jensen Klint, Petersen elaborated his Neo-Classicism with Chinese-inspired lattice work (Zahle and Monies, 2000, p.53). In both, Petersen's China reveals a more considered interpretation, unlike Jensen-Klint's primitivist approach with its structural expressivity. More importantly, Petersen's Neo-classicist China influenced many furniture designs with their allusions to traditional Chinese furniture in the work of his followers in the Royal Academy.

Among the followers of Petersen, the subsequent career and work of architect Kaare Klint was very significant for 20<sup>th</sup> century Danish furniture design. In 1924, Kaare Klint established Department of Furniture Design in the Royal Academy School of Architecture as a legacy of the Folk High School Movement in Denmark. Almost at the same time, Kaare

19. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

20. For Utzon's disinterest in traditional Japanese architecture culture, see Philip Drew's *The Masterpiece*. Drew explained: ‘Faber and Utzon read about Chinese philosophy and felt that Chinese architecture was more interesting than Japanese which they viewed as more degenerate’. This was confirmed by author's interview with Tobias Faber, in Copenhagen, 2009.

Klint started to produce a series of furniture designs inspired by Chinese furniture of the Ming and Qing Dynasty (Sommer, 2007, pp. 30–31). Klint was influenced by the traditional Chinese and Chinese-inspired neo-antique furniture in the collection of Copenhagen’s Kunstindustrimuseet, which had been relocated to a former hospital building after its renovation by Klint and architect Ivar Bentsen (1920–1926) (Sommer, 2007, p.32). Historically, the legacy of British Arts and Crafts influenced Klint’s Chinese style, as did the Queen Anne Chairs and Chippendale furniture with Chinese motifs made in Denmark in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For Klint, the Danish tradition of fine craftsmanship and the inspiration of ancient China, helped to differentiate his work from contemporary Nordic Neo-Classicism, French Art Deco, British Arts and Crafts and German Functionalism. Consequently, many of Klint’s followers, launched their own Chinese-inspired furniture, for example, Arne Jacobsen’s (1902–71) Dining Chair (1935), Hans Wegner’s (1914–2007) Kinastole (1994–95) (which literally means Chinese Chair) and Jørn Utzon’s 1970 New Angle furniture system (see Figure 6).

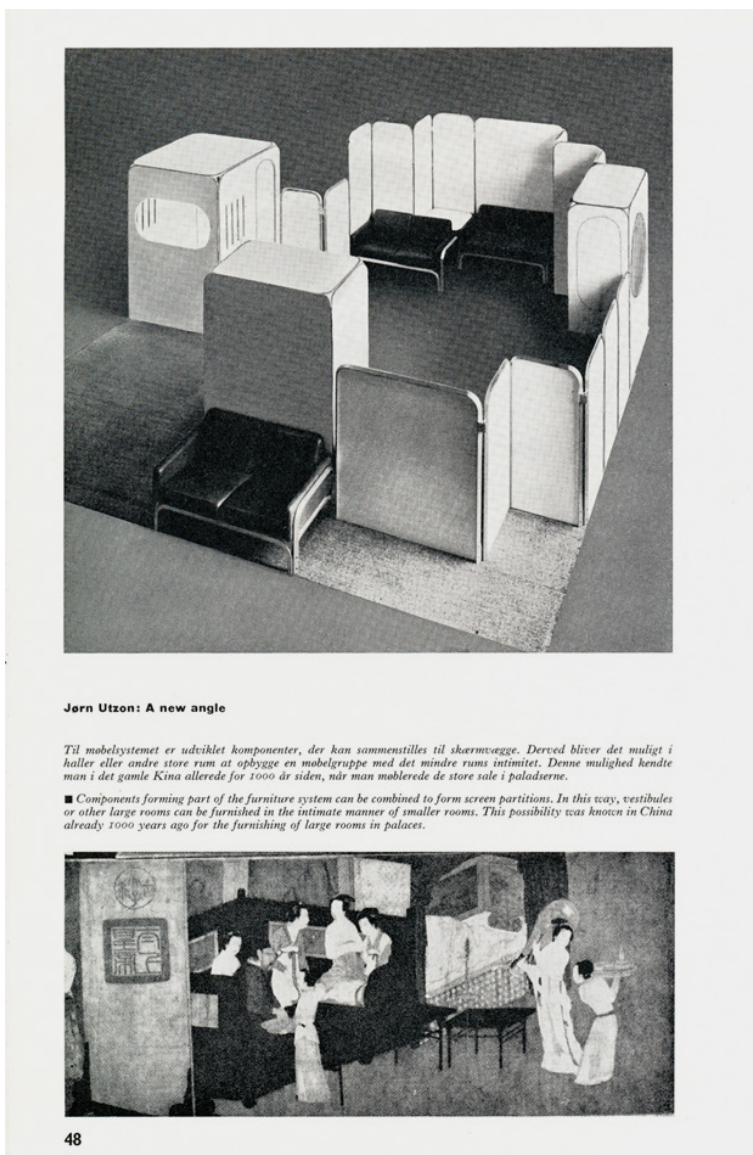


Figure 6  
Utzon’s New Angle Furniture System (above) in 1970 Arkitektur, published with the image (below) from Andrew Boyd’s Chinese Architecture and Town Planning: 1500BC-AD1911, showing the interior scenes from the painting ‘Evening Party at the Mansion of Officer Han Xizai’, by Ku Hongchung (Gu Hong-zhong) (910–980). Source: Utzon, J., 1970. Additive Architecture. In: Arkitektur. p. 48



### Aksel Einar Utzon-Frank

Utzon-Frank played a significant role not only in Utzon's architectural career but also in Utzon's early interest in China. Originally, before he entered the School of Architecture at the Royal Academy, Jørn Utzon wanted to be an artist. However, his uncle encouraged him to become an architect, as architecture was financially "safer than the artist's vocation" (Drew, 1999, pp.23–24). After the intensive examination for admission, Utzon was last on the list of 25 to be admitted in 1937 (Drew, 1999, pp.23–24). As the youngest student, aged 19, Utzon was enrolled despite poor results in the mathematics exam (GCSE Eksaminer). It was possible that Utzon-Frank might have helped his nephew gaining entry to the School of Architecture.<sup>21</sup>

In his uncle's studio at the Royal Academy, young Utzon encountered "many kinds of things" about China.<sup>22</sup> Although Utzon-Frank never went to China, Imperial Chinese decorated roof tiles, status of deities and noble women, ceremonial objects, paintings and masks were all in his large collection (Rindholt, 1942). Among Utzon-Frank's Chinese collection was the 1919-edition of the *Yingzao fashi* (Chinese Building Standards), an architectural treatise written in the mid Song Dynasty (960–1279 A.D.) of China. This *Yingzao fashi* was originally purchased by Finnish-born and Swedish-based art historian Osvald Sirén (1879–1966) in Shanghai in 1920 and later sent to Utzon-Frank as a personal gift.<sup>23</sup> Utzon's first encounter with the *Yingzao fashi* in Utzon-Frank's studio before he entered the Royal Academy certainly encouraged Utzon's later acquisition of the 1925-edition *Yingzao fashi* in Beijing during his trip to China in 1958.

