

CHAPTER ONE

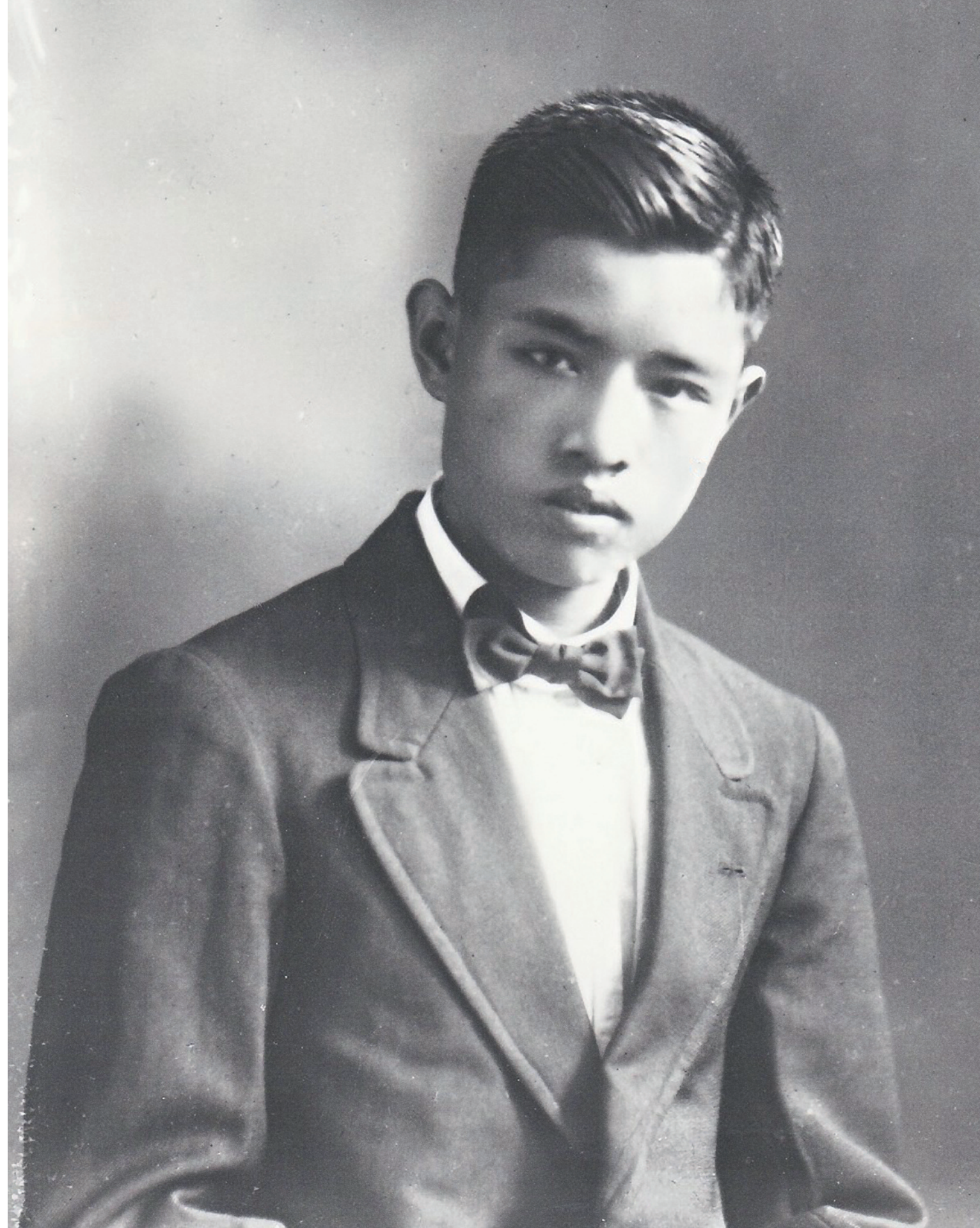
A Complicated *Birth*

At the start of the 20th century, China was just halfway through its ‘Hundred Years of Humiliation’ (Bai Nian Guo Chi). The ignominy that began in 1839, following Britain’s intercontinental drug dealing that precipitated the First Opium War (1839–42), was reaching its zenith by 1904, the year of Luke’s birth. After six decades of steady decline that had secured for China the dishonourable epithet ‘The Sick Man of Asia’, the decade leading up to 1904 was particularly unforgiving. However, the difficulties of the preceding decade paled in comparison with the next 10 years. Luke was born in the eye of a global storm that was ravaging China, and the ensuing turmoil would shape much of his life and the lives of the characters who populated it; its fallout

moulding the architectural ideas and output of one of China’s most prolific and talented architects of the 20th century.

In 1894 China went to war with Japan in what was the first major conflict with a country it had considered since time immemorial to be a subaltern neighbour and cultural underling. The Japanese, as the English poet and Orientalist Laurence Binyon (1869–1943) once noted, ‘look to China as we look to Italy and Greece, for them it is the classic land.’¹ In the late 19th century, China’s superior relationship with Japan was upended. The dramatic reversal was effected by the countries’ respective responses to the unrequited advances of Western powers. Both had sought to contain foreign interference

Luke Him Sau
photographed in Hong
Kong, c 1920.





