

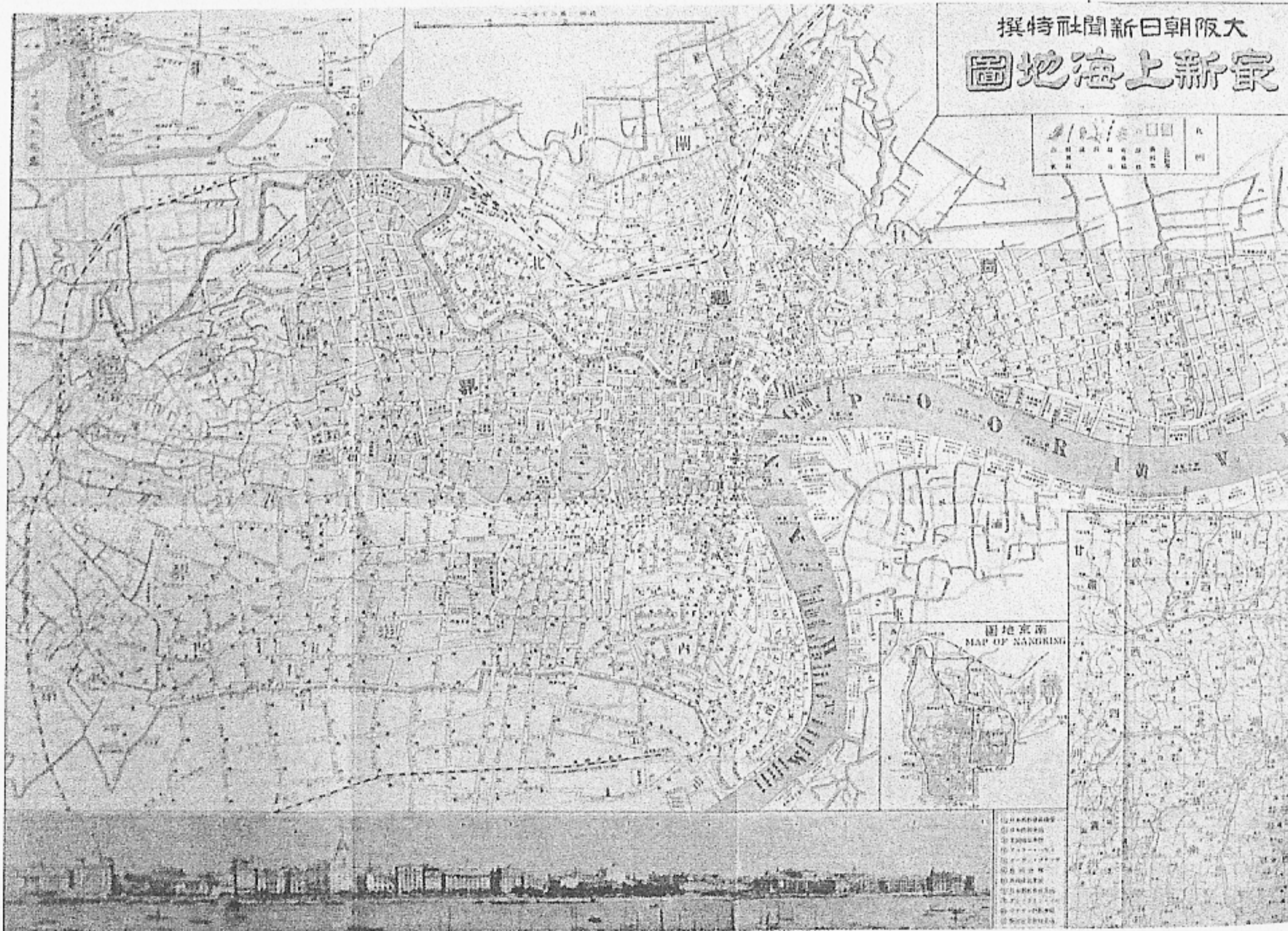


# Anti-Design

Shanghai would have been a great city had there never been a foreigner in the place [and] would continue to be a great city even if the foreigners should vacate their modern buildings and go home.

*China Weekly Review*, 4 December 1926

Below Japanese map of Shanghai



For all the glamour, adventure and allure that Shanghai evoked during the 1920s and 1930s, the introductory pages of a 1941 guidebook exemplified the city's swift decline. Shanghai's bars, clubs, hum of business, and breathtaking structures were relegated to inconsequential tidbits as visitors journeying up the Whuangpu could 'behold the shell-holed factory stacks and shell and fire torn structures on either bank'. Shanghai, it seemed, was reaching its lowest ebb.

Despite bouts of optimism, time stood still for Shanghai from the early 1940s. The Second World War had barely ended before China's civil war condemned the Nationalist government to Taiwan, heralding a Communist government and the People's Republic of China. Shanghai's capitalist character and liberal spirit proved incongruous with the new mould, forcing its once formidable economic prowess to be reined in under a veil of political absolutism, from which it would emerge in tatters over half a century later.

Through neglect, inexperience and devastating political expedience, Shanghai regressed – buildings were not maintained and little new was constructed. While architecture and design are practices concerned with progress, their absence in Shanghai from 1949 was significant not only in the paucity of new structures but also in the failure of the political system that prevented their application. This reached its nadir in the long, dark years of the Cultural Revolution – a period of anti-design in an age of devolution, where society almost but not entirely consumed itself.

## The Second World War

From the end of 1941, following their occupation of the International Settlement, the Japanese administration at first honoured the rights of foreigners. The Municipal Council continued its duties for a short while, maintaining the illusion of relative normality where 'Britons and Americans could mingle with enemies and friends alike'.<sup>1</sup> However, this state of limbo proved short-lived. The Allied members on the Council resigned in the opening days of 1942 against a backdrop of Allied capitulation throughout Asia. With business interests in Shanghai terminated or under Japanese control, the priority for most foreign residents in Shanghai was survival. Some were repatriated in the middle of 1942, but by the end of the year the first round-ups began for internment in the 'civilian assembly centres'. The first and worst of the centres was the military Haiphong Road Camp, reserved for 'political suspects, often former Municipal Police officers and ex-servicemen'.<sup>2</sup> Another seven camps catered for over 8,000 foreign civilians. Internees were given ten days to pack their belongings and register at Holy Trinity Cathedral, which became an assembly point before individuals were assigned their destination.

The conditions in the civilian camps were bad but bearable and as time passed the internees created liveable communities, though their captivity could not be compared with the weeks of confinement endured by Allied diplomats following Pearl Harbor. They awaited their fate at the expense of the Japanese government in the city's premiere hotels such as the Cathay and Metropole.

As the repatriations and internments continued, Shanghai's infamously stratified social structure was turned on its head. The citizens of Allied nations had been condemned to the bottom of the social ladder and bore

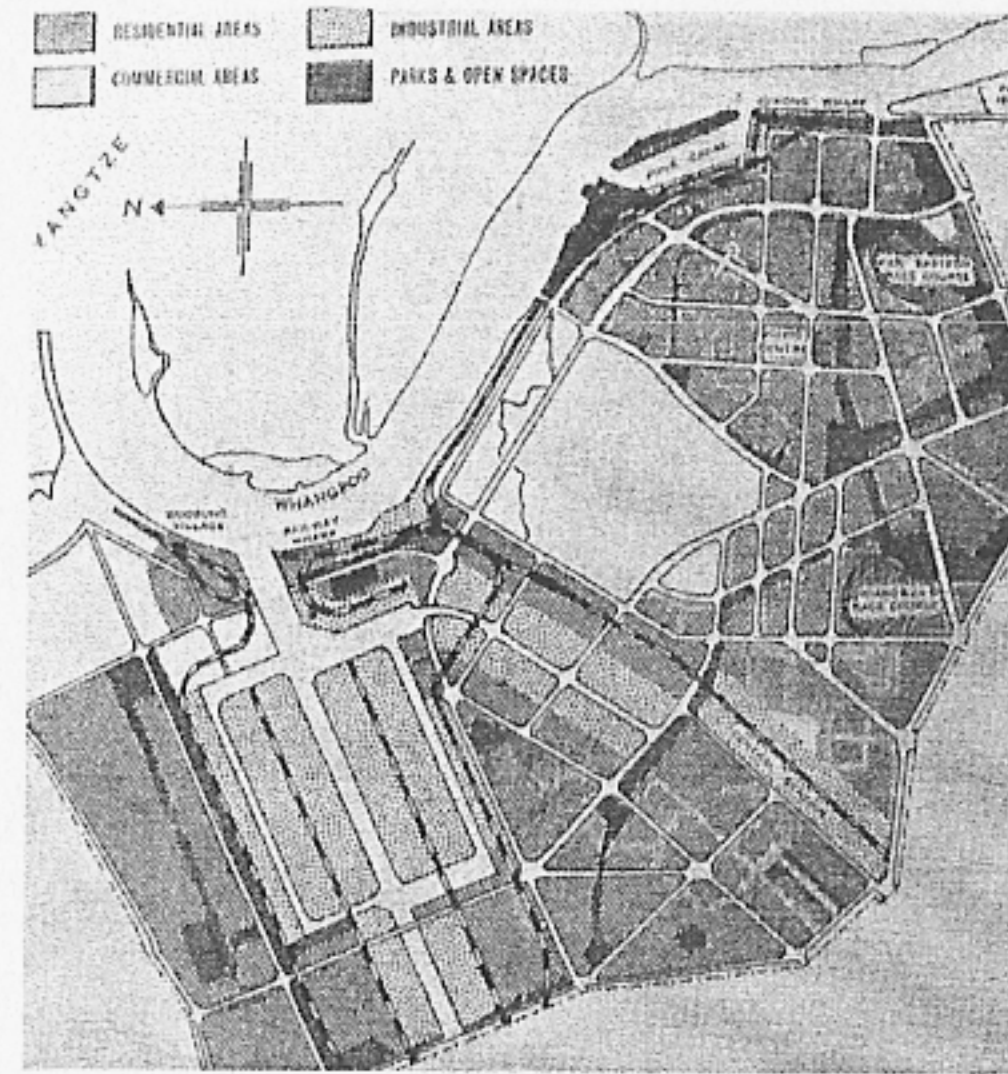
armbands marking their status, while citizens of neutral countries acted as mediators and Axis powers enjoyed newfound privileges as favoured nations of Japan. Shanghai's clubs, businesses and institutions were commandeered by the Japanese and distributed among their various imperial offices. Hamilton House became an office for the Kempeitai, the much feared Japanese military police, headed from August 1942 by the dreaded Kinoshita. The Shanghai Club was appropriated by the Japanese Naval Landing Party. Jardine & Matheson's offices on the Bund became the Japanese Naval Intelligence Bureau. Even Hitler's propaganda ministry joined the free for all and found a home in the city's tallest building, the Park Hotel. While the inevitable confiscation of property meant that many of Shanghai's most famous landmarks assumed different roles under the new administration, the most terrifying changes occurred in lesser known establishments. Seemingly innocuous addresses, such as 76 Jessfield Road and Bridge House, a former hostel on the northern banks of Suzhou Creek, became institutions of torture and abuse so cruel that 'some victims implored the Japanese to kill them in order to end their suffering'.<sup>3</sup>

