

Preface — Observations and Work Agenda

International ‘concessions’ or ‘settlements’ were strictly delimited enclaves within key trading cities, ceded to and governed by foreign powers after ‘unequal treaties’ as a consequence of military defeats. Concessions also came into being in China, from the mid-nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth. They are currently being rediscovered as a field of research about the entangled histories between whole continents as the preconditions of what we today call ‘globalisation’.

In this context, the International Settlement of Shanghai (with its beginnings in the 1840s and ending shortly after the Second World War) certainly counts today as the most prominent and best-known example of the concession era in China. From today’s perspective, this is not surprising: the French and British quarters, in particular, were massive construction sites at that time and their built fabric has survived in a rather good shape until today. Additionally, access to archival material was comparatively easy for a long time. As a consequence, both Chinese and international research into Shanghai’s urban and architectural concession history are well developed and have produced some fascinating publications.

The situation of Shanghai’s arguably most relevant counterpart, Tianjin — or *Tientsin* as it was pronounced during the concession era itself — is rather different. Although the concessions of the city, situated to the south-east of Beijing close to the Bohai Sea, did span the globe — involving nine nations (Japan, the USA, and seven European countries including Russia) — international scholarship is still fragmented and not well interconnected. From a ‘Western perspective’, only a handful of British, French, Italian or US-American authors have produced monographs about *the(ir)* concessions, most often drawing on archival sources available in the former mother countries’ capitals — from London, Paris, and Rome to Washington D.C. On the other hand, Chinese scholars have already produced a considerable range of publications primarily based on material from Tianjin’s Municipal Archives or from various archives in the capital Beijing — archives that are increasingly difficult to access for international researchers. The British, French, or Italian quarters were in use until WWII and have survived to a considerable extent until today; they can thus be used as built primary (both visual and physical) sources in their own rights. However, their recently

initiated, extremely touristic commodification, reinvention (through in-style additions) or even reconstruction by the Tianjin Municipal Government into a cultural heritage site endowed with a supposedly ‘cosmopolitan flair’ has created an additional challenge for research about the ‘original’ fabric. Last but not least, internal political agendas go hand in hand with powerful super-developers on the spot; facts and official strategies are most often shielded from any broader civil society-oriented discussions, not to mention grassroots initiatives or even resistance from local population groups against enforced relocation from their pulled-down housing.

Within this complex global configuration of fragmented (inter)national historiographies and limited archival access to Tianjin’s ambivalent imperialistic past (see the detailed discussion of the state of research in the central chapter of this publication), one particular concession had fallen into deep oblivion: *the Austro-Hungarian concession*. Filling this scientific gap is the overall goal of this book. Tientsin’s Austro-Hungarian concession existed only for some short sixteen years, between 1901 and 1917, and its urban and architectural history will be contextualised in great detail for the first time, making use of hitherto unknown published and unpublished material, both written and visual, that has been kept in the Austrian State Archives and the Austrian National Library (both in Vienna). These historical sources provide a solid foundation, to which a visit of the site of the former Austro-Hungarian concession in Tientsin was added. During a short stay in Tianjin in 2018, I was able to map out the concession’s last physical remains and set them in relation to a set of preliminary observations and open questions about today’s local heritage industry from a contemporary perspective.

Overall structure of this publication

While the episode of the Austro-Hungarian concession (from 1901 until 1917) and its afterlife, both of them read through the lens of architectural history, stand at the centre of this book, the historical account is framed by two additional sections: first, a Historical Introduction will provide the reader with a unique overview of the ‘many roads’ taken by Austrian (and, later, Austro-Hungarian) relations with China, from the early nineteenth century onwards, which ultimately led to the concession project

shortly after 1900. One may read them as many ‘intangible’ connections predating the ‘tangible’ and physical, i.e. urbanistic, infrastructural and architectural, impacts on the city of *Tientsin*/Tianjin. In this complex exploration of numerous historical aspects, it is my great pleasure to have persuaded my present co-author, Georg Lehner, to contribute to this publication. We both consider that our different disciplinary mindsets and their related ways of reasoning — those of a sinologist and historian on the one hand, and of an architectural historian on the other — unequivocally enriched this research project. In this connection, I would also like to thank Georg Lehner for developing a cross-referential glossary for the many English-Chinese-German terms floating around our topic. This glossary, which demanded much hard work, complements our joint effort to produce an index of all relevant names of places, persons, institutions, newspapers, etc.; both are provided in the appendix section of this book.

The second framing element of this publication is the central primary source for this present research, a “Photographic Album of the Austro-Hungarian Concession in *Tientsin*”, which I was extremely lucky to locate in the Austrian National Library. For the first time, it is reproduced in full and available to readers with my English translations of the original German legends. Along with other rediscovered maps, sketches, and photographs, I am convinced that this appendix will provide fascinating insights into a concession that, until today, was to a large extent handicapped by an absence of visual evidence.