The Luke family, Hong Kong, early 1920s. Photographed at the family home at 4 Hau Fung Lane, Ship Street, Wanchai, Hong Kong, showing Luke Him Sau (back row standing third from the right), his mother and father (seated centre), his two brothers and two brothers-in-law (standing centre), his two sisters and two sisters-in-law (standing far left and far right) and his 15 nieces and nephews.

by confining trade with the West to specific ports (Guangzhou in China² and Nagasaki in Japan), but the First Opium War and the concluding Treaty of Nanjing (1842) turned foreign interest in China from an external concern to an unavoidable and corrosive internal problem. From 1842, foreigners were granted the right to settle in China at designated 'treaty ports', the first five of which were defined in the Treaty of Nanjing: Guangzhou (then known as Canton), Xiamen (Amoy), Fuzhou (Foochow), Ningbo (Ningpo) and Shanghai. Hong Kong, where Luke would be born, became a Crown Colony and, unfathomable though it was to the British at the time, the Far Eastern jewel in the nation's imperial crown. Faced with a similar predicament in 1853 following the arrival in Tokyo (Edo) Bay of the *USS Mississippi* carrying

Commodore Matthew Perry, the Japanese were not going to concede similarly favourable terms on their own territory. Interaction with the West for Japan stopped at trade, which became its salvation; but for China, it permitted settlement, which became its downfall.

For Japan, the arrival of foreign forces was a sufficient portent to prompt sweeping reforms aimed at the wholesale modernisation of the nation. With a revolutionary zeal, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 not only laid the foundations of Japan's swift and fundamental modernisation but also endowed the country with the keys to the elite club of Western nations. All that remained for Japan in fulfilling its emulation of the West was an empire, the appetite for which China and Korea would pay

heavily. In 1885, Japan's metaphorical passage to the West was encapsulated in an anonymous essay, 'Datsuaron' ('Departing Asia'), attributed to the reformist intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), conjuring an image of Japan, drawn by the irresistible 'winds' from the West, setting sail and leaving Asia and its uncivilised neighbours behind.³

For China, negotiations with Western powers were conducted over the double barrels of the opium pipe and frigate cannon. The unscrupulous manner in which China was brought to the negotiating table resulted in the signing of a series of 'unequal treaties' with a medley of Western nations over the ensuing decades. The consequent century of humiliation instilled in China a profound distrust towards many foreign countries, but none more so than Japan, followed close behind by Britain.

When the question of influence over the former vassal state of Korea finally led to war between Asia's old guard and rising star, many assumed that China would crush its upstart neighbour, but it was not to be. Japan delivered a defeat so complete and humiliating that the eminent Chinese reformer Liang Qichao (1873–1929) described it as a 'thunderbolt in a dream'.⁴ Victory cemented Japan's ascendant position over its cultural ancestor, whose descent had reached its nadir. The Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) contained not only the terms of peace, but also the first drafts of the gathering storm that would engulf the country for the next two

decades and beyond. It would also permanently alter the course of China's modernisation by preparing the conditions for unprecedented construction and destruction – modernity's loyal bedfellows. With a taste for triumph, Japan was in no mood to stop at this preliminary conflict. Half a century of accumulating gains in China would ignite a conflagration that would consume not merely the country, nor the region, but the entire globe. The winds of war in the 1930s and 1940s scattered China's political, intellectual and artistic elites across the world, though many of those uprooted by Japan's invasion, including Luke, who lost everything in their escape, would land nearby in China's proxy capital, Chongqing – but that drama is for a later chapter.

The conditions of peace in 1895 forced China to recognise Korea's independence as well as pay Japan a hefty war indemnity, but it was the surrender of sovereign territory that would have a lasting and debilitating effect on China's future. China had to yield to Japan parts of the Manchurian coastline in the Liaodong Peninsula and several islands in the China Sea, including Taiwan (then Formosa). Such crushing terms disgraced China's ailing Qing Government and even worried the Western powers, prompting France, Germany and Russia to call on Japan to rescind its claim on the Liaodong Peninsula and the strategic port of Lüshun (then Port Arthur). Japan honoured the request in exchange for a larger indemnity, though Russia's demands were far from altruistic. The ice-free port of

Lüshun in the China Sea was a more attractive proposition militarily and commercially than the isolated port of Vladivostok at the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway on the coast of the Sea of Japan. Taking advantage of both China's impotence and gratitude to Russia for its negotiations with Japan, Russia leased the peninsula for 25 years. It was renamed the Kwantung Leased Territory and the Russians set about building a branch line of the Trans-Siberian from the frontier town of Harbin down to the coast that would become the South Manchuria Railway (SMR) and one of the most strategically important railway lines in the world. They would be forced to surrender these assets to Japan a decade later following their humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1905) – the first time in the modern era a Western nation was defeated by an Eastern counterpart, and the completion of Japan's second vital step in its quest for an empire.

These conflicts not only humiliated the vanquished, they also accelerated China's industrial revolution. In a seemingly innocuous clause in a supplementary treaty to the Treaty of Shimonoseki signed by China, Japan and Britain in 1896, Japanese subjects were granted the right to 'carry on trade, industry and manufactures' in the territory granted to Japan.⁵ With the 'Most Favoured Nation' clause extending this right to citizens of other nations, for the first time in history foreigners residing in China were permitted to engage in industry. Having allowed foreigners to settle on their territory, the

Chinese now allowed them to extract resources and manufacture goods too. The Sick Man of Asia may have been terminally ill, but his foreign accoutrements had never been so abundant. For China, the doors to modern industrial production – a hallmark of Western modernity – were unlocked not from the West but from the East.

As China plumbed the depths in search of redemption, the calls for sweeping reform grew louder. A response came in the summer of 1898 when Liang Qichao and his mentor Kang Youwei (1858–1927), under the auspices of the young Emperor Guangxu (1871–1908), initiated widespread educational, constitutional, military and economic reforms. However, desperate though China was for institutional change, the 'One Hundred Day Reform'⁶ resulted in a conservative backlash and coup d'état by the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908). Six reformers, including Kang's brother, were executed and the Emperor Guangxu was placed under house arrest in Beijing's (Peking's) Forbidden City, where he languished until his death in 1908 – the day before the death of his aunt, the Empress Dowager, fuelling speculation of murder and political intrigue inside the Imperial Court.