The Japanese authorities had also to contend with the internment of thousands of European Jews. Rendered officially stateless by German law in November 1941, the Shanghai Jews faced an uncertain fate. After much deliberation, it was decided in May 1943 that this group of approximately 20,000 'stateless refugees' would be confined to an area of Hongkou known as a *shitei chiku*, an area that was 'neither a ghetto nor jail, but an area which is full of hope' (see map pages 8–9).<sup>4</sup> From August 1943, Jews needing to exit the *shitei chiku* had to obtain passes from the infamous and appalling Japanese official, Ghoya, self-proclaimed 'King of the Jews' and notorious psychopath. Life in Hongkou throughout the war proved primitive, but, like most other foreigners, the Jews, or 'Jude-men' – as the Chinese call them, managed to eke out a living in order to survive their ordeals, transforming one of Shanghai's poorest areas into 'a kind of tourist attraction'.<sup>5</sup>

For others, survival was far from assured. Life in Shanghai during the Second World War descended into a morass of anarchy and political struggle. Nationalists and Communists fought one another and both fought the Japanese. Private armies of Sikhs, White Russians and Chinese were hired to do what the Municipal Police had long since lost the will or capacity to do, while enjoying the opportunity for retribution against their former paymasters, under whom they had forever been racially segregated at work. No one was safe, not least complicit Chinese officials working for the Japanese or Chinese patriots blacklisted by the puppet regime in Nanjing. The formerly esteemed New Asia Hotel (114) in Hongkou became home to Shanghai's 'Yellow Way Society'. This group of gangsters collaborated with the Japanese and 'used the

Previous pages Cultural Revolution poster depicting the Revolutionaries and Red Guard parading outside the Worker's Headquarters by the former racecourse

Right The New Asia Hotel



Left The Japanese plan for Shanghai

of the Home Department of the Japanese government and the army and was based on the former Civic Centre scheme of the 1930s. The proposal, like its predecessor, intended to draw influence away from the foreign settlements and was put forward as a plan of China's 'Reformed Government', but in reality it was a Japanese plan employing Japanese companies and serving the Japanese population in Shanghai, which was expected to reach 300,000 by the end of the 1940s. One of the more drastic schemes involved the complete razing of the former International Settlement from the Bund to its former western boundary, to be replaced by a monumental central east-west axis of broad roads, state buildings and gardens overlooking a reorganised Pudong. The architect's plan was as ludicrous as Japan's vision of world domination, and equally fruitless.

#### Allied liberation

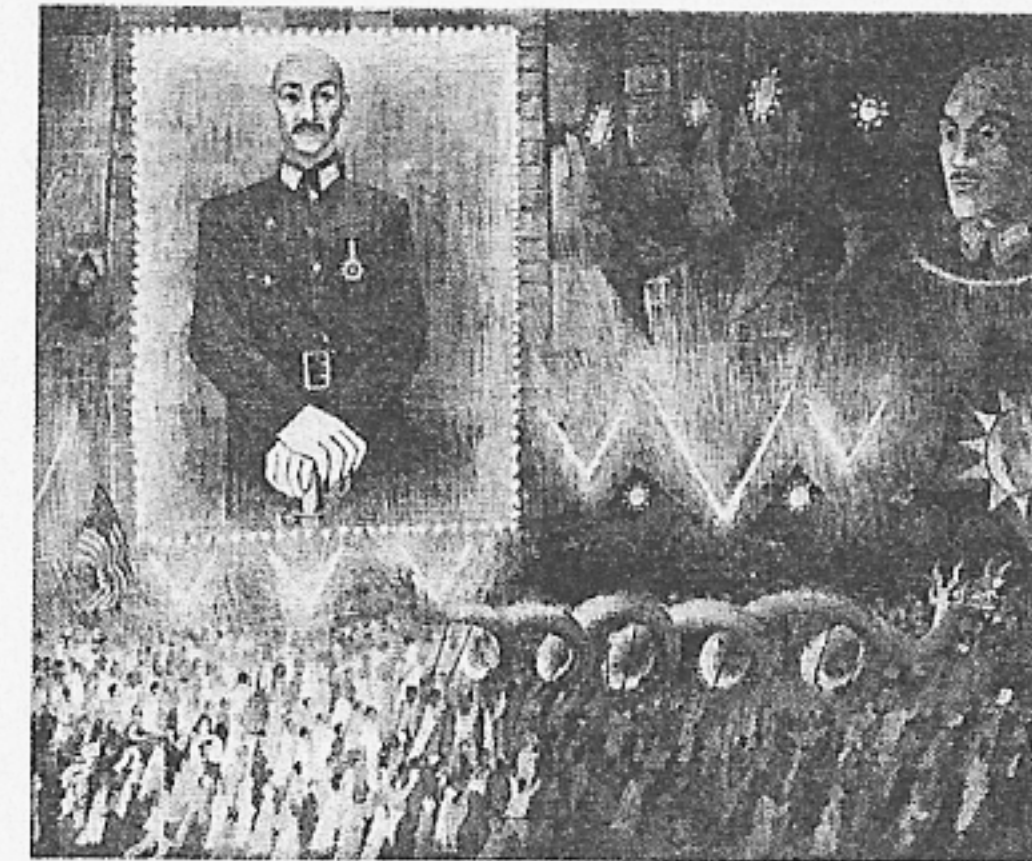
Japan had little time to implement any of its schemes for Shanghai. On 7 September 1945, following the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Shanghai was surrendered by Japan. Despite the united front presented by the Nationalists and Communists in their fight against Japan, the Nationalists quickly filled the power vacuum after the war, taking control of China's major cities, but losing out on much of the war bounty that was taken over by the Communists in northern China. Chiang Kai Shek and the Nationalist government had control of China's greatest prize, but not the means to retain it.

Returning foreigners faced a city in which they no longer enjoyed special privileges and in which their former homes were looted or in ruins. Many, broken in spirit and in health, decided then that their future lay not in Shanghai, but in the country stated on their passports – a place that some had never seen. Others chose suicide. A small minority of the various refugee communities stayed behind, but most made their way to America, Canada, Australia, the Philippines, or