*An Austro-Hungarian concession in China
rediscovered, or four global reasons for an
unknown story*

To arouse the curiosity of the reader, we shall ask right away about the reasons for this remarkable lacuna in historical knowledge. Why has the Austro-Hungarian part played during the Tientsin concession period been overlooked? I believe that four reasons can be summoned. With reference to the title chosen for this book — *Habsburgs going global* — I would like to argue that these four reasons are themselves entangled within a global logic.

- The missing Vienna-Tientsin connection for ‘Habsburgs going global’ and local circumstances

A first reason why the Austro-Hungarian concession was forgotten is to be found in the historical constel-

lation shortly after 1900: at that point in time, the Dual Monarchy had already contributed a few hundred marines to the Allies’ punitive action against the so-called Boxer Uprising, participated in the subsequent capture of Tientsin in July 1900 within the Eight-Nation Alliance (see map below), and was a party to the unequal ‘Peace Treaty’ with local Chinese authorities shortly after (see this context in Georg Lehner’s introduction to this book).

Austria-Hungary was then already part of the Provisional Government of Tientsin that was installed in the summer of 1900 and would, from 1902 onwards, officially administer the city. But in 1900, some eloquent individual Austrian players in China managed — as I will explore at the beginning of my chapter — to drive the Habsburg Monarchy, with its relatively unbriefed ministries back home, into a hurried occupation of the last and ‘least feasible concession slot’ of Tientsin. This was part of a global chain reaction in the ever precipitating competition for imperial outreach and prestige between Paris, London, Rome, Berlin and Vienna. But the Austro-Hungarian settlement itself was an absolute late(st)-comer to the international “scramble for concessions” (to use a famous expression which is attributed to British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury) in the city of Tientsin, whereas more powerful nations, such as Great Britain and France, had already installed their concessions from the 1860s onwards in much more suitable, almost vacant areas along the Hai River to the east of the older, traditional ‘Chinese City’. By occupying the last available spot — arguably the least practicable one, because it was *de facto* already heavily populated by some 30,000 Chinese — an effective new development, both in urbanistic, infrastructural and architectural terms, was therefore extremely difficult from the beginning. Not only did ‘local’ resistance form, and constant negotiation with this population leave little space and energy for construction projects during the short Austro-Hungarian intermezzo. Also at the ‘global’ other end of the world, in far-away Europe, things were not much easier: political decision-makers in Vienna and Budapest were extremely sceptical and hesitant about all ‘colonial’ experiments (the Dual Monarchy never had ‘real’ colonies overseas before or after, nor any real experience in ‘world trade’ in overseas), and Austrian and Hungarian entrepreneurs in trade, industry, and manufacturing also showed little courage when it came to investing into this project. This ‘local-global handicap’ meant that — in comparison to more efficient building projects by other

concession powers — only a very small amount of urban structure and architectural fabric was finally realised, a fact that only contributed to the Austro-Hungarian project's fading into oblivion in the following decades.

In the global dynamics of Tientsin's international concession area, from today's perspective, it is no less important that it be chronicled. I am convinced that exploring the ambivalent role and far less prominent story of Austro-Hungary as a rather *reluctant coloniser* in the 'scramble for China' (or, more precisely, a belated and hesitant actor within the 'international concession game') will help us a) to scrutinise (i.e. correct, differentiate and periodise) the present, all-too-easily adopted, homogenised, and one-dimensional narrative of *one* coherent Tientsin concession framework (in the singular) as an international success story of modernisation and cosmopolitanism — a storyline that is today strongly nurtured by the Tianjin government itself in its urban self-branding efforts as a reborn global metropolis; and it will help b) to conceptualise global implications for Tientsin/Tianjin from the 1860s to 1940s through the lens of *multiple colonialisms* (in the plural) — with their different time regimes and institutional agencies, and not necessarily always successful architectural or urban impacts.

- Lost in global translation? Repatriated, then divided archival material

These social, political, and economic obstacles notwithstanding, some urban fabric and architectural building stock did take shape during the brief sixteen years of Austro-Hungarian presence in Tianjin — as I will map out thanks to so far unknown archival material. Hence there must be a second reason why virtually no contextual knowledge about the physical reality of the Austro-Hungarian concession exists today. The crucial point here is that, once China had declared war to Austria-Hungary in 1917 and its concession was retroceded (at the latest with the Peace Treaty of St. Germain in 1919 and the sale of the consulate in 1923), many Austro-Hungarian diplomatic sources, from (hand)written correspondence to plans and photographs, were sent back to Austria (when they were not destroyed on the spot). In what I call here a global process of repatriation, many archival sources were partially 'lost in translation': while all the (hand)written correspondence material ended up in the Austrian State Archives in Vienna, crucial visual material (such as plans, maps, and