Liang and Kang survived by fleeing to Japan which was regarded by China's reformers not as a despised adversary but rather the model of Asian modernity. As the Qing Government stuttered on under the Empress Dowager's reign

Luke Cheukman, Hong Kong, c 1900s. Luke Him Sau's father in traditional dress.



in spite of further traumas such as the homicidal anarchy of the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion in 1900, Japan provided a safe haven for China's reformers and upcoming luminaries, including the future leader, Chiang Kai Shek, and Sun Yat Sen (1866–1925), the founding father of the Republic of China. Liang and Kang lived in Tokyo for over a decade, sustaining pressure on the Qing Government by establishing the Protect the Emperor Society (Bao Huang Hui),⁷ which petitioned for the reinstatement of the emperor under a system of constitutional monarchy. In his exile Liang also published the radical journals, *Qing Yi Bao* (*Honest Criticism*) and *Xin Min Cong Bao* (*A New People*), which he smuggled into China through the foreign settlements.

Japan was not only a sanctuary for Chinese reformers, but also, in conjunction with China's foreign concessions and colonial enclaves, an

essential conduit for the passage of modern ideas into their ailing nation. Chinese translations of Western modernist literature and the latest scientific theories predominantly came from Japanese translations through intermediate settlements like Luke's home of Hong Kong, where modern concepts and practices were more freely aired and expressed. Japan's universities also schooled growing numbers of Chinese students who were attracted not only by the relatively inexpensive education compared with Europe or the United States of America, but also by Japan's cultural and geographic proximity. The total number of Chinese students in Japan rose from 280 in 1901 to 15,000 by 1906 – more overseas students than at any other time or in any other country. Within a decade it would be from Japan, not the West, that China's first trained architects emerged.⁸

The maelstrom that had consumed China from the late 19th century, violent though it was, was also instrumental in aligning the constellation of events, personalities and conditions that would shape Luke's life and the lives of a generation of modern Chinese professionals. Born in the region of Xin Hui, Guangdong province, Luke shared his ancestral home with many of China's most eminent individuals, including the reformer, Liang Qichao. Xin Hui was renowned for its scholarly standing, with a disproportionately high number of citizens entering the Imperial Court as distinguished academics and bureaucrats through the once ubiquitous Imperial Examination, which

ensured, irrespective of upbringing, China's brightest and best minds served government. Having migrated from central China to Guangdong province, Luke's father, Luke Cheukman (1860–1938), had attempted these exams but failed, and so turned his attentions to business, though he would always maintain the primacy of education. By the time Luke was born, the Imperial Examination, like so many ancient customs, was seen as anachronistic and incompatible with the fledgling aspirations of modern China. In 1905, after supplying governments with the most talented civil servants from across the empire for well over 1,000 years, the Imperial Examination was abolished. Other ancient customs followed a similar path to redundancy or extinction, as the Qing Government did too little too late to steer China towards the modern era and vainly attempt to avert catastrophe.

The classical language, ancient modes of art production, enduring social doctrines, concepts of time, and conventional financial systems were swept aside by modernity's unremitting march. Classical Chinese (Wen Yan Wen) was replaced by plain-speaking vernacular Chinese (Bai Hua). Artistic expression, long the preserve of the Imperial Court, was made accessible to the masses, initiating a revolution in painting, literature, music and architecture. The notion of progress and its linear connotations usurped China's cyclical temporal precedents. Confucianism, the very essence of Chinese thought for over two millennia, was replaced by



Luke Cheukman, Hong Kong, c 1910s. Luke Him Sau's father in Western dress.

a new cultural consciousness based on scientific reason, democracy and nationalism. And the introduction of a modern banking system based on the latest Japanese model mobilised China's first ever national banks, the Commercial Bank of China (1898) and the China Government Bank (1905), the progenitor of the Bank of China (1912). In 1911, it was the turn of the Qing Government itself – considered by too many for too long to be the root cause of China's ills – to confront the inevitable change sweeping the country. The eventual overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 brought an end to over two thousand years of dynastic rule and heralded the birth of the Republic of China.

The Luke family home, 4 Hau Fung Lane, Ship Street, Wanchai, Hong Kong, 1920s. The large house with expansive garden was designed in a combination of Chinese and Western styles. Luke's father, Luke Cheukman, and mother, Hung Shauching, can be seen standing on the terrace.



LUKE'S CHILDHOOD

Luke's birthplace of Hong Kong was largely sheltered from the tempest across the border. A British colony since the 1840s, the craggy island off the coast of Canton was symptomatic of China's unique condition – no other country on earth was as diversely carved up and exploited by outsiders. By the start of the 20th century there were approximately five different types of foreign settlements in China. The sheer variety of these settlements before the Second World War accounted for an extreme architectural and urban heterogeneity that continues to have a potent legacy in many Chinese cities. Hong Kong was a colony, like Macau (Portuguese) and Taiwan (Japanese), and thus administered

from afar. This arrangement had some parallels with the puppet state of Manchukuo created by Japan after their annexation of northeast China in 1931. A leased territory was a region loaned to a foreign power for a fixed term, as Kwantung had been to Russia before it was seized by Japan, and as parts of Shandong province (where Luke would produce some of his best work) had been to Germany in 1897. Another settlement type was the foreign concession, which was granted to specific nations and governed by representatives of that nation or shared between nations. Under the iniquitous system of extraterritoriality, foreign residents of these concessions were legally immune from Chinese jurisdiction.⁹ Foreign concessions usually comprised a portion of another



Luke Cheukman and guests, 4 Hau Fung Lane, Ship Street, Wanchai, Hong Kong, c 1910s. The guests are shown among the landscaped garden of the Luke family home.

settlement type: the treaty port, which emerged after the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing. The Chinese retained jurisdiction over treaty ports but granted access to particular foreign powers. Most treaty ports were divided into separate foreign concessions, which were often surrounded by Chinese-administered areas, creating a group of independent settlements within a city – something Luke would have to tackle in the late 1940s when placed in charge of planning Shanghai’s unification after its foreign concessions had been surrendered and combined with the Chinese areas. This peculiar legacy of inequitable foreign relations remains engrained in the urban fabric of many major Chinese cities, where the tight, disorderly street pattern

of historic quarters formed by municipally disinterested foreign merchants up to the mid-20th century jars with the rectilinear layouts imposed by subsequent Soviet-influenced planners from the second half of the century.