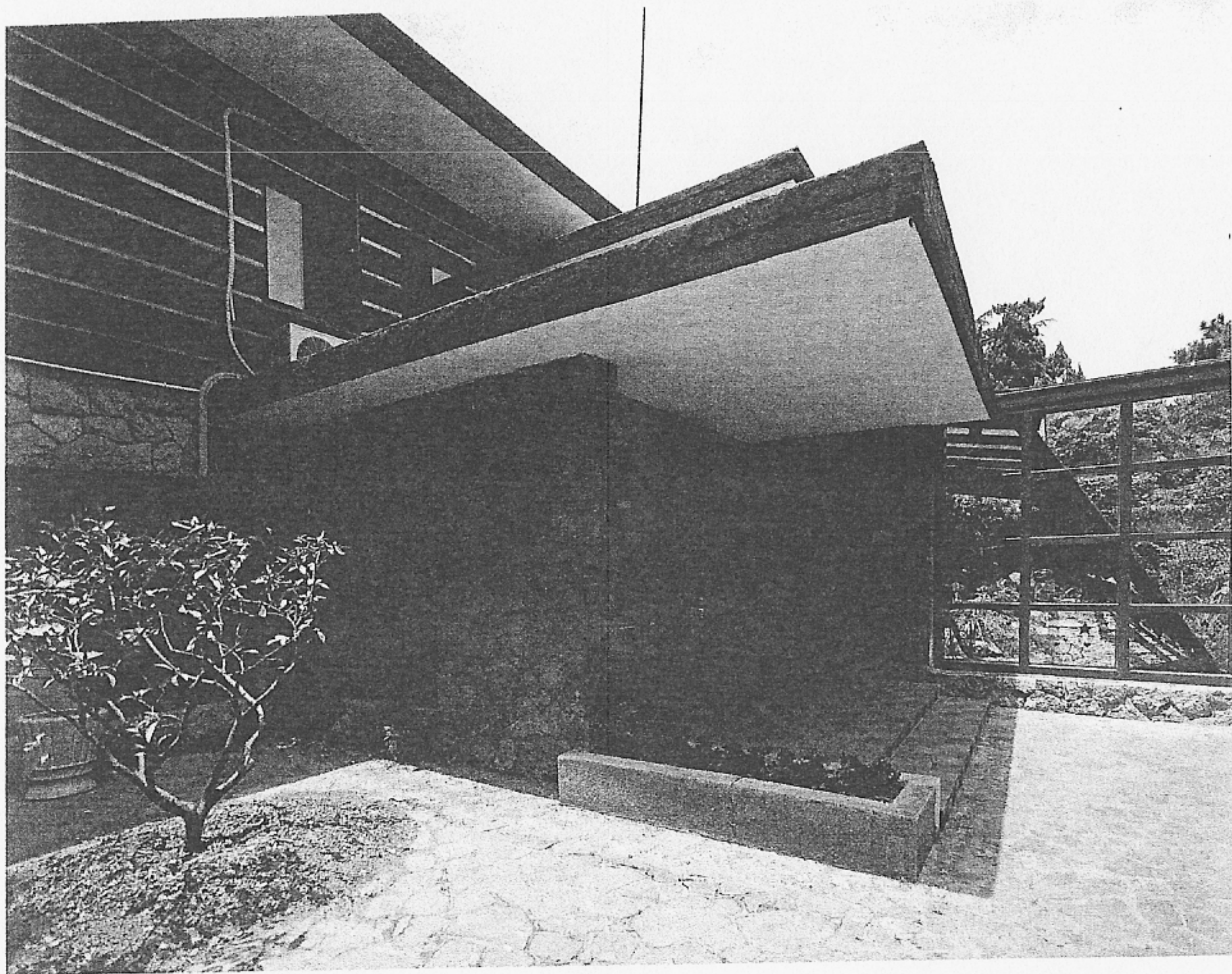
bathroom for the decapitation of Chinese who refused to play ball with conquerors and puppets.' For those with a hint of freedom of movement, international espionage provided one way to strike a retaliatory blow at the Japanese administration, while others chose to collaborate with their captors.

The start of 1943 saw Shanghai become a free city for the first time in 100 years, at least on paper. America and Britain rescinded their extraterritorial rights to Chiang's government in Chongqing on 11 and 13 January 1943 respectively, and the French Vichy government followed suit on 30 July, by revoking France's rights under China's puppet regime. France formally abandoned extraterritoriality with the Chongqing government on 11 February 1946. However, Shanghai's real rulers, having assumed control over a veritable hornets' nest, were struggling to maintain their supremacy. As the tide of war started to turn against the Axis powers, insurgency increased. The Park Hotel's renowned restaurant on the 14th floor was the venue for a bombing on 4 May 1944, which killed several Japanese officers. A year later, Hongkou was once again the site of the worst incidence of bombing in Shanghai. On 17 July 1945, American planes attacking Japanese positions in Hongkou missed their targets. According to the memoirs of eyewitness Ernest Heppner, the bombs, landing in one of the most densely populated areas on earth, killed at least 30 Jewish refugees, 300 Japanese and an estimated 4,000 Chinese, and left over 700 refugees and thousands of Chinese homeless.

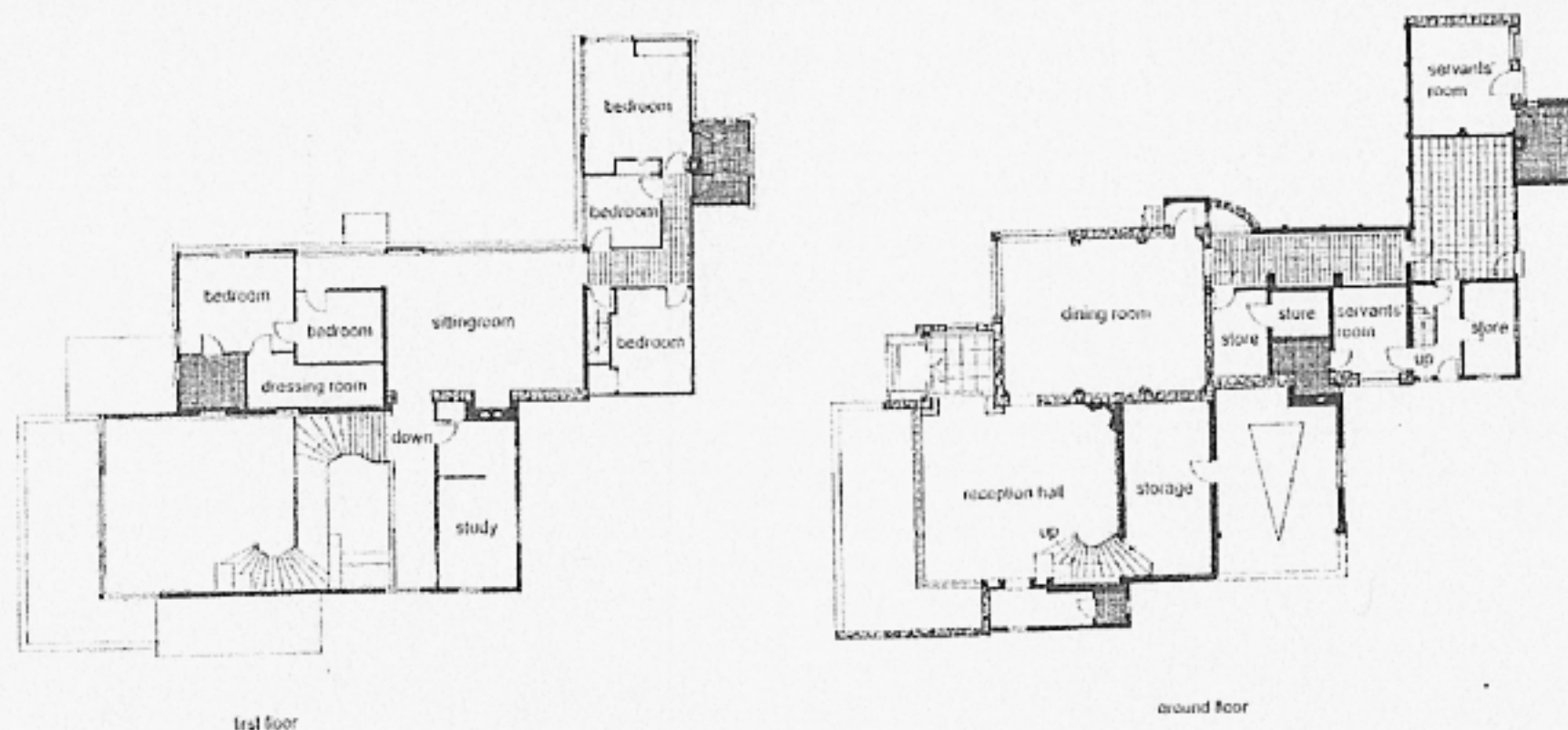
As the destruction caused by war weighed heavily on Shanghai's tired population, construction in Shanghai during the Second World War stalled. The Japanese drew up several grandiose plans for the city – more symbolic than practical. The most realistic plan was produced in 1939 by engineers



Left Post-Second World War celebrations with portraits of Chiang Kai Shek



Above and right Shanghai's progressive Modern era was interrupted by the Second World War with few notable Modernist buildings built in the 1940s. This villa on the outskirts of Shanghai, designed by Wang Min Xin in 1948, is one of the exceptions