Utzon-Frank's Neo-Gothic works, with their references to the Greek and Nordic myths, and the pre-Renaissance and exotic cultures, proclaimed a primitivism against the neoplasticism and synthetic Cubism of his time. Utzon-Frank's critical primitivism was also reflected in his working collection of traditional arts and crafts, which did not contain luxurious or delicate objects and was intended to contrast with the elite art preferences of many his contemporaries. No doubt Utzon-Frank cultivated young Utzon's creativity and later his critical approach to architectural design. To young Utzon, China was part of his uncle's exoticism and primitivism in opposition to the European elite culture. As Utzon explained: "my uncle Einar Utzon Frank let me know the East, when I was young" (Bech, 2007). Utzon's eldest son – Jan Utzon – further explained: "My grand-uncle told my father to search for inspiration from the unknown Eastern cultures, instead of the West with which we were more familiar".<sup>24</sup>

### Aage Marcus and Johannes Prip-Møller

In the Royal Academy, Utzon-Frank was not the only staff interested in China. Aage Marcus (1888–1985), Director of the Royal Library (1928–58), published *Den Blaa Drage* (The Blue Dragon) (see Figure 7) in 1941: an

21. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

22. "Many Kinds of things" is the English translated title of the 1942 portfolio for Utzon-Frank's collection – *Mangeslags Ting*.

23. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.

24. Jan Utzon interview, Sydney, Australia, 2008.

introduction to the romanticism and mysticism of Chinese art, literature, religion and philosophy. Marcus synthesized much previous international China scholarship, especially that concerning Taoism, Zen Buddhism and Confucianism. Literally, *Drage* is an extended chapter of Chinese writer Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People* (1937), which was translated into Danish in 1938 and undoubtedly inspired Marcus's writing (Marcus, 1941, p.200). Moreover, inspired by Osvald Sirén's seminal book from 1917, *Rytm och Form* (Rhythm and Form), Marcus also adapted Sirén's ideas about Chinese art and artists. Further with Sirén's help, *Drage* contained many illustrations of Chinese painting to support Marcus's eclectic occultism (Marcus, 1941, p.8).<sup>25</sup> As with Marcus's previous work *Mystik og Mystikere* (Mysticism and Mystics) published in 1930, *Drage* was very popular in the Academy during Utzon's time, and he certainly read this book (Weston, 2002, p.20).<sup>26</sup>

25. Marcus had been inspired by Sirén's *Rytm och Form och andra Fragmenter om Kinesisk och Europeisk Målar-konst* (Rhythm and Form and other Fragments of Chinese and European Paintings, 1917) which was later published in English as 1919 *Essentials in Art*.

26. In Tobias Faber interview in Copenhagen, 2009, he also confirmed Utzon's reading of Marcus's book.

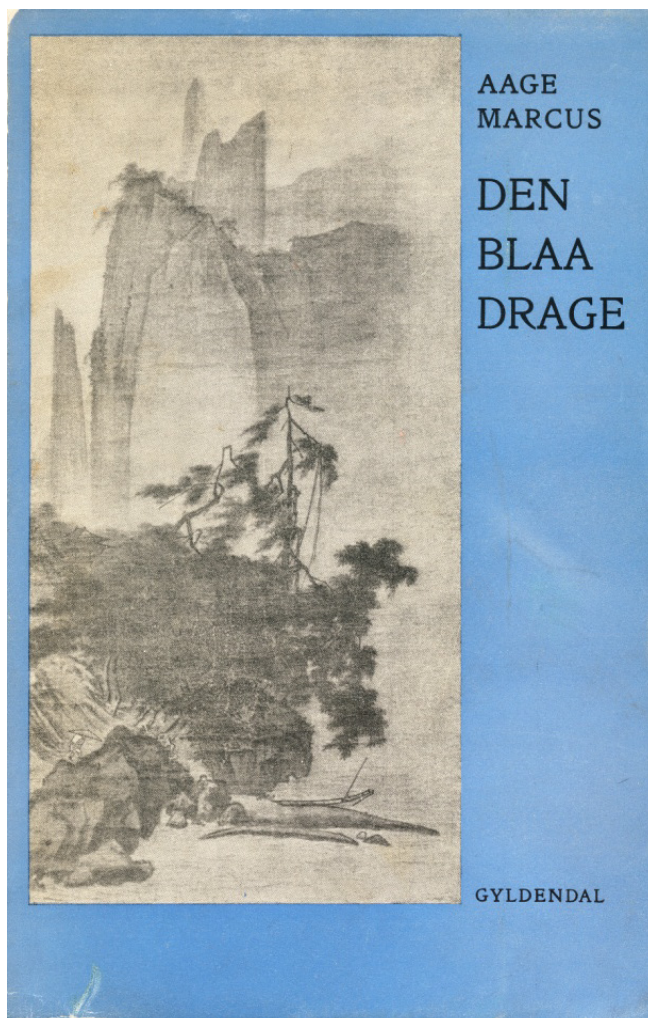


Figure 7  
The cover of *Den Blaa Drage* and its first page showing the work of Chinese painter Wu Taotse: the snake and turtle symbolizing the Taoist dualism.

OWN PHOTOGRAPHS.



During Utzon's study at the Royal Academy, Marcus's Library had a sophisticated collection of academic studies on Chinese art and architecture. This included most monographs written by Osvald Sirén<sup>27</sup> and Ernst Boerschmann<sup>28</sup>. These books offered young Utzon an opportunity to closely study on China, and Utzon requested some copies of their books in his later career.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, in Marcus's Library, there was a 1:20 scale model of a Chinese palace building of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), see Figure 8.<sup>30</sup> This two metre long model was commissioned by Danish missionary architect Johannes Prip-Møller (1889–1943) and paid for by the New Carlsberg Foundation in 1933 (Faber, 1994, p.53). Through Prip-Møller's friendship connection with Professor Liang Sicheng (1901–1972), this model was constructed by a Chinese craftsman, Yang Wenchi, and then painted by Fan Shihchang under the supervision of the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture in Beijing (1933–35).<sup>31</sup> Even though it had a removable roof, the interior decoration and painting had to be omitted to reduce the price.<sup>32</sup> The exhibition of this large model and its related publication written in 1937 by Prip-Møller for *Architekten* together gave Utzon a powerful encounter with Chinese building culture.<sup>33</sup> In 1958 Beijing, Utzon met Liang Sicheng who helped Utzon request two copies of the *Yingzao fashi*: one for himself; and the other for his son Jan who had decided to be an architect.<sup>34</sup>

The Academy Library also had Prip-Møller's extensive archives of rough designs for buildings and projects both in China and Denmark, as well as his collection of Chinese monks' clothing, Buddhist sculpture, textiles, rosaries and so on (Faber, 1994, p.61). These objects were collected during Prip-Møller's early missionary work and architectural practice in China from 1921 to 1927. His sympathy with Chinese Buddhism and ambition to converting Chinese Buddhists and Taoists into Christian were the main reasons for his later study of Chinese Buddhist monasteries and monastic life in southern China. During the years 1929 to 1933, with the financial support of the Carlsberg Foundation, Prip-Møller divided

27. During the 1920s and 30s, Sirén visited China frequently, documenting art with his camera and also purchasing select art works. In 1924, he issued his first monumental volume – *The Walls and Gates of Peking* – with a highly preservationist, romantic tone in the text juxtaposed with large, lavishly printed photographs and illustrations. Two years later, Sirén published 1926 *The Imperial Palaces of Peking* both in English and French with a similarly extravagant format. In 1927, Sirén published the article 'Tch'angnagn au temps des Souei et des T'ang (Chang'an city in the time of the Sui and Tang Dynasties)' in *Revue des Arts Asiatiques*, as a result of his study of ancient Chinese city planning. In 1929, Sirén's *A History of Early Chinese Art* was published both in English and French, one of the first scholarly surveys and a summary of his earlier academic writing on traditional Chinese art and architecture. In 1937, Sirén published *Billeder fra Kina (Images of China)* both in Danish and Swedish, as the sober edition of his early work on Chinese architecture for the general readers in the North. All these books have the format of plates with descriptive text and a short historical narrative. Later, confined to Sweden during the Second World War, Sirén wrote and published his first survey in Swedish – 1948 *Kina konst under tre Årtusenden (Chinese Art over Three Millennia)*. Utzon studied all above-mentioned books and essays of Sirén, initially while he was working in Stockholm during the Second World War. Soon after the War, Utzon and Tobias Faber visited Sirén in Copenhagen, seeking more knowledge about traditional Chinese art and architecture. Sirén gave Utzon 1919 *Den Gyllene paviljongen, minnen och studier från Japan (The Golden Pavilion, memories and studies from Japan)* for commemorating their friendship.