Hong Kong’s colonial status and its detachment from China set it apart from most foreign settlement types in China. Being a colonial city, municipal bureaucrats were expected to supervise tax revenues and ensure their disbursement was in the interests of society. This required foresight and planning, effective municipal departments, and investment in infrastructure projects, formal urban development, social welfare programmes and

the maintenance of law and order. Such matters were largely irrelevant or at least all too often neglected by their municipal colleagues in the foreign settlements of China's treaty ports in favour of commerce, though in reality Hong Kong was little different. China's foreign enclaves, colonial or otherwise, were founded on trade, and commerce always prevailed.

Hong Kong, despite being a Crown Colony, was a Chinese city and, at the expense of life's many other facets, was fast becoming the region's pre-eminent trading hub. Over 98 per cent of the population were Chinese, and the vast majority of those were from the eminently entrepreneurial neighbouring region of Canton, whose inhabitants are largely responsible for building Chinatowns across the globe. Among this Cantonese cohort was Luke's father, Luke Cheukman, who made the short journey across Victoria Harbour to pursue his career as an investor initially in the ferries that plied the seas between Canton, Macau and Hong Kong, and then, among other ventures, in the city's thriving Chinese newspaper industry. Business prospered and enabled his family to settle in the district of Wanchai, nestled between central Hong Kong and the settlement's sporting heart of Happy Valley ringed by its inevitable British Racecourse.

Luke Cheukman's learned upbringing had taught him that with wealth comes responsibility. As a respected elder in his community he supported local charities and

even established a school for up to 60 local children, Meng Yang Xue Tang, in the old Chinese settlement of Wong Nai Chung, which he managed until the late 1920s when, nearing 70 years old, he arranged for it to be taken over by the government. Luke Him Sau was born on 29 July 1904, only days after his father had moved to 1A Wong Nai Chung Village in Happy Valley. The home was only temporary while his father had a permanent house built nearby at 4 Hau Fung Lane, Ship Street, on the steep slopes of Wanchai. Completed in 1910, the Luke family home was a sprawling and multilayered house, in an eclectic Chinese style fused with Western features, that clung to the mountainside forming an Escher-like landscape – an architectural extension of the subtropical foliage that invades and blankets the rocky terrain in this sultry climate. A warren of steps, walkways and terraces richly decorated with elaborately carved wooden latticework and covered with glazed tiles trimmed with characteristically upturned eaves connected a series of pavilions and larger stone and concrete structures to create a meandering complex that, like the city itself, was a hybrid of East and West. As was typical of a prosperous Chinese home of the time, the Luke household was a place of business, scholarly endeavour and familial retreat for an extended and growing family. The Luke home, although physically expansive, was in principle similar to a conventional Chinese courtyard house. The front portion comprised public areas for meeting and hosting guests: namely a hall, reception and dining room. Behind this frontage



Luke Cheukman and guests, 4 Hau Fung Lane, Ship Street, Wanchai, Hong Kong, 1920s. The group are standing outside one of the several pavilions that link the internal and external elements of the family home.



The Luke family home, 4 Hau Fung Lane, Ship Street, Wanchai, Hong Kong, 1920s.

Luke Cheukman, Hong Kong, c 1910s. The head of the family at his desk in his library at the family home.



was the nucleus of the home, the courtyard, which in the Luke household comprised a warren of external terraces, balconies, and the miniature world of the Chinese landscaped garden framed by screens and variously shaped doors and windows. Around this intricate scene were the private areas of the home, the study and library, kitchen, and the living quarters of the immediate and extended family and domestic helpers.

The roles adopted by Luke's parents within the home were typical of the traditional Chinese household. Luke's father was responsible for its reputation, overseeing matters of business, hosting guests, and ensuring the family's financial security. His mother, Hung Shauching (1866–

1931), was responsible for familial affairs and the efficient running of the house, which principally involved organising the various domestic workers who performed the myriad daily tasks required to maintain a comparatively affluent Chinese home of this size: waiting on guests, cooking, cleaning and attending to the needs of the family's five children and many grandchildren.

Luke's mother and father had three sons and two daughters. Two boys were born first, followed by the two girls. Luke was the last and considerably younger than his siblings. Luke's eldest brother, Kean Fai, became a doctor and had 10 children. He travelled throughout China from the northeast where he was sent to combat a plague



The male members of the Luke family, Hong Kong, early 1920s. Luke's father, Luke Cheukman, is seated with the two brothers-in-law (left), two older brothers, Luke Kean Fai and Luke Kean Ching, (centre), and Luke Him Sau (far right).

epidemic in Manchuria, to the south, where he settled in Macau. He had to retreat to Hong Kong briefly during the Cultural Revolution and died in the 1970s. The second brother became a railway engineer and had three children. Luke's sisters, as was customary for females in early 20th-century China, did not receive a formal education but were expected to marry into a respectable household and raise a family. His eldest sister, Shun King, had three children while his youngest sister, Fong King, married a medical doctor who was one of the first graduates of Hong Kong University's school of medicine, and they had six children. Before Luke had even started a family he had 22 nieces and nephews from four siblings.