photographs) that was previously attached to it was — and unfortunately still is — separated from it. Hence it is no wonder that comparatively few illustrative sources for the Austro-Hungarian concession of Tientsin were ever systematically identified, scientifically analysed, or published by emerging research into the 'Habsburgs going global' episode (from Mexico to China) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It was within the framework of the present study that I was able to rediscover — together with other sketches, plans, and photographs sporadically attached to written correspondence — an absolutely unique primary source in the 'Picture Archives and Graphics Department' of the Austrian National Library in Vienna: a bound album from c.1911 entitled "Österreich-ungarische Niederlassung Tientsin" with 115 black-and-white photographs, a fifteen-page typewritten description of a tour through the concession, and a hand-drawn scaled development plan. All this new material is discussed in my chapter and published in full for the first time in an appendix to the book. In this way, I tried to reconnect visual information about architectural and urbanistic achievements with written correspondence material about the creation and development of the concession. I hope that the data provided will be of great scientific benefit for international researchers in the field — above all for Chinese art and architectural historians who often have little knowledge of German and can scarcely find their way amongst Austrian archives.

- The global loss of German as a language of science and the hidden 'national historiographical archival logic'

The third reason why the urban and architectural history of the Austro-Hungarian concession is almost unknown today is that the only comprehensive studies about it were written in the German language — a language which is increasingly ignored by current, primarily English-language international scientific research. These studies, part of PhD theses at the University of Vienna (Wagner 1955, Hörtler 1984, and Lehner 1995; I will discuss and quote these studies in my chapter), were unfortunately not published and therefore 'out of digital sight' for international research through many online research engines. Thus, the present book is the first English-language publication to unlock the curious history of the Austro-Hungarian concession to a broader, English-speaking audience. For this task, a wide selec-

tion of original German-language published primary sources (internal reports, newspaper clippings, travel reports, etc.) were translated and therefore made available to English-speaking readers for the first time. In this way, we hope to provide the (Austro-Hungarian) missing link in the chain and gradually complete the entangled history of all nine former Tientsin concession powers and their Chinese counterpart.

However, from a wider perspective, it could be argued that it is precisely the ‘inter-national’ framework of multiple colonialisms around historical Tientsin (nine imperialist nations plus China) that continues to function as a hidden, ‘national historiographical archival logic’ behind the still rather patchworky character of the state of research. In fact, current research clusters and findings can be ascribed to the same ‘inter-national’ configuration: French, British/American, Italian, Japanese and Chinese researchers not only most often elect to write the history of ‘their’ previous national concessions or ‘indigenous quarters’; their knowledge has also been structured by this logic given that they primarily consult the archives and libraries in ‘their’ mother countries before complementing this more sizeable amount of research with visits to other archives (for the Austrian context, see below). It must be admitted that the present publication, to a large extent, has equally followed this logic when analysing historical documents kept in various sections of the Austrian State Archives: in my chapter I will not only provide a critical evaluation of the state of research concerning already published material (secondary sources), but will also present a short overview of the structure of the relevant Austrian archives.

Last but not least, very often the various national historiographies of historical Tientsin have been published in their respective language. Certainly, here as elsewhere, English provides the usual translingual bridge for a conjoint, transnational research field: this undeniable fact motivated us to present our research findings about the Austro-Hungarian concession not in our mother tongue (German) but in this global *lingua franca*.

- The loss of original ‘colonial’ fabric during the reinvention of Tianjin as a ‘global city’

Finally, a fourth reason is worth noting when we ask why the built legacy of Austria-Hungary in China has remained almost unnoticed until today. Certainly, very little urban fabric was actually com-

pleted during the Austro-Hungarian concession era itself; and what little had been built may have been lost owing to political or natural reasons during the post-war era, including ideologically motivated neglect or even demolition during the Maoist period, an earthquake in 1976, and natural decay, followed by the burgeoning urban boom in the post-1990s. Therefore, the approach taken in the final section of the book is from a retrospective viewpoint: not only was little actually built during the concession period, but this limited *original* fabric seems to have been lost over the following decades. Paradoxically, what I will call a ‘history-cum-heritage turn’ since the early 2000s may be identified as the largest threat. While the present Chinese city of Tianjin is branded as a ‘global city’ through a systematic reinvention of its past as the Tientsin of concessions (which *de facto* was violent and imperialist) in the name of an international or, even, cosmopolitan legacy, the remaining authentic architecture of the Austro-Hungarian concession seems to be modified beyond recognition. Following the observations made during my first field trip to Tianjin in December 2018, I believe that the current heritagisation process even accelerates — rather than mitigates — this dramatic loss. When walking from over-commodified ‘Little England’ and ‘Little France’ towards ‘Little Italy’, I did notice that ‘Little Austria’ was also undergoing full commodification. Yet only limited heritage research has been invested into the latter to map out concretely what has been preserved, replaced, reconstructed, or simply reinvented, since the historical background and above-quoted visual primary sources had been missing until now as important referential and comparative data. In this sense, it must be noted that what I describe in this book as a process guided by a *history to heritage logic* is rather meant to raise a first set of open research questions without the pretence to come to a final conclusion or judgement. What will particularly be needed in the near future is a collaborative research effort that at last would bring together international experts and Chinese scholars — who enjoy better access to, and know their way around local archives, and could present their alternative conclusions about this field of imperialist history in China.