Figure 8  
The model of traditional Chinese palace with the Qing Dynasty style ordered by Johannes Prip-Møller now in the Danish National Museum.

OWN PHOTOGRAPHS.

his time between staying mainly in Shanghai and Beijing during winter, occupied in studies and examining what he had surveyed, and travelling in China through the summer months (Faber, 1994, p.30). In 1929, Prip-Møller discovered the Franciscan church<sup>35</sup> built in 1324 in Nanjing and made a survey and reconstruction drawings which were published in ARTES III in 1935. In 1937, Prip-Møller's monumental work was completed with the publication of *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries*. In 1944, the widow of Prip-Møller, Antonette Prip-Møller (1888–1977) published *Kina før og nu* (China before and now), a collection of articles written by Prip-Møller about Chinese history, art, architecture and Buddhism, after the husband's death in 1943. Utzon subsequently acquired *Kina før og nu* and two copies of *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries* in Hong Kong, and visited the Franciscan church in Nanjing during his 1958 trip to China.<sup>36</sup> *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries* also served as one of the key inspirations for Utzon creating Bagsværd Church (1968–76) (Chiu, 2016). Today, Utzon's own copy still contained many surviving sketches and notes of his church.<sup>37</sup>

### Kay Fisker and Steen Eiler Rasmussen

Utzon's 1958 study trip to China was directly inspired by the precedent of his two revered professors at Royal Academy. Kay Fisker (1893–1965) was granted a travelling scholarship in 1922 by the East Asiatic Company (EAC) to travel to China and Japan, as a guest on one of EAC's ships. Together with his wife, Kay Fisker spent four months in China and two months in Japan (Faber, 1995, pp.34–35). In 1923, Fisker published his article – “Peking” in *Arkitekten* with his own photographs (see Figure 9). In this article, Fisker described the monuments of Imperial Beijing and defined the “inaccessibility” of the Imperial Palaces for contemporary practice (Faber, 1995, pp.34–35). Fisker implied a long-term dynastic degeneration in Chinese Imperial monuments. Fisker's criticism of Imperial Beijing echoed his disapproval for contemporary Danish Neo-Classicism (Faber, 1995, pp.34–35).

Despite his qualified acceptance of Chinese Imperial building culture, Fisker's functionalist convictions were certainly influenced by his perception of China. After this trip to China, Fisker designed several urban schemes in the 1920s, in each case, the materiality of the brick wall expressed a massive building volume and with their tiled roofs recalled the monumental city walls and gate towers of Imperial Beijing. Later, Fisker's design for the University of Aarhus (1933), one of his best works, was possibly influenced by the expressivity of earthwork, wall and roof form of Chinese Imperial monuments (Faber, 1986, pp.12–14). Juxtaposed with his “Chinese” style monuments, Fisker also designed a coffee pot, silver box and a stove heater, all incorporating patterns resembling Chinese latticework. To Fisker, China simultaneously presented a primitive and classical role model, helping him to distance his design work from dominant Neo-classicism and German functionalism.

28. In 1923, Boerschmann published his most successful book, *Baukunst und Landschaft in China (Picturesque China)*, which boasted a print-run of 20,000 in German alone. In addition to that two English versions have been released, one in London the other in New York. In 1925, he published a two-volume work titled *Chinesische Architektur*. This was followed in 1927 by a book on architectural ceramics in China – *Chinesische Baukeramik*. In 1931, the first volume of his two-volume opus on *Chinesische Pagoden (Chinese Pagodas)* appeared. He worked on revising volume two until it finally appeared in 1942. These two volumes become the third book within the series of *Die Baukunst und religiöse Kultur der Chinesen*. The work of Boerschmann became the important precedent of Osvald Sirén and Johannes Prip-Møller's later study. Utzon also studied most monographs of Boerschmann and owned *Picturesque China* and *Chinesische Architektur*.

29. Utzon owned *Picturesque China* and *Chinesische Architektur*.

30. Today, the model is removed to the Danish National Museum.

31. The names of two model makers and the name of Society for Research in Chinese Architecture were written in Chinese on the plaque in the front elevation of model.

32. See the letter from Liang to Prip-Møller, dated 22 July 1933, in Prip-Møller Archives, The Royal Library, Denmark.

33. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

34. Jan Utzon interview, Sydney, Australia, 2008.

35. Today, the church was rebuilt with three naves and displayed as a former Buddhist temple hall, ‘the Hall without Beams’ or ‘Wu Liang Dien’.