Luke was a sickly baby, but he showed great promise intellectually and perhaps for this reason was favoured by his father who, though a highly respected and successful businessman, never lost his reverence for scholarship. When the child of any reputable Chinese family reached the age of three or four it was the convention that they would be privately tutored. Through a family friend, Luke's father was recommended a renowned imperial scholar, Wu Daorong, who specialised in poetry and calligraphy, two uniquely Chinese art forms that Luke would grow to love and practise throughout his life. Luke's private tuition in Chinese from such a young age would have a profound impact not only on his education, but also on his life and his career as an architect.

Luke Kean Fai, Hong Kong, late 1910s. Luke's eldest brother, a trained doctor, with his wife and one of his 10 children in the courtyard garden of the family's home.



Luke attended Wanchai Primary School from the age of 10 and in 1918 took exams for the esteemed Queen's College, Hong Kong's first public secondary school, coming top in Chinese and fourth in English. Despite these achievements, his father chose to send him to St Joseph's College, one of the city's top schools, which he attended from 1919 to 1922. St Joseph's College had been founded by Catholic missionaries and was a typical product of its colonial setting, priming Chinese pupils for further education at UK universities. It was popular too among the Portuguese community from Macau, with whom the Chinese boys would always feud. At the end of the school day the Catholic priests would have to lead each faction off in opposite directions to avoid

them settling the day's scores in the street. As a means of self-defence, Luke learned kung fu and became an able student of this martial art. With the exception of two native teachers giving some instruction in Cantonese, Chinese pupils were taught in English, the only language tolerated in the playground and in classroom. It was while at St Joseph's that Luke was introduced to the world of architecture through the special courses it offered in geometrical and architectural drawing, for which the school was renowned. Luke excelled at school, and his earnest and scholarly disposition – which would determine the course of his life and his architectural output – was rewarded with the presentation of a solid gold watch upon his graduation in 1922.

INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

Unsure of the direction his career should take, Luke's decision in 1923 to pursue the still-embryonic profession of architecture received the support of his father, who paid \$2,000 for a four-year apprenticeship with the British firm of architects, civil engineers and surveyors, Denison, Ram & Gibbs. In the early 1920s, architecture was still largely the preserve of foreigners in China and remained a relatively mysterious profession among prospective Chinese students, whether resident in the colonies, treaty ports or Chinese-administered areas. Architecture had no precedent in China.

This so-called ‘art of building’ was not even considered an art, but rather a utilitarian trade associated with various types of woodwork. The closest artisan to building was *Jiang Ren*, the person responsible for constructing palaces and temples. However, in China’s strictly ordered traditional society it made no difference whether one fabricated palaces or cooking utensils, they still occupied the rank of carpenter and could never be considered comparable to those engaged in the exalted arts of poetry, painting or music. As China confronted modernity and began to break free of these ancient strictures, it was through engineering that most Chinese were introduced to architecture.

Engineering graduates greatly outnumbered architects in China and had started travelling overseas for education long before their architectural colleagues. China’s first engineering graduate was Zhan Tianyou (1861–1919) who received a PhD in Civil Engineering from Yale University and in so doing helped to elevate the standing of the relatively unknown subject of engineering in Chinese society at the turn of the century. In 1912, as China became a Republic, Zhan helped establish the Chinese Society of Engineers (Zhong Hua (later Guo) Gong Chong Shi Xue Hui), an institution that promoted the cause of engineering and preceded its architectural equivalent (of which Luke would one day be president) by 15 years. Engineering’s earlier emergence in China and its warm endorsement by government meant architecture consistently lagged behind. It is no surprise,

then, that China’s first trained architects emerged from engineering backgrounds. Shen Liyuan (1890–1951), for example, studied engineering at a technical school in Naples in 1909 before switching to architecture and returning to China in 1915 to establish his own firm, Hua Xing Architecture and Engineering, in the northern treaty port of Tianjin.

The ‘first generation’ of Chinese architects was forced to make individual, disparate and often desperate efforts to receive a foreign education. Until Europe and the United States of America



Luke Fong King, Hong Kong, 1910s. Luke’s sister in traditional Chinese dress, including double-heeled shoes and bound feet.



Luke's mother, Hung Shauching, Hong Kong, c 1910s. Dressed in richly embroidered traditional Chinese clothes, concealing double-heeled shoes and bound feet.

became viable destinations for significant numbers of Chinese students (which did not happen for architecture until the 1920s), Japan was the obvious and only choice for most prospective students. A larger proportion of China's early architectural graduates were trained in Japan than occurred in the 'second generation' who enjoyed considerable state support, particularly through the Boxer Indemnity Fund which had been set up after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 as a means of directing China's crippling compensation payments towards a mutually beneficial cause, notably education. Consequently, China's first taste of

architectural education came from Japan as a version of Western pedagogy received second-hand. Among the first Chinese architecture students to benefit from this mediated modern form of Japanese education were Liu Shiyang (1893–1973) and Liu Dunzhen (1897–1968), both of whom attended the Tokyo Higher Technical School in the 1910s and returned to China in the early 1920s, together establishing the Hua Hai Architectural Practice in Shanghai in 1923 – the same year Luke began his apprenticeship at Denison, Ram & Gibbs.

By the 1920s Denison, Ram & Gibbs were among the old guard of British establishments in Asia, those early firms created by enterprising engineers and architects bored by the mundanity of municipal life in Britain's industrial cities and in search of something more exciting. These were the men who were enticed overseas by the heady cocktail of opportunity, remuneration and adventure. Those who washed up in China laid the filaments of the modern industrial world – railways, tramlines, telegraphs, docks, power stations, water treatment plants and gasworks. Denison, Ram & Gibbs were cast in this mould. Albert Denison and Edward A Ram (1858–1946) established the firm in 1896 – Denison the engineer and Ram the architect. As Ram's apprentice, Luke continued an esteemed architectural lineage. Ram had been the pupil of George Somers Clarke (1822–1882), who in turn had been the pupil of Charles Barry (1795–1860) and had worked with him on his most famous project, the Palace of

Westminster, better known as London's Houses of Parliament. Ram qualified in 1885 and worked in Westminster before travelling to Belgium and Holland and then to Asia in 1889, where he later met Denison. In 1900, Denison & Ram were joined by Lawrence Gibbs (1865–unknown), a civil engineer who had come to Hong Kong in 1890 as an employee of the Public Works Department. The firm continued to work on many of Hong Kong's major public projects, including the Kowloon waterworks that Gibbs had supervised when at the Public Works Department.