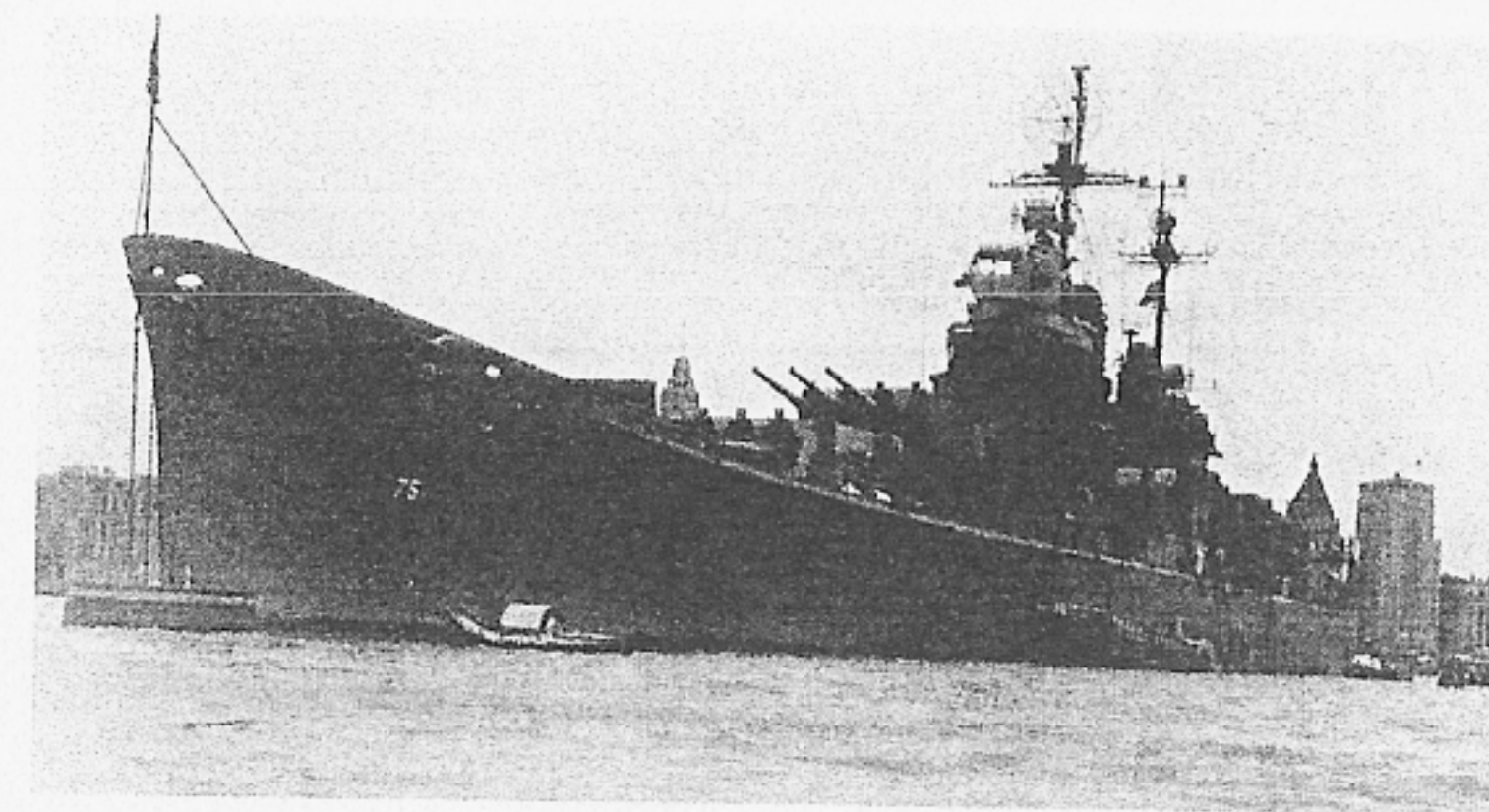
back to their former homes in Europe. After 1948, the Jews also had the choice of moving to Israel. There were also those who believed Shanghai would rise again and was approaching 'the biggest boom you can possibly imagine'.<sup>8</sup>

With the economy in tatters, industry at a standstill and hyperinflation producing China's first \$100,000 banknote, such assertions seemed preposterous. However, just at this time when Shanghai faced bankruptcy, 50,000 American GIs arrived on the city's doorstep, with weeks of unspent pay and a determination to have a good time. As the American dollar restored life to the city, even the old trading houses and banks resumed a certain semblance of business. The Hongkong and Shanghai Bank found its 'lucky lions' in a godown and resumed business in its palatial residence on the Bund, while Jardine & Matheson created order from the chaos wrought to its wide-ranging business interests, and quenched Shanghai's thirst by resuscitating the Shanghai Brewery. The sense of revival, combined with huge grants in aid from the United Nations and the United States, created an atmosphere of 'riotous abundance'.<sup>9</sup> One American businessman boasted in *Fortune Magazine*: 'You watch. Shanghai will snap back faster than any city in the world. You won't know the place in a year,' echoing the famous words of the Nationalist government's finance minister, Soong Tze Wen: 'We must make Shanghai the show window of the New China.'

However, beyond the blustering and far from the American-funded shallow economic miracle, the reality for the Chinese was unemployment, starvation and hyperinflation in the face of appalling governmental corruption and fiscal negligence. In 1944, the US dollar had been worth 20 Chinese Yuan, but by 1948 it had topped a million. Thousands of homeless Chinese slept and died on Shanghai's streets, to be collected by trucks each morning and dumped like refuse in the city's outskirts. Such scenes played into the hands of the Communists and their army of over a million soldiers led by Mao Tse Dong.

#### Communist liberation

By April 1949, the whole of China north of the Yangtze was under Communist control and Shanghai was under curfew. Without an extraterritorial cloak for protection, foreigners in Shanghai with their considerable business interests once again feared for their livelihoods. By May, the Nationalist army started moving into defensive positions, occupying key vantage points provided by the tall apartment buildings and hotels such as Cavendish Court and the Cathay, while the nightclubs such as Paramount, Ciro's and the Majestic were commandeered for army barracks. Barbed wire and sandbags were put up all over the city, just as they had been when the Japanese had attacked Hongkou, and the former Public Garden hosted a battery of guns, as it had done in 1842 when the Chinese had tried to repulse the British. In the former extra-settlement roads areas to the west of the city, residents

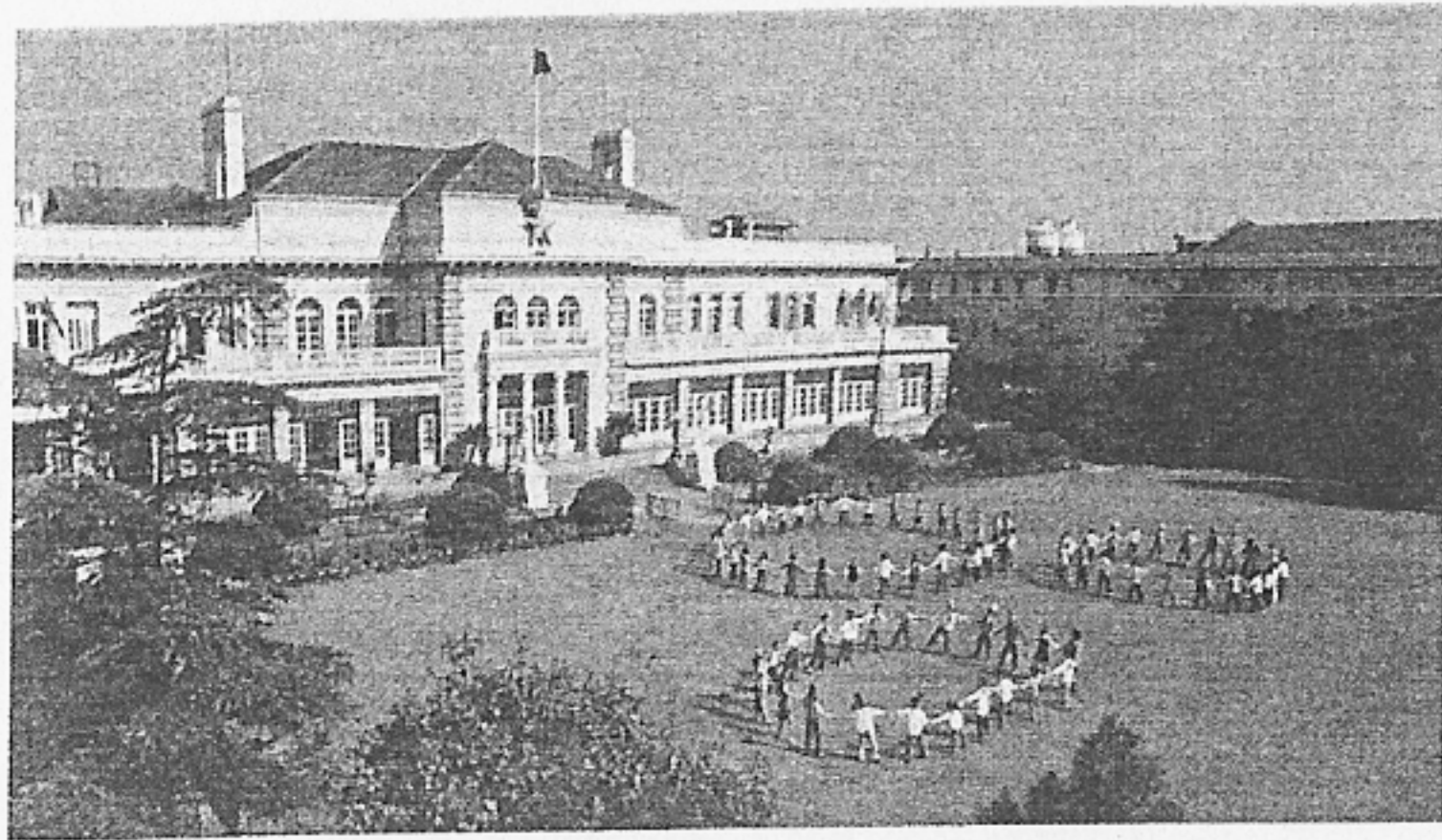


Above The USS Helena at Shanghai on 20 September 1946. Note Sassoon House and the Bank of China in the background.

were again awaiting their fate while two huge armies faced each other across lines of picket fences and privet hedges. Generals Li Tsung Jen and Ho Ying Chin, two of the generals who had led the march on Shanghai in 1927, were now implicated in its downfall. While General Li attempted to negotiate a truce with the advancing Communists, General Ho was organising the city's defence. Unbeknown to anyone but Chiang, a few trusted aides and bank officials, a line of coolies one night at the end of April filed out of the Bank of China on the Bund, laden with the country's gold reserves to be taken to Taiwan. With fitting irony the looting of China's wealth was literally carried out on the backs of its poorest class on the former towpath that had come to symbolise foreign exploitation. Chiang, like the foreign businesses before him, fled China with much of its wealth in tow.

The ensuing Battle for Shanghai was similar to the Battle of Muddy Flat 95 years earlier, as one force capitulated at the first show of strength from the other, handing the reins of power in Shanghai to yet another ruler with little damage to property. A brief but spirited display of resistance occurred at the mouth of Suzhou Creek, overlooked by Garden Bridge, the former Public Garden and Broadway Mansions. As the Nationalists played for time and prolonged their retreat by two days, Shanghai characteristically continued business as normal a few streets behind the Bund, while machine guns, mortars and grenades raged on and around Garden Bridge.