36. Jan Utzon interview, Sydney, Australia, 2008.

37. The book is surviving in Jan Utzon's collection at Saunte, Denmark.



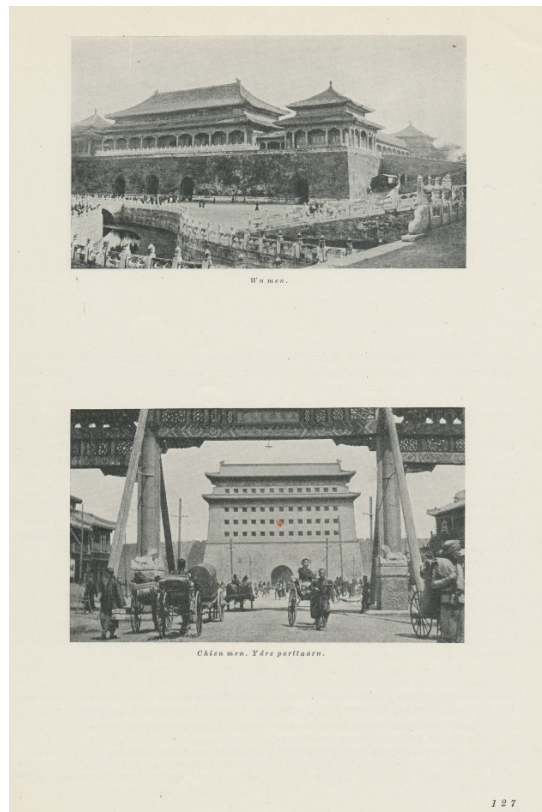
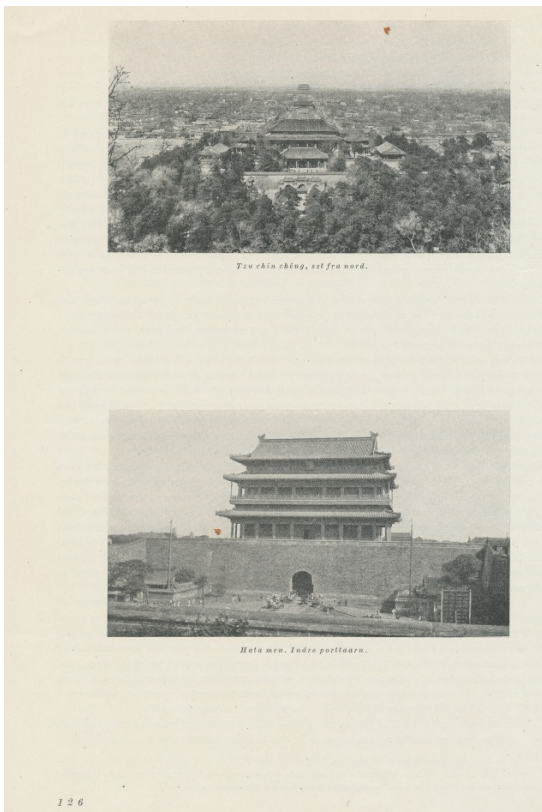
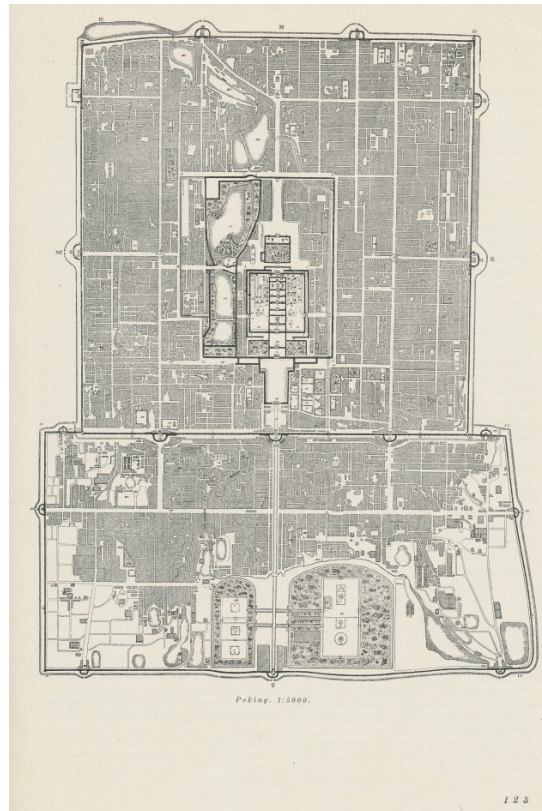
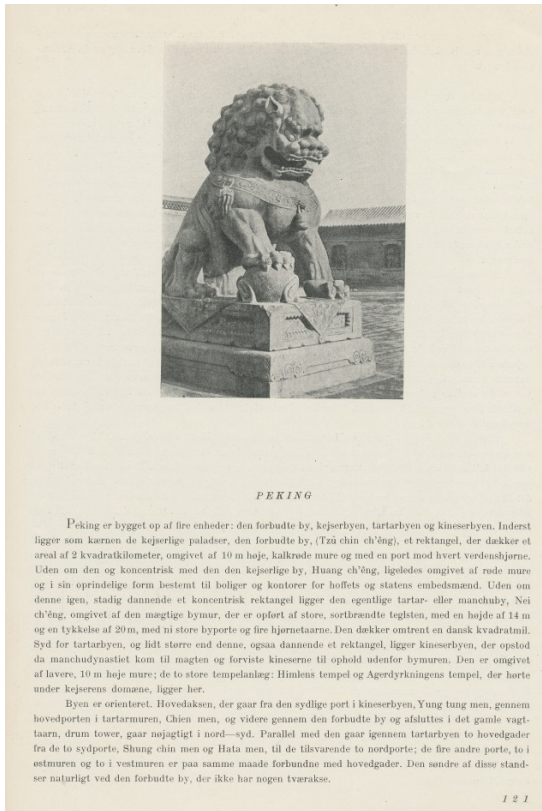
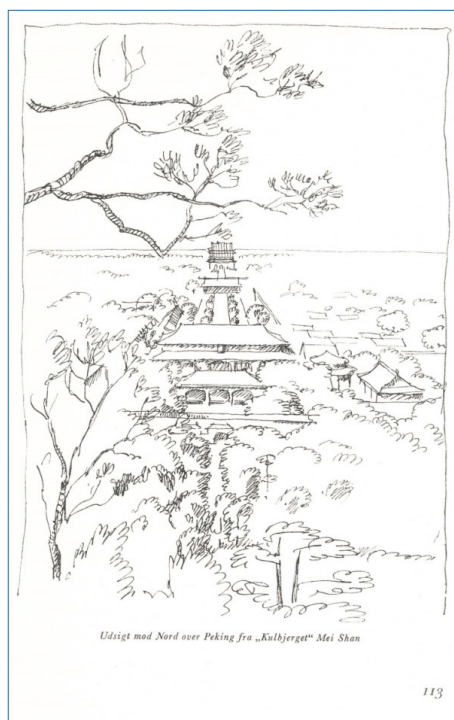
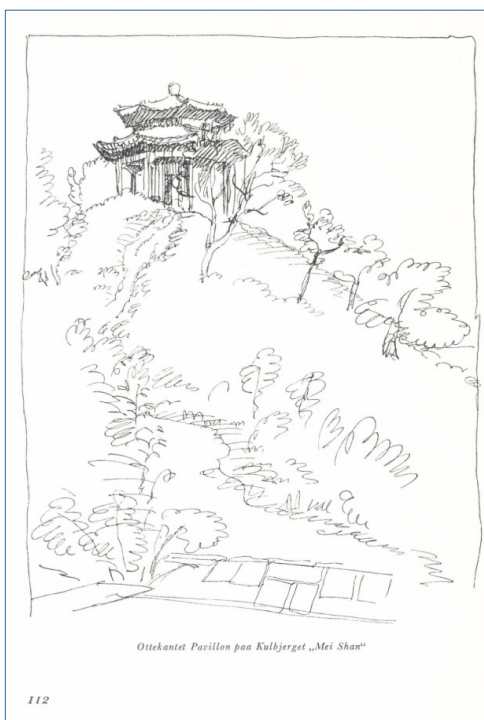
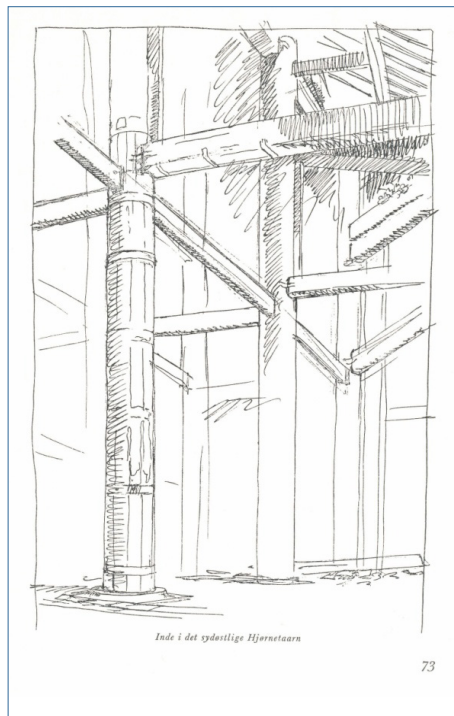


Figure 9  
Four pages of Kay Fisker's travel essay  
"Peking", after his 1922 trip to China.  
Fisker, K., 1923, Peking. In: Arkitekten,  
DK. p. 121, 123, 126 and 127.