When Luke joined the office, the firm was finishing the first major project to be built on one of Hong Kong's most picturesque stretches of beach along its southern coastline known as Repulse Bay (formerly Shallow Water Bay). Denison, Ram & Gibbs had been commissioned by Hong Kong Hotels Ltd, the oldest hotel company in Asia, to build a new luxury hotel and the city's first beach resort, the Repulse Bay Hotel, perched on the mountainside overlooking the bay. In 1918, the hotel's Managing Director, James Taggart (1885–unknown), who would go on to revolutionise the hotel industry in Shanghai, had struck a deal with the Municipal Government whereby he would build the hotel if the Municipality would lay a road across the island to what was then a relatively remote bay for the city's small but growing fleet of motor cars.¹⁰ When the hotel opened on New Year's Day 1920, there was still no direct road from the city, prompting the architects to write a letter



Luke Him Sau, Hong Kong, c 1925. Photographed in traditional Chinese dress, the inscription reads: 'For my Love, Shukching, to keep.'

of complaint to the Governor, Sir Reginald Edward Stubbs: 'The Hotel has already spent very large sums of money in developing the district ... the road which it was promised would be commenced in 1920 and pushed through, with the utmost expedition, has not been made.'¹¹ By 1924 the road was complete and, in acknowledgement of the Governor's efforts, was named Stubbs Road. The Repulse Bay Hotel would have been one of the first projects Luke encountered when he began work as an architect's apprentice and, decades later, he would return to Repulse Bay as one of China's most experienced architects and help transform this charming retreat into a thriving community and enviable seaside resort.

Luke's apprenticeship at Denison, Ram & Gibbs occurred during a time when the architectural community in China, much like the country's political landscape, although in flux, was approaching a rare period of composure and on the brink of transformation. Luke's was a generation that succeeded an intermediary generation of Chinese scholars, such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei, nurtured on Confucianism but exposed also to Western scientific texts, and willing to explore the opportunity presented by the modern world in which they were fully immersed. This preceding generation had blazed a trail in championing the notion of progress in China. Typical of this generation was the scholar Yan Fu, who conveyed his perspicacious perspective on progress in his famous statement in 1895:

The greatest and most irreconcilable difference between Chinese and Western thinking is that the Chinese love the past and neglect the present, while the Westerners strive in the present to surpass the past. The Chinese believe that to revolve from order to disorder, from ascension to decline, is the natural way of heaven and of human affairs. The Westerners believe, as the ultimate principle of all learning and government, in infinite, daily progress, in advance that will not sink into decline, in order that will not revert to disorder.¹²

Yan translated many of the texts that were vital in laying the ground for a complete

reconceptualisation of China's philosophical, political, economic and historical understanding: Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (1893), Herbert Spencer's *Study of Sociology* (1873), John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859), Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) and Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). He also published *Tian Yan Lun (The Theory of Evolution)* in 1898, which introduced Darwinian theory to the Chinese. Yan's translations were essential prerequisites to the radical New Culture Movement (began 1916) and May Fourth Movement (began 1919; see chapter 3) that depended on and advocated the notion of progress. The New Culture Movement arose amid growing disenchantment with the new Republic and in protest at China's continued debility which had been sorely exposed when Japan had issued its Twenty-One Demands in 1915, among which was its claim on the German territory in Shandong province and its port city of Qingdao. Where earlier reformers raised on Confucianism had based their ideas on that custom, the New Culture Movement viewed Confucianism as culpable for China's sorry condition and key to its failure to modernise. While it abhorred imperialism and rejected outright Occidentalism, there was a growing conviction that salvation would come from Western pedagogy. Luke's generation, unlike that before him, was raised on these revolutionary ideals and was thus liberated from the ancient strictures that were accused of shackling China and denying its passage to modernity.

It was among this generation that, from the early 1920s, the second wave of Chinese architects began leaving for formal education overseas, mostly in the West. Many of them would become Luke's colleagues and lifelong friends, despite the cataclysms that lay ahead for them personally, for their profession and for their country. By the 1920s, the single most popular destination for Chinese students to receive an overseas architectural education was the University of Pennsylvania, which opened its doors to more Chinese students than any other university outside China until the 1980s. The University of Pennsylvania's architectural programme was directed by Paul Philippe Cret (1876–1945) under the Dean, Warren Powers Laird (1861–1948). Between them, Cret and Laird dominated architectural teaching at the University for half a century. Laird was Professor of Architecture from 1881 to 1932 and Dean of the School of Fine Arts from 1920 to 1932, and he appointed Cret as Assistant Professor of Design in the School of Architecture in 1903. Except for military service in France during the First World War, Cret remained at the University until his retirement in 1937.

The architectural course under Laird and Cret was based on the Parisian Beaux-Arts mould, but to assume this dominated the Chinese students' professional outlook is too simplistic a conclusion. Cret did much to instil the Beaux-Arts influence in architectural education in the USA, but his admiration for the Beaux-Arts tradition did not make him a traditionalist. He,

like so many educators of his generation, was acutely aware of the apparent conflict between tradition and modernity in architecture; and, while he stood by Beaux-Arts methods, he distanced himself from the radicalism of either camp. He accepted the transitional period that Western architecture and architectural education was in, and advocated a 'new classicism', wherein beauty could be achieved 'through good proportions rather than through picturesque'¹³ – a position that would mirror Luke's educational experiences in London and his professional outlook, as well as that of many of his generation who would return to China to design the country's first 'modern Chinese' buildings. In a speech titled 'Modernists and Conservatives' delivered to the T Square Club, an architectural group in Philadelphia, Cret claimed that men were divided into two 'antagonistic' groups in society: those who are 'perfectly satisfied with things as they are and those who have this turn of mind which urges them to try if they could not be arranged in some other way ... modernists and conservatives'.¹⁴ For Luke's generation, there was only one realistic option – and that was not conservatism.