By 27 May 1949, Shanghai was a communist city, its new rulers claiming to have liberated it 'from a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society'. In the eyes of the city's pro-communist newspapers like the *Shang Pao* (Commerce Daily), Shanghai had been transformed in three days from a city in which 'bandits let loose slaughter and plunder' to 'a paradise in which there is freedom, democracy, stability, and prosperity'.<sup>10</sup> Feverish flag-waving greeted the peasant army, whose unquestionable proficiency in the field of combat did little to prepare them for China's most modern metropolis, despite 'a great deal of effort into training PLA [People's



Above The Children's Palace and former home of the Kadoorie family

Liberation Army] troops assigned to capture cities'.<sup>11</sup> Towering skyscrapers, escalators, American films, foreign language schools, neon lights and rail-less trams confronted these rural peasants, and confirmed in them their nascent suspicions about this evil and decadent city. Nonetheless, these rural youngsters were noted for behaving impeccably in their alien abode, paying for everything and showing a sincere courtesy towards their urban neighbours.

On first impressions, some were misled by this charming display of rustic innocence, which was undermined only by the conversion of the racecourse into an execution ground for racketeers and Nationalist sympathisers. As the city acquainted itself with its new rulers, the Communist General, Chen Yi, was named Mayor of Shanghai. The Picardie and Gascoigne apartments in the former French Concession were rented out to the city council, who housed peasant soldiers in them so as to honour Mao's promise that they would sleep in skyscrapers. The lifts, flush toilets, electric stoves and, especially, the bidets provided no end of entertainment for the soldiers, whose tenancy changed every couple of weeks in a cunning move designed to exploit the free propaganda emanating from their excited gossip after their tour of duty in Shanghai. For foreign and Chinese residents who had experienced Shanghai in its heyday, the city was becoming tedious. Chiang's naval blockade stifled trade and Communist policies impinged on formerly liberal social activities. The British Consulate's Senior Architect, TSM Terrace, described the scene in Shanghai in 1949:

I should say that the broad picture of Shanghai today is that conditions are not too pleasant, and the possibility of Shanghai ever returning to its normal way of life is very doubtful. Despondency prevails and the general feeling is that Shanghai is finished so far as the foreigner is concerned. The general atmosphere is indeed depressing and it looks as though Shanghai with its wonderful reputation for recovery has had its time.

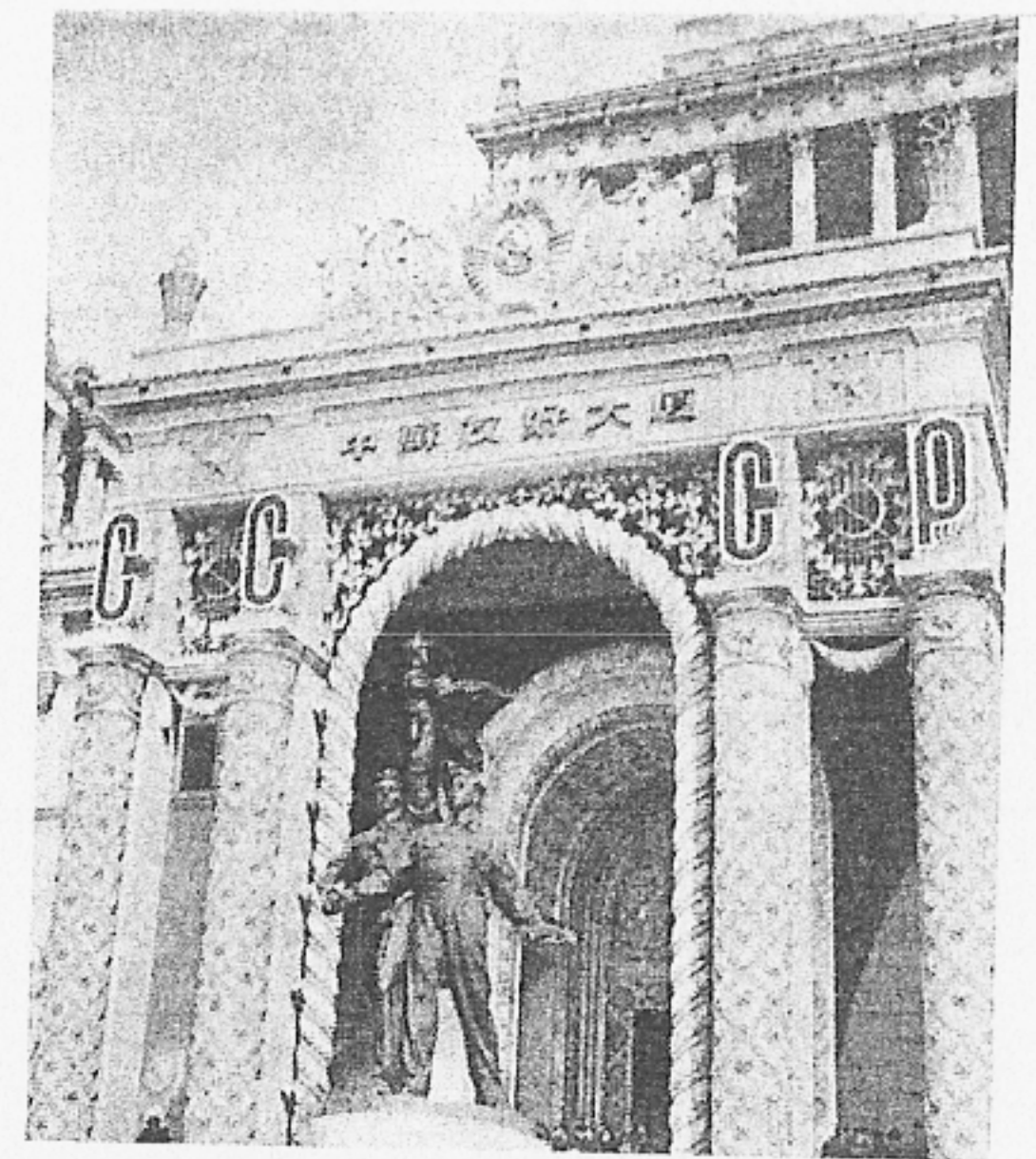
Two decades earlier, when asked how China could solve its own problems, the illustrious American shipping magnate Robert Dollar replied, 'By a strong dictator who will set up a strong Government.' On 1 October 1949, Chairman Mao announced the founding of the People's Republic of China. Only months later, foreign governments one by one officially recognised China's new rulers. China was, according to Dollar's reasoning, finally in a position to solve its own problems. With Communist tradition rooted in peasant communes, village organisations and rural administration, it was questionable whether this fledgling government could cope with administering large, complex, industrialised urban centres, despite Mao's assertions that the time for communism to operate 'from the city to the village' had arrived. An immediate nationalisation programme reined in China's most commercial city, which had always relied on merchants, traders and industrialists for its prosperity. Construction had always been underpinned by the assumption that 'there [was] hardly a likelihood, should a new State step in, for it to confiscate the individual's right to property'<sup>12</sup> in Shanghai. With this worst-case scenario now becoming reality, construction halted.

At the time, Shanghai's housing stock comprised 52.7 per cent old lane houses (mostly within the former settlement boundaries), 19.8 per cent new lane houses, 13.7 per cent temporary huts (in the outlying suburbs), 9.5 per cent garden houses and 4.3 per cent apartments. With the help of Soviet advisors, the Communists forged ahead with land and property reform, slicing up China's urban real estate. At the onset of the Korean War in June 1950, followed by an edict demanding that all public buildings were to be handed in to the government by January 1952, the last remaining foreigners realised that this was the end. Britain, after over one hundred years of trade in China, pulled the plug on its \$900 million stake in the country. The exodus from Shanghai pumped untold wealth into Hong Kong, which thrived on the sorry predicament facing Shanghai's former businesses, many of which went on to become very powerful enterprises in their new home. Those with most to lose were the last to leave. The 14 May 1954 marked the end of a century of Shanghai's famously turbulent property market. Over 15,000 foreign properties were appropriated by the Communist government, which used the same excuse again and again to legitimise its policy: properties were taken as collateral against outstanding debts. The nature and size of the debts were irrelevant. A century of ignominy caused by foreign exploitation was being avenged with swift and brutal retribution, delivering a fatal blow to Shanghai's commercial spirit.

One by one, Shanghai's former landmarks were taken. The Shanghai Club, after nearly a century of plying the city's elite with alcohol, was ordered to pay commodity tax on its liquor stocks, which it did, only to be fined 430 million

Yuan by the Tax Bureau, bankrupting the club. This 'melancholy story', as the British Ambassador described it in 1952, was repeated throughout Shanghai's former foreign settlements. Almost a hundred years to the day after the Battle of Muddy Flat, the Race Club, on the site of the battle itself, was taken against debts. HSBC fell the following year, against debt. Kadoorie's villa was appropriated and converted into a Children's Palace. The former empires of Sassoon and Hardoon were all taken against debt, the massive garden of the latter being converted into the unmistakable Sino-Russian Friendship Building (DS) – an absurdly decorative Soviet structure that fits well into Shanghai's architectural muddle.