To conclude: a personal note

My own personal ‘discovery’ of the Austro-Hungarian concession was in itself a happy incident. With my professional background as a Vienna-trained ar-

chitect, art historian, and cultural heritage specialist, I had the privilege to direct a research project in the field of colonial architecture, urbanism, and archaeology within a German Research Foundation-funded Cluster of Excellence, ‘Asia and Europe in a Global Context. The Dynamics of Transculturality’ at Heidelberg University (Germany), for many years. This also gave me the opportunity to travel extensively in South, South East, and East Asia in order to explore how imperial nations such as France (Falser 2020), Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Germany physically engaged with their overseas territories. In this context, I was invited to an international conference on heritage studies in Shanghai in 2018; after the academic event itself, this gave me the opportunity to explore more of the city’s historical concession areas, which are now promoted through manifold nostalgic heritage walks into the supposedly ‘good old times’.

My own extended China travels had started in the late 1990s and brought me from Beijing, along the Silk Road, into the Muslim regions in the deep west, and all the way down south to the former British territory of Hong Kong. This time, I travelled north of Shanghai to the former German marine base of Qingdao (in German *Tsingtau*, in operation from 1898 to 1914), an important city to be investigated for my new research project on German colonial architecture, which started in 2020 at the Department of Architecture of the Technical University of Munich, Germany (Falser 2021, Falser 2022 forthcoming, Falser 2023 forthcoming). However, after my architectural explorations of the former concession areas in Shanghai, I was also curious about its important historical counterpart: Tientsin. I took one of these miraculously fast bullet trains further north and reached the megacity that today is called Tianjin.

When I explored the city in December 2018 (a selection of my photographs is published in this book as well), I ended up finding myself in what local guide books and Tianjin’s city branding brochures propagate as the *Austrian Style Riverfront*, and what is called “Austro-Hungarian architecture” by national and local newspapers (Fig.).

However, as a matter of fact — and this was easily discernible for my eyes as an architectural historian from ‘Good Old European Vienna’ — the great majority of the depicted buildings (particularly those on a giant scale) were not originally Austrian at all, but produced as flat ‘in-style additions’ after 2000 and the global investment boom in Tianjin. As an ef-



Fig. Article by Laura Morgan for *ChinaDaily.com* (February 15, 2011)

fect of what critical heritage investigators may sum up as a global trend towards ‘Disneyfication’, the few really *authentic* remains of the Austro-Hungarian concession were dwarfed to small-scale, less ‘perfect’, definitively ‘unspectacular’ leftovers. (*Nota bene*: China had already replicated a complete Austrian village, Hallstatt, in the southern province of Guangdong in 2012.)

Back in my hometown of Vienna, I discovered the aforementioned photographic album of the Austro-Hungarian concession from c.1911 in the National Library; it constituted a perfect reference for understanding what had happened between 1918 and 2018 in Tientsin/Tianjin. Thus, I gradually deciphered the complex mix of very few original architectural remains on the spot, right next to alterations, later additions, and destructions, all the way to recent restorations, reconstructions, and strange architectural re-inventions *à l’Autrichienne*. Consequently, I became consumed by this investigation into Austria’s brief episode in East Asia, and then discovered a whole new collection of original material from the period. All of it is now made accessible

by this publication, depicted by a rich amount of illustrations, and listed in an overview in the attached comprehensive bibliography.

Given our parallel European debates about reconstructed city castles (as in Berlin) or over-commodified cultural heritage sites of the Habsburg era, I am convinced that this contemporary hybrid or side-by-side conglomerate remembered as ‘the Austro-Hungarian concession in Tientsin’ and now promoted as an *Austrian Style Riverfront* in Tianjin is in itself a unique document of our present super-globalisation — one that is definitely worth studying in all its facets.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to my dear colleague, the Viennese historian-sinologist Georg Lehner. He has not only contributed to this book, on the basis of his long-standing expertise, by providing a “Historical Introduction” to the — intangible — Austrian-Chinese relations from 1820 until 1900, which altogether opened up ‘many roads’ to the — tangible — impact of the Habsburg Empire within

the Tientsin concession. He has also been a competent help for my own investigations into the architectural history of the Austro-Hungarian concession.

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