The first Chinese architectural student to enrol at the University of Pennsylvania was Zhu Bin (Chu Pin) (1896–1971) in 1918. Zhu would return to China to form an architectural practice in 1924 with his brother-in-law Guan Songsheng (Kwan Sungsing) (1892–1960), whose close association with Chiang Kai Shek would land

the practice many jobs with the Nationalist Government in the years ahead. Their practice, Kwan, Chu & Associates, would later enlist Yang Tingbao (1901–1982) (see chapter 3), a contemporary and friend of the great American modernist and Pennsylvania professor Louis Kahn (1901–1974) and the most able and decorated of all Chinese graduates to attend the University's School of Architecture. Having joined the University in 1921, Yang received his Bachelor of Architecture in 1924 and his Masters in 1925, winning many prizes including the Emerson Prize, the Municipal Art Society Prize and the Warren Prize. After graduation, he was hired by Cret, who, it is said, favoured Yang above all the Chinese students,¹⁵ and participated in the design of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

As Yang was leaving the University of Pennsylvania to embark on the modern Chinese equivalent of a Grand Tour of Europe, a young Cantonese student, Wu Jingqi (1900–1943), was just arriving. Wu was schooled at the Canton Christian College established in Guangzhou by American missionaries in 1888. He enrolled in architecture at the University of Pennsylvania in 1925, completing his undergraduate degree in 1930 and his Masters in June 1931. After returning to China, he would later work closely with Luke in Shanghai. (The subject of their partnership is covered in chapter 3.)

Two years ahead of Wu were three Chinese students who had arrived at the University of Pennsylvania together and, like Wu, would

later achieve eminence in Chinese architectural circles, as well as becoming close friends of Luke: Chen Zhi (1902–2002) and his classmate from Tsinghua Xue Tang (later Tsinghua University) Liang Sicheng (1901–1972), and Lin Huiyin (1904–1955), a gifted writer aptly described by a friend as 'not one character, but a historical process'.¹⁶ Chen Zhi, or 'Benjamin' as he was known by his Western colleagues, was the most easy-going of all the Chinese students, assimilating to life in the West and playing in a jazz band that performed at the University's Glee Club. By his own admission, Chen was 'interested in too many things, particularly in concerts and operas and therefore was a lazy student'.¹⁷ He may have considered himself lazy, but he was also gifted and spent a year in the New York office of Ely Kahn (1884–1972) before returning to China in 1929.

Liang Sicheng shared the same ancestral home as Luke – Xin Hui – though he was not actually born there on account of his father, the banished reformer Liang Qichao's exile in Japan. Consequently, Liang had a comparatively privileged, albeit strict upbringing in Tokyo. The same could be said for Lin Huiyin, whose father, Lin Changmin (1876–1925), was a former Parliamentary Secretary General and Minister of Justice. Lin was born in Hangzhou in 1904, the same year as Luke, and, like Luke, was partially educated in London, where she lived from 1919 to 1921 with her father who was then serving as co-founder of China's delegation to the League of Nations. It was in London that



Lin, when attending St Mary's seminary school for girls, 'one day found a schoolmate leaning over a drawing board and asked her what she was doing. The girl replied, "Drawing houses," and told her briefly something about the profession of architecture. Miss Lin was immediately swept away by an enthusiasm; this was "just what she wanted to learn".¹⁸ However, she would have to wait. In 1919, before she departed for London, her father had arranged with Liang Qichao to introduce her to his son, and their affiliation, despite her promiscuity, survived her two-year absence. Lin was already an avid and able writer and architecture, for her, complemented this natural talent perfectly. Upon returning to China in 1921 she 'had no difficulty in leading

Sicheng to the same decision. He had always loved drawing and had thought vaguely of a career as an artist. Architecture made sense to him and pursuing it together made sense to both.¹⁹ In 1923 Liang and Lin were formally engaged, though Liang's father forbade them to marry until they had completed their studies.

Lin was a starlet in Beijing's relatively small and fledgling cultural universe. She had become an active member of the modern literary Crescent Moon Society (Xin Yue She), published her first work (a translation of Oscar Wilde's 1891 short story *The Nightingale and the Rose*), written her first poems and short stories, and had helped to arrange the first major concert of Western classical music in Beijing, performed by the violinist Fritz Kreisler. Only weeks before her departure for America, she had been translator to the literary and musical polymath Rabindranath Tagore on his tour of China. Her natural charm and good looks made a great impression on many, not least Tagore who penned a poem to her:

The blue of the sky
Fell in love with the green of the earth
The breeze between them sighs 'Alas!'²⁰

Lin and Liang later became acquaintances of Luke's, but it was in Chongqing during the Second World War that they became friends. Like him, they were among the many skilled professionals who spent the Second World War in the relative safety but difficult conditions

Luke Him Sau and his wife Ng Shukching, Hong Kong, 1927. The newly married couple in the garden of the Luke family home at 4 Hau Fung Lane, Ship Street, Wanchai, Hong Kong.

of China's interior, far behind the front line with Japan. Despite the many obstacles, no other couple would do as much to champion architectural history and preservation in China, lifelong pursuits to which Lin and Liang ultimately gave their lives (see chapter 5). In the summer of 1924 the pair embarked on their architectural careers with Chen Zhi, the three heading for America – or, as Liang Qichao described it, 'Buddhist Hell ... more frightening than the thirteen torture chambers of hell'.²¹

Luke Him Sau, Hong Kong,
1925.