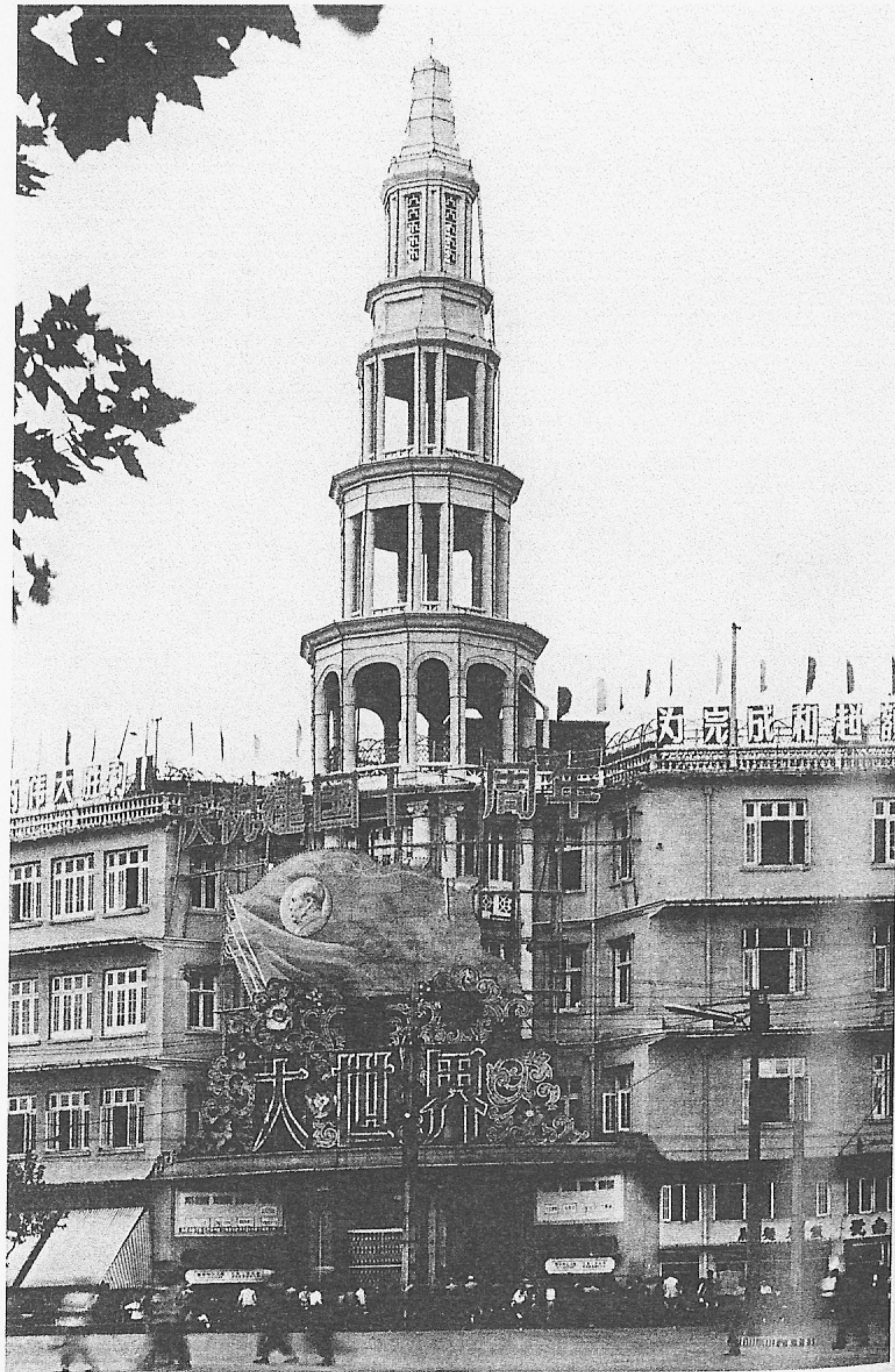
Although there were many exceptions to the rule, depending usually on how much influence an individual or family could wield, nationalisation of housing was carried



Left and below The distinctive Sino-Russian Friendship Building; (left) later renamed the Shanghai Exhibition Centre (below)



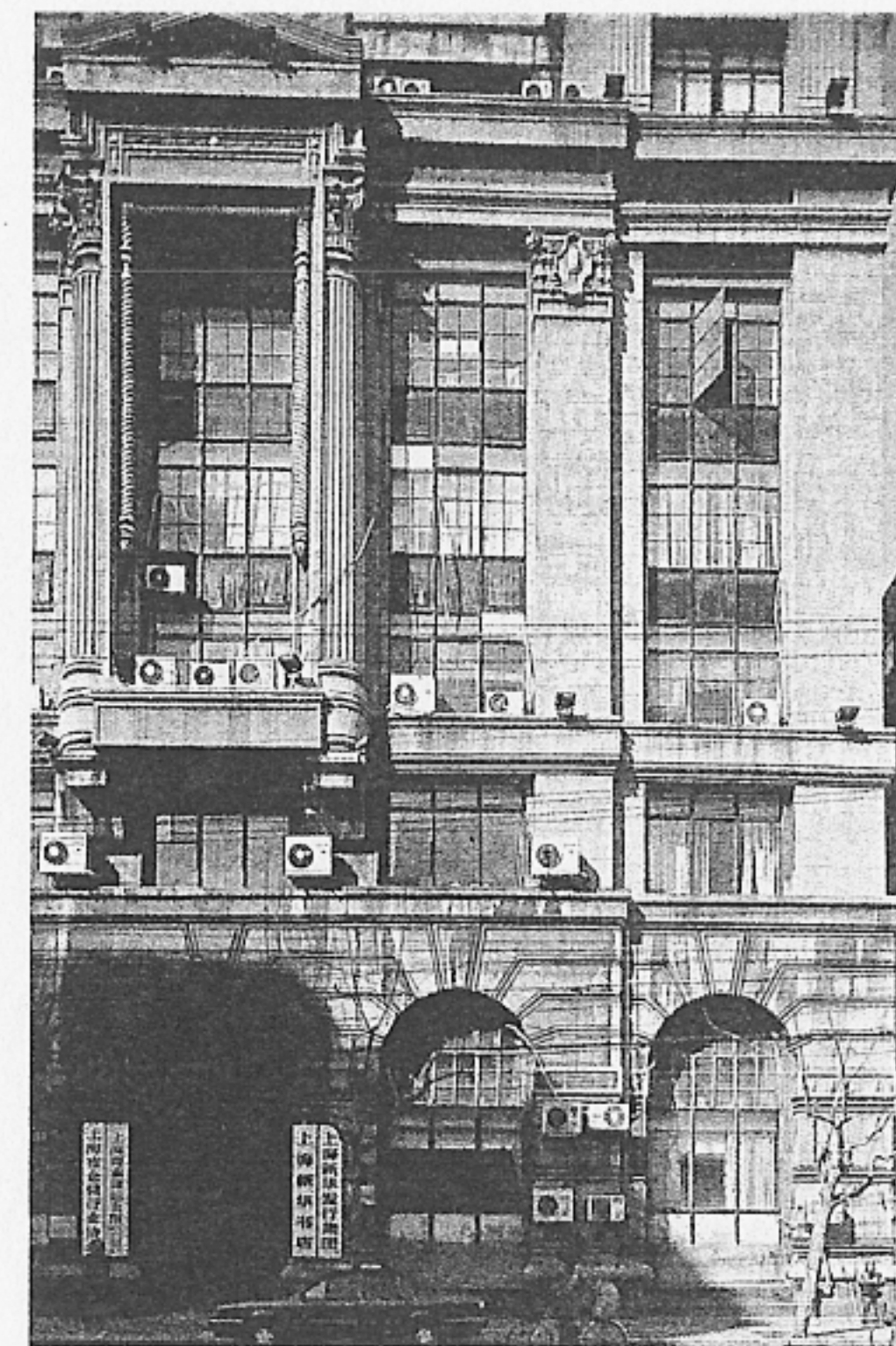
Right The Great World in 1960, adorned with decorations celebrating the 11th anniversary of the establishment of New China