Steen Eiler Rasmussen (1898–1990) was granted a travelling scholarship in 1923 by the East Asiatic Company (EAC) to travel to China for his extraordinary academic performances, one year after Fisker received the same grant. During his 5-month stay in China, Steen Eiler Rasmussen made numerous photographs and sketches on his trips between Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou and Suzhou (see Figure 10). These materials provide a solid ground for Steen Eiler Rasmussen’s many writings related to China in his later career. Fortunately, these materials are surviving in his family collection.

Figure 10  
Illustrations from Rasmussen’s *Rejse I Kina* (1958)  
Rasmussen, S. E., 1958, *Rejse I Kina*, 1958. København: Carit Andersens Forlag. pp. 72–93 and 112–113





At the Royal Academy, Utzon attended both Kay Fisker's and Steen Eiler Rasmussen's lectures, which often included Chinese architecture as case studies.<sup>38</sup> Utzon further read Rasmussen's many publications related to China. Utzon knew Rasmussen's trip to China in 1923 from his book, *Billedbog fra en Kinarejse* (Pictures from a Journey to China) published in 1935. In 1958 it was edited by Rasmussen and published again as *Rejse i Kina* (Travel in China). In Rasmussen's *London: The Unique City* (first published in Danish in 1934, English in 1937), he described the so-called Chinese ideas and role of William Chambers in the emergence of "The English Landscape Garden" (Rasmussen, 1967, pp.154–165). In *Towns and Buildings: Described in Drawings and Words* (first published in Danish in 1949, English in 1951), Rasmussen synthesized his understanding both of traditional Chinese architecture and planning in the case of old Beijing under the title "The City a Temple" (Rasmussen, 1951, pp.1–9). In *Experiencing Architecture* (first published in Danish in 1957, English in 1959), Rasmussen conceptualized the monumentality of Imperial Beijing and the picturesque setting of the Imperial Gardens (Rasmussen, 1964, pp.136–139). In the Danish version of Lin Yutang's *Imperial Peking, Seven Centuries of China* (1962), one of Utzon's favourite books, Rasmussen wrote the introduction on his "grey" city of modern Beijing in contrast to Lin Yutang's vibrant *Imperial Peking* (Lin, 1962, pp.V–VIII).<sup>39</sup> Rasmussen's enthusiastic approach to Chinese building culture heavily influenced young Utzon's interest in China, and certainly inspired his trip to China and visiting Beijing in 1958.

### Asger Jorn, Tobias Faber and Else Glahn

Following the legacy of predecessors at Royal Academy, in Utzon's generation, Asger Jorn (1914–1973), Tobias Faber (1915–2010) and Else Glahn (1921–2011) further presented their different approaches to Chinese art and architecture in their early careers. As one of the most important Danish artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Asger Jorn, after working with Le Corbusier on Le Palais des Temps Nouveaux for the 1937 Paris Exhibition, returned to Denmark and studied at the Royal Academy from 1937 to 1942, during which time Utzon was also a student (Atkins, 1977, p.14). In 1940, Asger Jorn published mere twelve copies of a little book – *The Jade Flute: Some Chinese Poems*<sup>40</sup>, inspired by Franz Toussaint's collection of Chinese poems, *La Flute de Jade* (The Jade Flute).<sup>41</sup> This book contains several classic Chinese poems from the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), which were first translated from French into Danish by Yang Shihjia. Yang Shihjia's translation was further interpreted by Asger Jorn's lithographs.<sup>42</sup> This important multicultural translation of classical Chinese literature was showing Asger Jorn's critical approach to cross-cultural motifs with an extreme way of interpreting ideas of China.

In 1947, Asger Jorn published the article "Yin/Yang, The dialectical materials philosophy of life" in the Danish architectural students' journal *A5* (reprinted in Baumeister, 2011, pp.120–135). This article exposed Asger Jorn's observation and interpretation of Taoism, *I Ching* (The book

38. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

39. Jan Utzon interview, Sydney, Australia, 2008.

40. Later in 1970, *The Jade Flute* was edited and republished. In this version, the Danish translation of these classic Chinese poems was translated into English by Yang Shih-Jia and then further translated into modern Chinese by Walasse Ting (1929–2010). With French (red) and English (green) printed texts, Walasse Ting's calligraphy of his modern Chinese lyrics and Asger Jørn's lithographs with Danish texts, four different languages with their four 'different' literal interpretations and graphic representations are compiled in one book. See *La Flutede Jade / Jade Flojten / The Jade Flute* (1970)

41. See the introduction of 1970 *The Jade Flute* written by Asger Jørn.

42. See the introduction of 1970 *The Jade Flute* written by Walasse Ting.

of Changes), Chinese philosophy and symbolism. Before and after this publication, several of Asger Jorn's early paintings revealed an inspiration from classic Chinese calligraphy, similar to the lyrical sentiments of his lithographs in *The Jade Flute* (Atkins, 1977, p.99). It is unlikely that Utzon would have overlooked Asger Jorn's China both in his early publications and paintings.<sup>43</sup>

Following Utzon's winning the Sydney Opera House competition in 1957, Asger Jorn's 1958 manifesto *Pour la forme* (In Defense of Form) included Utzon's competition proposal and entitled it "Charm and Mechanics" (Fromonot, 1998, pp.56–57). Asger Jorn saw the Opera House as a first manifestation of his critical ideas applied to architecture (Fromonot, 1998, pp.56–57). In 1963, Asger Jorn invited Utzon to design a gallery to house his own work, the Silkeborg Museum. Asger Jorn's interest in China triggered Utzon to reveal his own China to both his clients and the public. Utzon's initial proposal sent to Asger Jorn, a conceptual diagram drawn with salt, directly alluded to Asger Jorn's "calligraphic" works. Later, in the 1964 *Arkitektur* publication of this diagram, Utzon demonstrated that the initial idea of the Silkeborg Museum came from his 1958 trip to China, when he visited the Yungang Grottoes at Datung (Utzon, 1964, p.1) (see Figure 11).

The lifetime friendship between Utzon and Tobias Faber (see Figure 12) was established while they were both studying at the Royal Academy. The two young students shared many interests, including their obsession with China and readings on Chinese architecture.<sup>44</sup> Early in his architectural career, Faber proposed to establish an architectural firm with Jørn Utzon, but this idea was eventually and timelessly postponed.<sup>45</sup> This was a result of the plagiarism scandal associated with their first joint architectural manifesto in 1947 in which, after Faber's main texts, Utzon's reproduction of seven illustrations from Swiss émigré architect Albert Frey's (1903–1998) book *In Search of a Living Architecture* (1935) was without proper acknowledgement.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Utzon who continued to pursue a career as a practising architect, Faber became an assistant lecturer at the School of Architecture (1951–56), then lecturer (1956–62) and Professor (1962–85) and, finally, the Director of all of the Royal Academy Schools (1965–74) and subsequently the Director for the School of Architecture (1974–85).