In the 1920s, as Liang, Lin, Chen and many other Chinese students were heading west to the various incarnations of Buddhist Hell, the country they were leaving behind was anything but Shangri-La. The decade following the fall of the Qing Dynasty was beset with cultural, political and military strife as China stuttered on without a viable government, though things were about to change. The Nationalist Army led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek was close to securing a victory over the various warlords who had marched into the power vacuum that opened up in 1912 and torn China apart with fratricidal conflict. The constellation of economic, political and cultural elements that would determine the next phase of Luke's life was beginning to take shape.

Luke was a reluctant son of empire, acutely aware from a young age of his place in this peculiar new world emerging between East and West. As the Chinese were beginning to get their house in order across Hong Kong's border, Luke knew that in this colonial ignominy the Chinese were third-class citizens in their native territory. The tiny fraction of Hong Kong's population that was non-Chinese formed the city's elite in a precipitous hierarchy – with the British on top and other foreign nationals on the rung below. Bearing witness to this iniquity and being conscious of its gravity made Luke's next decision all the more difficult to undertake.

However, growing up as a Chinese professional in the colonial and capitalist setting of Hong

Kong gave Luke a unique advantage. Having received an education in both traditional Chinese and colonial British systems placed him in a small but influential group of Chinese professionals who could see both sides of the cultural chasm separating East from West. Fluent in two languages, Luke's ambidextrous position assumed an architectural dimension that would later manifest itself in his approach to the irreconcilable yet persistent question of what constituted a modern Chinese architecture. His passage to an architectural education, even by the standards of China's disparate student population scattered across the globe, was unorthodox. While the first trained Chinese architects during the 1910s had tended to head east to the modern universities of Japan, the second generation in the 1920s, supported by state funding and reciprocal agreements, looked west to the famous schools of Europe and, in particular, the United States of America. As a resident of colonial Hong Kong and the favoured son of a wealthy merchant, an alternative route was open to Luke. In February 1927, after four years at Denison, Ram & Gibbs and only weeks after marrying his fiancée, Ng Shukching (1898–1996),²² a teacher and headmistress of a local school, Luke boarded a boat for England to study at the Architectural Association, a private architectural school in central London and the heart of empire.



Luke Him Sau (right), Hong Kong, 1927. Luke is seated in Western dress in January 1927, days before departing for England to study at the Architectural Association. The name of the man beside him is given on the back of the photograph as Tang; no further information on him is known.



Ng Shukching, Shanghai, 1930s. Luke's wife is photographed in a traditional Chinese *qipao* sporting a fashionable modern hairstyle and make-up, the combination of Chinese and international styles being a characteristic of pre-war Shanghai.

NOTES

- 1 Laurence Binyon, *Painting in the Far East*, Edward Arnold (London), 1908, p 6.
- 2 Macau, Xiamen and Taiwan were at different times exceptions to the general rule.
- 3 Fukuzawa Yukichi, 'Datsuaron', *Jiji Shimpō*, 16 March 1885. Fukuzawa was referring to Korea and China.
- 4 Liang Qichao, 'Wu Shi Nian Zhong Guo Jin Hua Lun' ('The Evolution of China in the Last 50 Years'), written in April 1922 and published in February 1923 for *Shen Bao's* (*Shanghai Daily's*) 50th Anniversary Special Edition (unpaginated).
- 5 The supplementary treaty was signed in Beijing on 21 July 1896 (see *Manchuria: Treaties and Agreements*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law, Pamphlet 44, Byron S Adams (Washington), 1921, p 3).
- 6 11 June to 21 September 1898.
- 7 The Bao Huang Hui was established in Vancouver, Canada, in 1899 and had milder objectives than the more radical and republican Tong Meng Hui, the forerunner of the Kuomintang.
- 8 Wang Yichu, *Chinese Intellectuals and the West 1872–1949*, University of North Carolina Press (Chapel Hill, North Carolina), 1966, p 59.
- 9 The United States of America, Austria and Hungary, Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia and Spain all possessed concessions in China at some point during its 'Hundred Years of Humiliation'.
- 10 Repulse Bay became accessible by car in 1917, when the coastal road via Pok Fu Lam, Aberdeen and Deep Water Bay finally reached Repulse Bay.
- 11 Quoted in Anthony Walker and Stephen Rowlinson, *The Building of Hong Kong: Constructing Hong Kong through the Ages*, Hong Kong University Press (Hong Kong), 1990, p 52.
- 12 Quoted in James Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts), 1983, p 51.
- 13 Paul Philippe Cret, 'Modern Movements in Architecture' (May 1933), *The Architectural Forum*, August 1933, pp 91–4.
- 14 Paul Philippe Cret, 'Modernists and Conservatives', speech delivered to the T Square Club, Philadelphia, 19 November 1927, University of Pennsylvania Archives, Philadelphia.
- 15 Wilma Fairbank interview notes with Yang Tingbao in Beijing, 16 October 1980, Fairbank family archive.
- 16 Letter from YL Chin to John and Wilma Fairbank, January 1936, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.
- 17 Letter from Chen Zhi to Wilma Fairbank, 28 November 1979, Fairbank family archive.
- 18 Wilma Fairbank written notes, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.
- 19 Wilma Fairbank, *Liang and Lin: Partners in Exploring China's Architectural Past*, University of Pennsylvania Press (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 1994, p 18.
- 20 Unpublished poem in Holly Fairbank personal archive, quoted in *ibid* p 22.
- 21 Quoted in VK Ting (ed), *Chronicle Biography of Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*, World Publishing Company (Taipei), 1958, pp 676–8.
- 22 Luke Him Sau and Ng Shukching were married in Hop Yat Tong, Hong Kong on 25 November 1936.