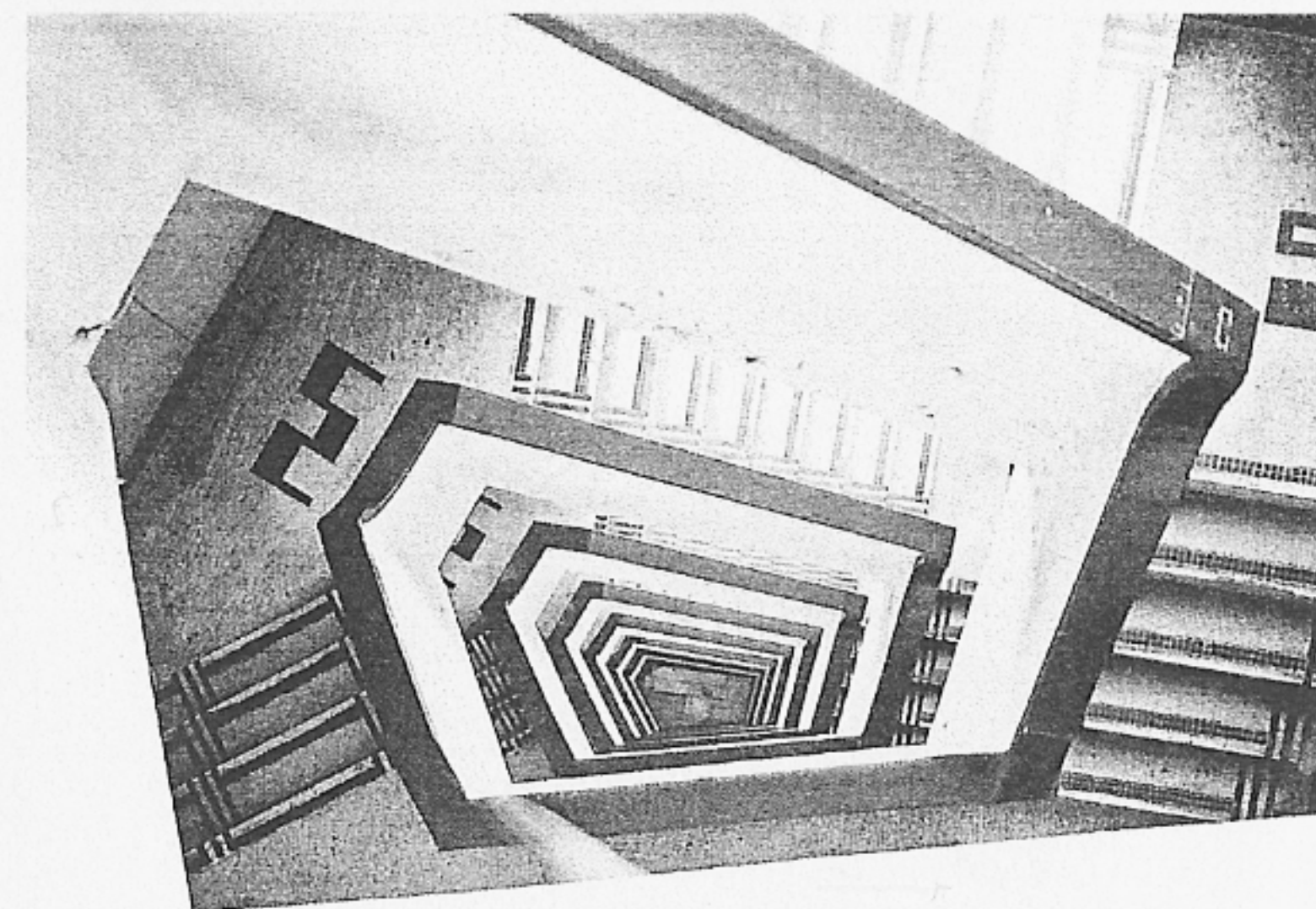
out according to three vague categories. The first was 'enemy property'. These were confiscated outright. The second was former capitalist property, which was taken coercively from individuals such as the city's businessmen, entrepreneurs and non-Party members. The third and largest category contained the properties of most ordinary people, who had to revoke their property rights, albeit 'voluntarily', to prove their allegiance to the new Communist government.

Former mansions, villas, lane houses and workplaces were dutifully handed over, subdivided and assigned to government offices or formerly landless peasants, as Shanghai's population and area increased dramatically. 'A ring of new industrial suburbs' with rows of Soviet-styled concrete block apartments encircled the former settlements, reflecting a 'heavy dependence upon Soviet industrial planning and design'.<sup>11</sup> Although Master Plans were devised for a sprawling Shanghai, now covering 5,910 square kilometres, they became purely symbolic gestures of progress in a political climate that disfavoured improvement based on anything but political ideology. Shanghai's population grew by 44 per cent from approximately 5 million in 1949 to 7.2 million in 1957, while housing standards 'declined sharply ... reaching intolerable levels' for many.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, government offices and bureaucrats acquired the city's finest residences appropriated during nationalisation, and the military requisitioned almost 10 per cent of the city's property. With Mao's guerrilla mindset preoccupied with global conflict, Shanghai was transformed into a military base. As a result of despotic paranoia, combined with the Communists' concerns about overpopulation and ingrained distrust of large urban centres, much of Shanghai's industrial capacity was moved to other parts of the country away from the eastern seaboard, which Mao believed was vulnerable to attack.

While the Party boasted that 'the calamity-ridden port town was greeting a grand resurrection', others saw only descent into the political morass, as the Communists imposed their political ideology through vague doctrines that swayed with the political mood. Shanghai's towering edifices, so long the source of bravado, had come to serve as ideal billboards for political slogans and sites for committing suicide. The last had become so common that 'the police tried to stop the suicides by erecting nets which jutted out from first-floor windows over the pavement, but this only made them more determined. Instead of jumping from windows, they took running jumps from the roofs of tall buildings, so they would land in the street beyond the range of the netting.'<sup>13</sup> This bleak reality presented a grim foreboding for the years ahead, during which millions would take their own lives to escape their suffering.



Left The facade of one of Shanghai's offices in the former Central District with the faded slogan 'Long life Great Leader Chairman Mao' painted on the central pilaster



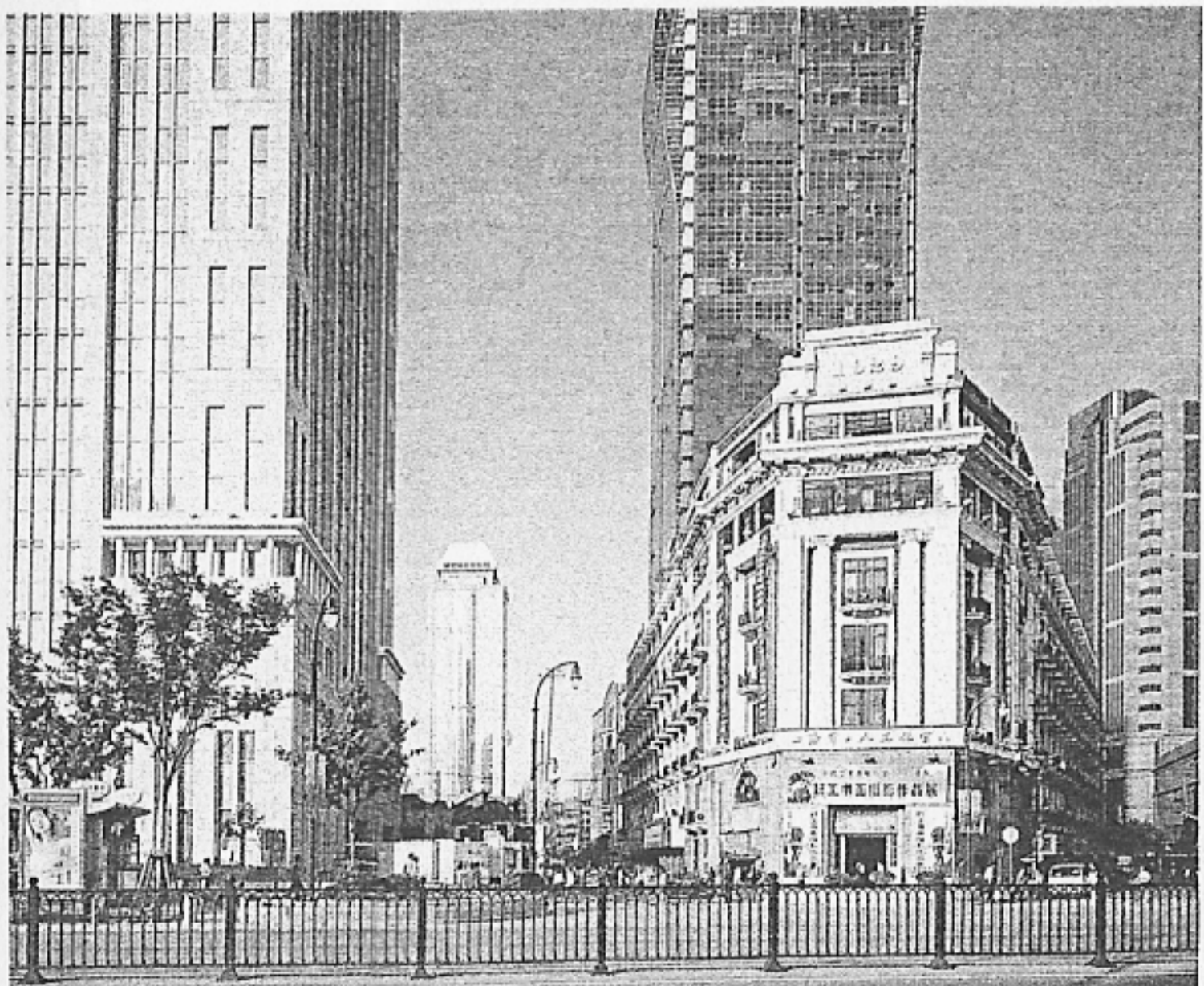
Below The Modern staircase of one of Shanghai's former apartment buildings where many attempted suicide during the Cultural Revolution



Above The compound of the former British Consulate in 2005

Opposite, above and below The former Union Church before (above) and after (below) the Cultural Revolution

Below The former Shanghai Workers' Headquarters opposite the former racecourse



so long its economic prowess, was now its political stature as Mao's power base, forming the vanguard against Beijing's power elite.