Many accounts of Utzon's early perception of China survive, because Faber was not only a close friend of young Utzon but also a scholar with many publications on China and Chinese influences on Danish architects (Faber, 1986). In 1978, Faber first visited China after his 1976 trip to Japan.<sup>47</sup> After this trip, Faber published his travel writings – *En Kinarejse* (A Travel to China) (1979) and later *Kina* (China) (1985), their format and content directly inspired by Rasmussen's *Rejse I Kina* and Lin Yutang's *Imperial Peking, Seven Centuries of China*. In 1989, he finished the first

43. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

44. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

45. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

46. For the issue about the plagiarism scandal, see the author's 2008 conference paper – Chiu (2008).

47. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009. For Faber's trip to China, see Faber's 1979 *En Kinarejse* and 1985 *Kina*.



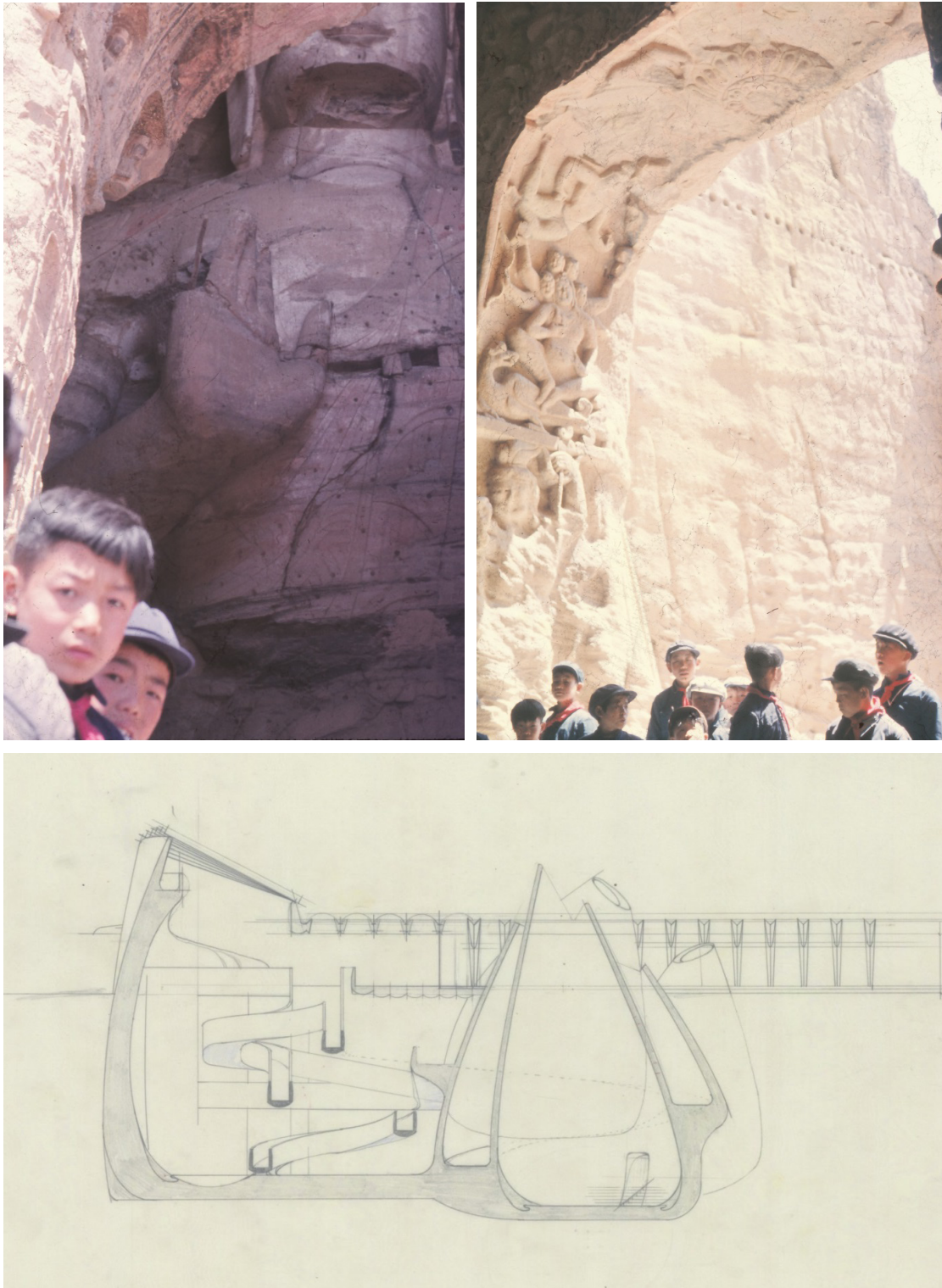


Figure 11  
The Yungang Grottoes in Shanxi province, slides taken by Utzon (above) and Utzon's early design proposal for the Silkeborg Museum (first scheme) for Danish artist Asger Jørn (1914–1973) in the 1960s (below).

THE UTZON ARCHIVES, AALBORG UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.



Figure 12  
Utzon and Faber in the early 1950s.

TOBIAS FABER'S PHOTOGRAPH.

account of Johannes Prip-Møller's China – "En dansk arkitekt i Kina" (A Danish Architect in China) published in *Architectura* 11. The manuscript was translated into English in 1994 and published as a monograph, *Johannes Prip-Møller, A Danish Architect in China*<sup>48</sup>. Faber also researched earlier approaches to China by graduates of the Royal Academy in *Kina-Danmark: arkitektionisk set* (China-Denmark: the architectonic set) from 1986. Of course, he also wanted to write a monograph about Utzon's China, but unfortunately, he was rejected by Utzon several times.<sup>49</sup> Notwithstanding, Faber's *Houses in Fredensborg* (1991), an essay on Utzon's courtyard housing proposals, clearly set down the idea of China in Utzon's work from his view as an architectural historian.

After his retirement from the Royal Academy in 1985, Faber worked part-time as a Chinese architecture tour guide with Peter Porskjaer, whom he first met in Tibet, and together they travelled to China about eleven times.<sup>50</sup> For Faber's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, he dressed as a Chinese emperor to celebrate. For his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, he dressed as a Manchurian.<sup>51</sup> At the age of 94, during his conversation with one of the authors, he excitedly explained his delight in encountering Utzon and China.<sup>52</sup>

48. See Faber (1994).

49. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

50. Interview Peter Porskjaer, Esbjerg, Denmark, 2009.

51. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.

52. Tobias Faber interview, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009.



Else Glahn (1921–2011) (see Figure 13) entered the Royal Academy in 1940, and became friends both with Faber and Utzon.<sup>53</sup> Glahn's China was inspired by her early reading of the 1919-version of *Yingzao fashi* in the library of the Royal Academy (originally owned by Professor Einar Utzon-Frank).<sup>54</sup> During the War, Faber, Utzon and Glahn all lived in Stockholm and frequently met.<sup>55</sup> In 1944, Glahn entered the Stockholm University and studied classic literature of the Song Dynasty under Professor Bernard Karlgren (1889–1978), who had established modern Nordic academic scholarship of China. Glahn worked with Osvald Sirén translating classic literature relating to Chinese painting and painters. Later, Glahn worked with Joseph Needham (1900–95) on the chapters concerning Chinese architecture in his *Science and Civilization in China* (1954) which Utzon studied in great detail.<sup>56</sup>

53. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.

54. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.

55. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.

56. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009. Utzon's own copy of *Science and Civilization in China* survives in the collection of Jan Utzon.

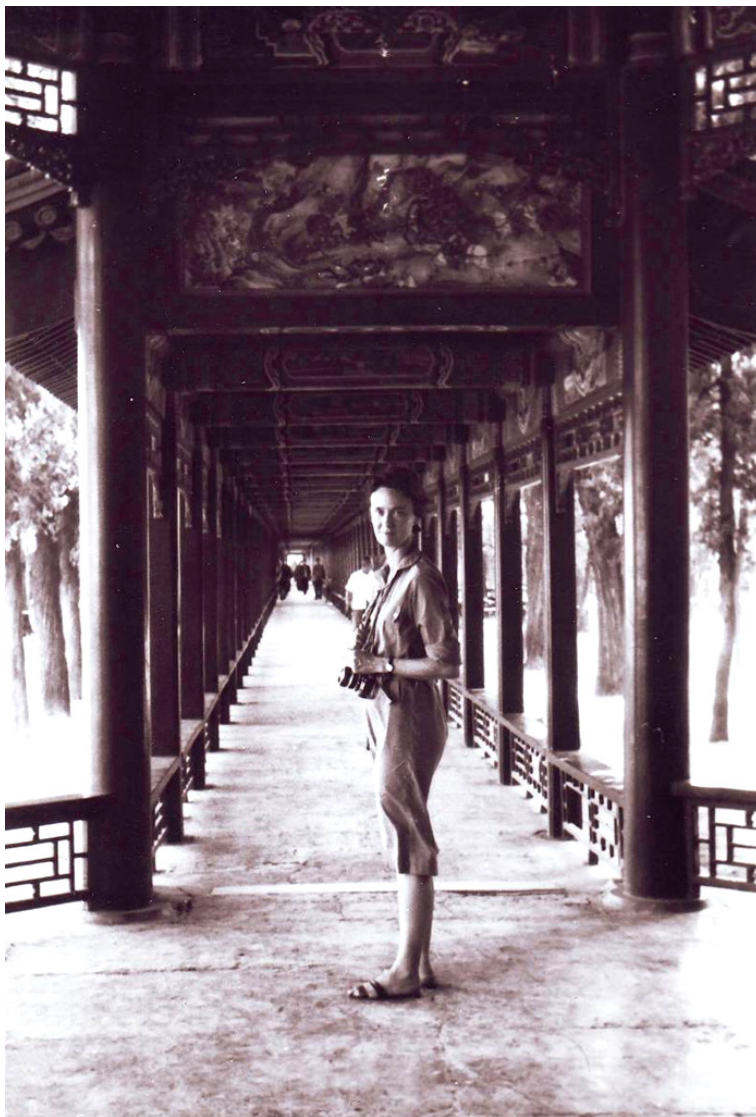


Figure 13  
Else Glahn in the Summer Palace of  
Beijing, Beijing, in the early 1960s

ELSE GLAHN'S PHOTOGRAPHS.

From 1949 to 1968, Glahn was librarian in charge of books in Far Eastern languages at the Royal Danish Library, a lecturer at both the Institute of East Asia Studies and the University of Copenhagen. Since 1966, with the assistance from American historian Wilma Fairbank (1909–2002), she “secretly” obtained two passports and started travelling to China during the early Cultural Revolution (1966–76). At the same time, she met with Utzon in Japan and arranged several architectural tours and tea ceremonies for Utzon, who was by then frustrated with the progress of the Sydney Opera House (1957–66).<sup>57</sup> In 1968, she established the Institute of East Asia Studies at Aarhus University, and from 1968 to 1986, she was Director.

Before the mid-1970s, Glahn mainly taught Chinese literature, history and language. Later, she taught traditional Chinese architecture and devoted her late life to translating the *Yingzao fashi* into modern architectural drawings with an English text and commentary, with a list of early Chinese buildings constructed using the *Yingzao fashi*. Glahn’s 1981 article “Chinese Building Standards in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century” in *The Scientific American* was a notable example of her scholarship and brought her international recognition. Ironically, this whole article was largely rewritten by the editor who also added many extra and incorrect illustrations without Glahn’s permission.<sup>58</sup> Consequently, Else Glahn never published any further journal articles in America.<sup>59</sup>

As an old friend and professional colleague, Else Glahn had frequent telephone contact with Utzon. Several of their telephone conversations were related to the subject of the *Yingzao fashi*, following which Else Glahn sent her translations and drawings of Chinese bracketing units documented in the *Yingzao fashi* to Utzon (see Figure 14).<sup>60</sup> These drawings served as an important inspiration for Utzon proposing the precast concrete units and their site assembly to construct National Assembly of Kuwait (1975–84) (see Figure 15).<sup>61</sup> Also, as a friend of Professor Liang Sicheng, in 1972, she helped to prepare the unpublished notes and drawings of Liang’s last work on the *Yingzao fashi* for Tsinghua University in Beijing. Glahn further suggested that Wilma Fairbank sent Liang’s posthumous manuscript back to China.<sup>62</sup> With Glahn’s editing, this manuscript was published in 1984, *A Pictorial History of Chinese Architecture*, and was acknowledged as a significant work of modern Chinese scholarship on traditional Chinese architecture. Utzon was aware of this work by Glahn and owned the monograph.<sup>63</sup>

With Glahn’s help, Francoise Fromonot wrote her study *Jørn Utzon: The Sydney Opera House* in 1998, with its many analogies between Utzon’s design proposals and illustrations from the *Yingzao fashi*. This inspired Chinese Professor Zhao Chen at Nanjing University in 2003 to write an introduction about Utzon’s work and his influences from China. This article also recognized the *Yingzao fashi* as a significant contributing factor

57. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.

58. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.

59. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.

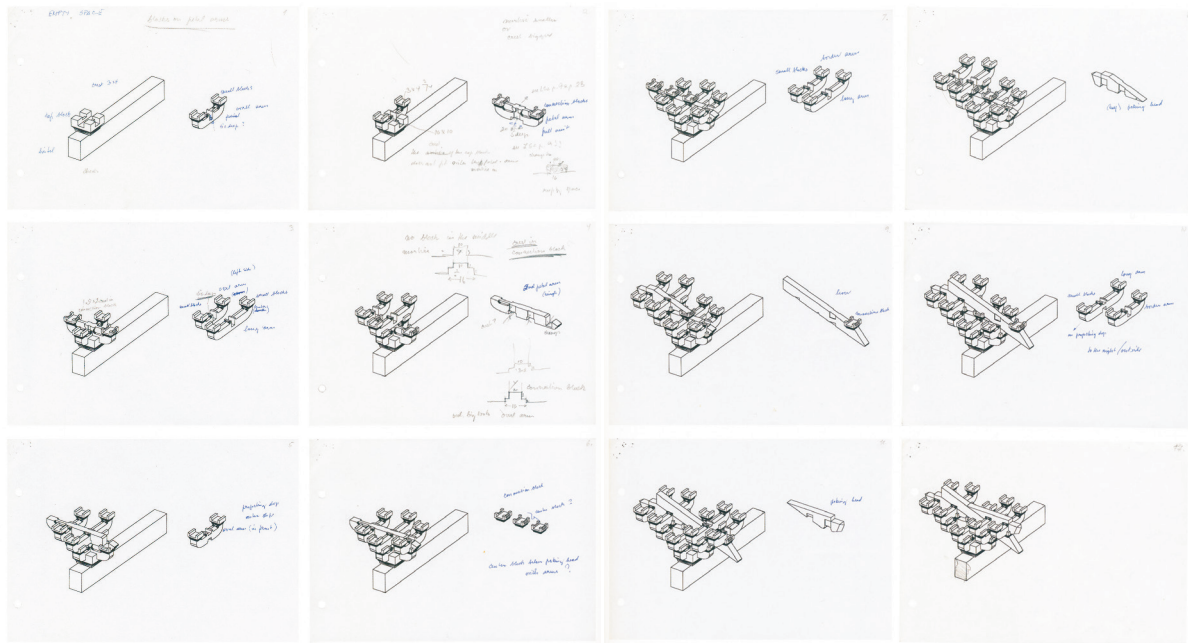
60. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.

61. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.

62. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009. This manuscript was finished by Professor Liang before the end of the WWII and brought to America by the author for future publication in 1947. However, due to the many interruptions, finally in 1980, the materials were sent back to Tsinghua University in Beijing and published as 1984 *A Pictorial History of Chinese Architecture*. For more information, see the introduction by Fairbank, W. in Liang (2001, pp.9–14)

63. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009. *A Pictorial History of Chinese Architecture* is found in Jan Utzon’s collection at Saunte, Denmark.





to Utzon's work.<sup>64</sup> Glahn also talked to Utzon about Zhao Chen's interest in his China, and Utzon was pleased and asked his Danish publisher, Torsten Bløndal, to send a set of his retrospective *Logbook Series* to Zhao Chen in his appreciation.<sup>65</sup> In the same year in China, the *Yingzao fashi* was republished in the same format as the 1925-edition. The editorial celebrated both the republication of the *Yingzao fashi* nine hundred years after its first publication in 1103 AD and Utzon's winning of the Pritzker Prize in 2003, underscoring his lifetime interest in the *Yingzao fashi*.

**Figure 14**  
Utzon's study of Chinese bracketing units with the modern perspective drawing made by the Chinese student of Else Glahn.

THE UTZON ARCHIVES, AALBORG UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

64. Zhao Chen interview, Nanjing, China, 2009.

65. Else Glahn interview, Birkerød, Denmark, 2009.



Figure 15  
National Assembly of Kuwait, photographs taken in the early 1980s.  
THE UTZON ARCHIVES, AALBORG UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

## Conclusion

Young Utzon's perception of China contained varied ideas and artefacts directly derived from many predecessors at Royal Danish Academy. Under the influences of China-Denmark trade and shipping, the school continuously revealed the work of its heroic figures, such as Thorvald Bindesbøll, P.V. Jensen-Klint, Johan Carl Christian Petersen and Kaare Klint, with the inspiration of China and a so-called Chinese style. These figures' creative representations of China frame another view of Danish building culture. Their free historical style, as part of Denmark's pursuit of its own nation-state identity, recalls young Utzon's pursuit of China in the 1940s – the otherness of his historical references, set against the clichéd dominant post-war tendencies. This illuminates a deeper understanding of Utzon's approach to Chinese building culture, as part of a legacy his generation received from the Royal Academy, as well as an important tendency in the history of Danish architecture.

Einar Utzon-Frank, Aage Marcus, Johannes Prip Møller, Kay Fisker and Steen Eiler Rasmussen could play a key role in stimulating young Utzon's interest in China. Among Utzon-Frank's Chinese collection was the 1919-edition of the *Yingzao fashi*. Utzon's first encounter with the *Yingzao fashi* in Utzon-Frank's studio before he entered the Royal Academy certainly encouraged Utzon's later acquisition of the 1925-edition *Yingzao fashi* in Beijing during his trip to China in 1958. No doubt Utzon-Frank cultivated young Utzon's creativity and later his critical approach to architectural design. Aage Marcus's *Den Blaa Drage* and Johannes Prip Møller's *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries* allowed Utzon to study Chinese religion in great detail and were further served as one of the key inspirational sources for Utzon creating Bagsværd Church. Both of Kay Fisker and Steen Eiler Rasmussen's lectures, writings and trips to China heavily influenced young Utzon's interest in China, and certainly inspired his trip to China and visiting Beijing in 1958.

Utzon further shared his obsession of Chinese art and architecture with his colleagues, such as Asger Jorn, Tobias Faber and Else Glahn. It is unlikely that Utzon would have overlooked Asger Jorn's China both in his early publications – *The Jade Flute: Some Chinese Poems* – and paintings. Asger Jorn's interest in China could trigger Utzon to reveal his own China to both his clients and the public during the Silkeborg Museum project. The lifetime friendship between Utzon and Tobias Faber was established while they were both studying at the Royal Academy. The two young students shared many interests together, including their obsession with China and readings on Chinese architecture. Many accounts of Utzon's early perception of China survive, because Faber was not only a close friend of young Utzon but also a scholar with many publications on China and Chinese influences on Danish architects. Glahn's China was inspired by her early "reading" of the 1919-version of *Yingzao fashi* in the library of the Royal Academy. Later, she taught traditional Chinese

architecture and devoted her late life to translating the *Yingzao fashi* into modern architectural drawings with an English text and commentary. These drawings served as an important inspiration for Utzon proposing the precast concrete units and their site assembly to construct National Assembly of Kuwait.

Utzon's lifetime affinity with China was intimately connected to his Danish socio-cultural background within a specific cross-cultural context. This represents an amalgamation that assimilated diverse aspects of China taken by different people and represented by varied media before and especially during Utzon's early career. Their varied approaches to China reflected the previous trends, such as Nordic orientalism, classicism and national romanticism in Denmark, following the rise and fall of its maritime power and interconnection with China. Indeed, Utzon's reception of China represents a matrix of cultural transmission between China and Denmark and provides an important channel to understand Utzon as a real person within a specific cross-cultural context.



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### Biographical information

Chin Chen-Yu  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Architecture, Bilkent University  
FF 206, Department of Architecture  
Address:  
Bilkent University, 06800 Ankara, TURKEY  
Phone: +90 5316 146 326 / +90 312 290 2590  
Email: chen-yu.chiu@bilkent.edu.tr

Chiu Chen-Yu graduated from Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan in 2002 with a Bachelor of Architecture. He achieved a Masters degree in Urban Design at Columbia University in New York in 2005 and received his PhD at the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne, in 2011. From 2013–15, he worked as a Post-Doctoral researcher at Department of Architecture, Aalto University, Finland. Since September 2016, he has worked as an Assistant Professor at Department of Architecture, Bilkent University. His primary research interest is in the cross-cultural/national relationships within the field of architecture.





### Biographical information

Professor Philip Goad  
Faculty of Architecture, Building and  
Planning Masson Road  
The University of Melbourne  
Location: Level: 4, Room: 427,  
VIC 3010, Australia  
Phone: +61 3 8344 6426  
Email: [p.goad@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:p.goad@unimelb.edu.au)

Philip Goad is Chair of Architecture at the University of Melbourne. He has published widely in Australian architecture as an architectural historian and as a design critic, including in the fields of modernism, residential, community, institutional and commercial building design, individual architects and contemporary design thinking.



### Biographical information

Peter Myers

Address:

19 Scott Street, Orbost,

Victoria 3888, Australia

Phone: (+61) 3 5154 1626

E-mail: [metope@bigpond.com](mailto:metope@bigpond.com)

Peter Myers worked for Jørn Utzon on the Sydney Opera House until Utzon's forced resignation in 1966. In 1970, he established his own practice in Australia and has undertaken several award winning projects. He also taught in Sydney and writes variously on Utzon's design ideas, urban consolidation and architectural history.