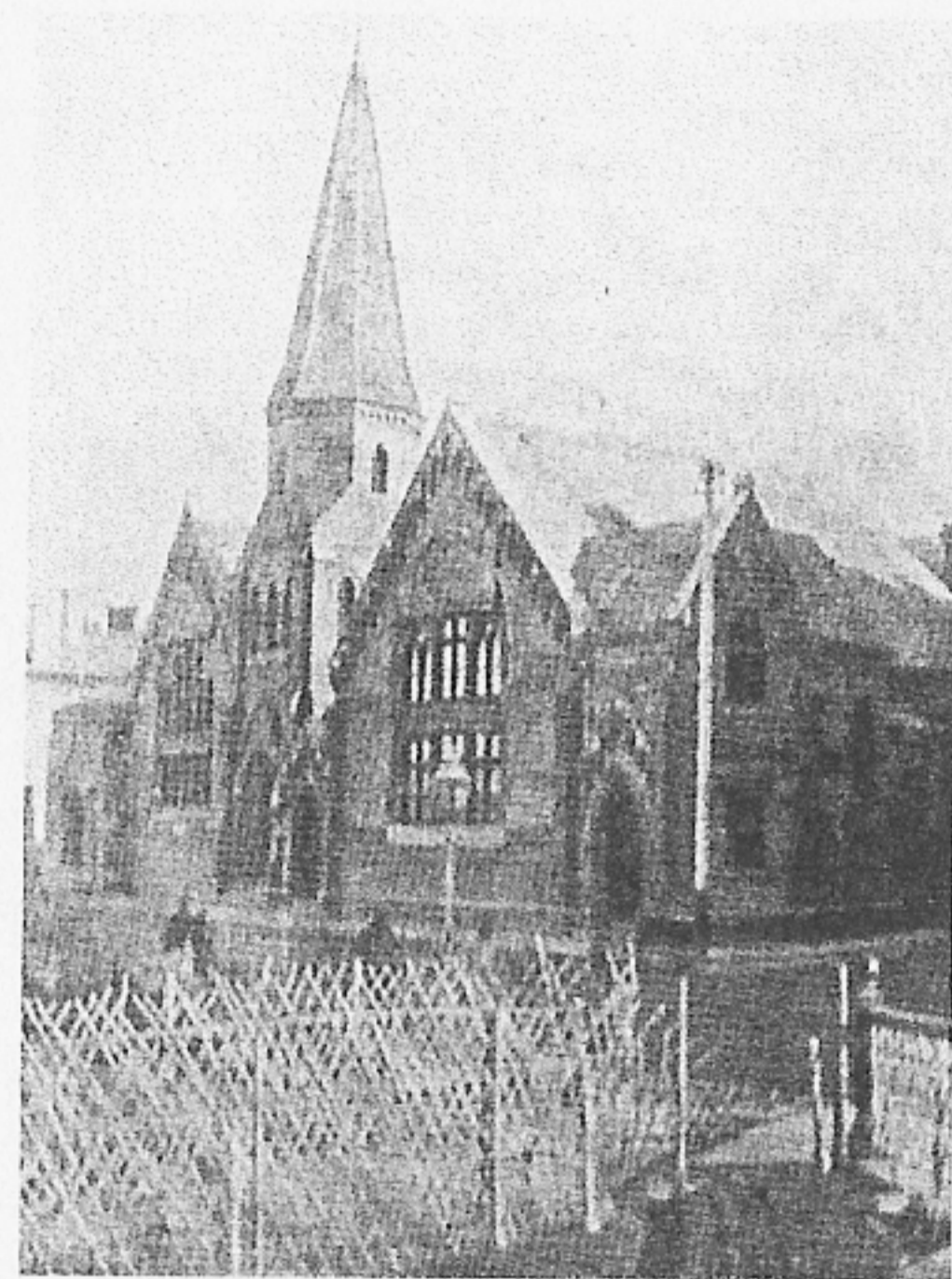
From August 1966, the notorious Red Guard, a mobilised body of lawless students devoted to Mao, ran amok on the streets in a frenzy designed to rid Shanghai of symbols of feudalism, capitalism and colonialism. Foreign language signage, statues and decorative features on walls were wiped from the face of Shanghai. Next in the firing line were the properties of 'landlords', 'rightists', 'capitalists', 'imperialists', 'anti-revolutionists', 'feudalists' and religious institutions. No one was innocent, as rampaging students smashed their way into homes, looted and destroyed possessions and seized properties for their own use or operational headquarters. In one example, the property of the former owner of Wing On department store was raided seven times. The British, the first foreigners into Shanghai, were among the very last to leave. The British Consulate was breached and forced to vacate the premises that had occupied the city's most hallowed piece of real estate. On leaving the consulate compound for the final time, Britain's last diplomatic staff in Shanghai, Mr Hewitt and Mr Whitney, were 'struck, kicked, had glue poured on them and clothes torn' in a 'clearly organised' staged humiliation designed to wreak vengeance on the hapless foreigners unfortunate enough to be the last out of Shanghai. They arrived in Beijing on 24 May 1967 'battered but unbowed', having surrendered the consulate compound and its 'unlawful activities' against all manner of fines and taxes at which the Foreign Office philosophically concluded: '122 years without rent isn't bad going.'

For the wretched Chinese unable to escape the social and political turmoil, Shanghai had become a battleground for the various political elements, each claiming to be more revolutionary than the other. By December 1966, the Revolutionists had occupied 360,000 square metres of housing and granted it to 19,500 families. On the last evening of 1966, the Red Guard carried out further raids on even more properties, as well as all those commandeered in the first raids in August. The following week, the Revolutionists, spearheaded by the Workers' Headquarters (G5), declared war on the government's municipal authority, and after the 'January Revolution' claimed control of Shanghai. The GPCR's impact throughout China had turned from being a war of words into a war of deeds. Beijing had lost control of Shanghai, as Mao and his cohorts, Jiang Ching (his wife), Zhang Chun Chiao, Yao Wen Yuan and Wang Hong Wen (later known as 'The Gang of Four'), oversaw the Party's downfall and the establishment of the Shanghai People's Commune on 5 February, which was renamed the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee on 23 February.

In the prevailing mayhem, nearly one and a half million square metres of homes, occupied by 40,501 families, and over one hundred religious sites were stolen in three appalling years.

#### The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

Political campaign followed political campaign, as Shanghai and China were brought to the brink of civil war by the infighting within the Communist Party, concluding in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), launched in Shanghai in 1966. This year marked one of the lowest points of China's ostensible 5,000 years of civilisation. For ten terrible years, China's descent into chaos caused unfathomable misery, as countless millions were pitted against one another as pawns in a political crusade that, in the totality of its mercilessness, outdid all previous rebellions, wars and insurgencies within the Chinese empire. Shanghai's forte, for

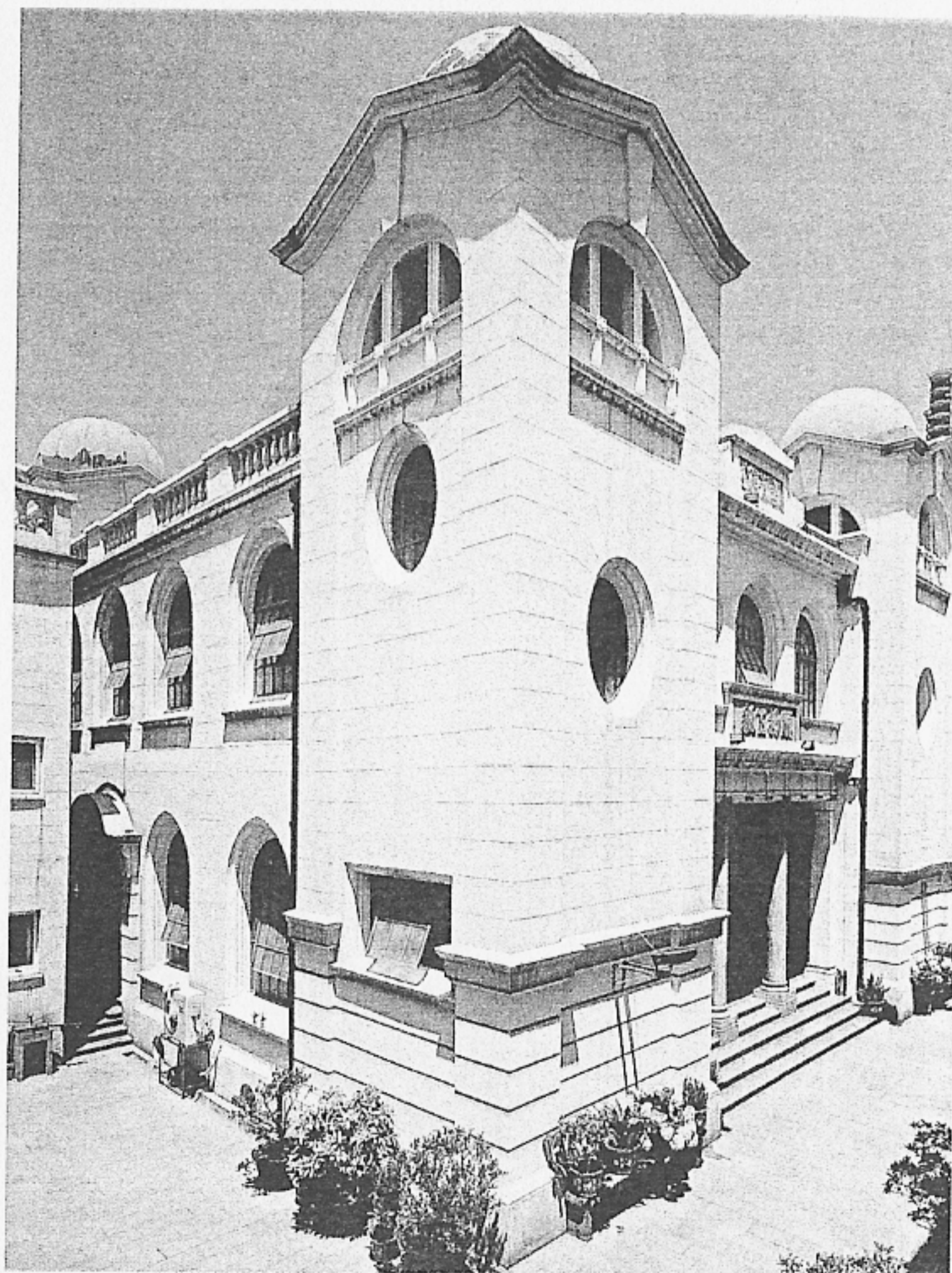


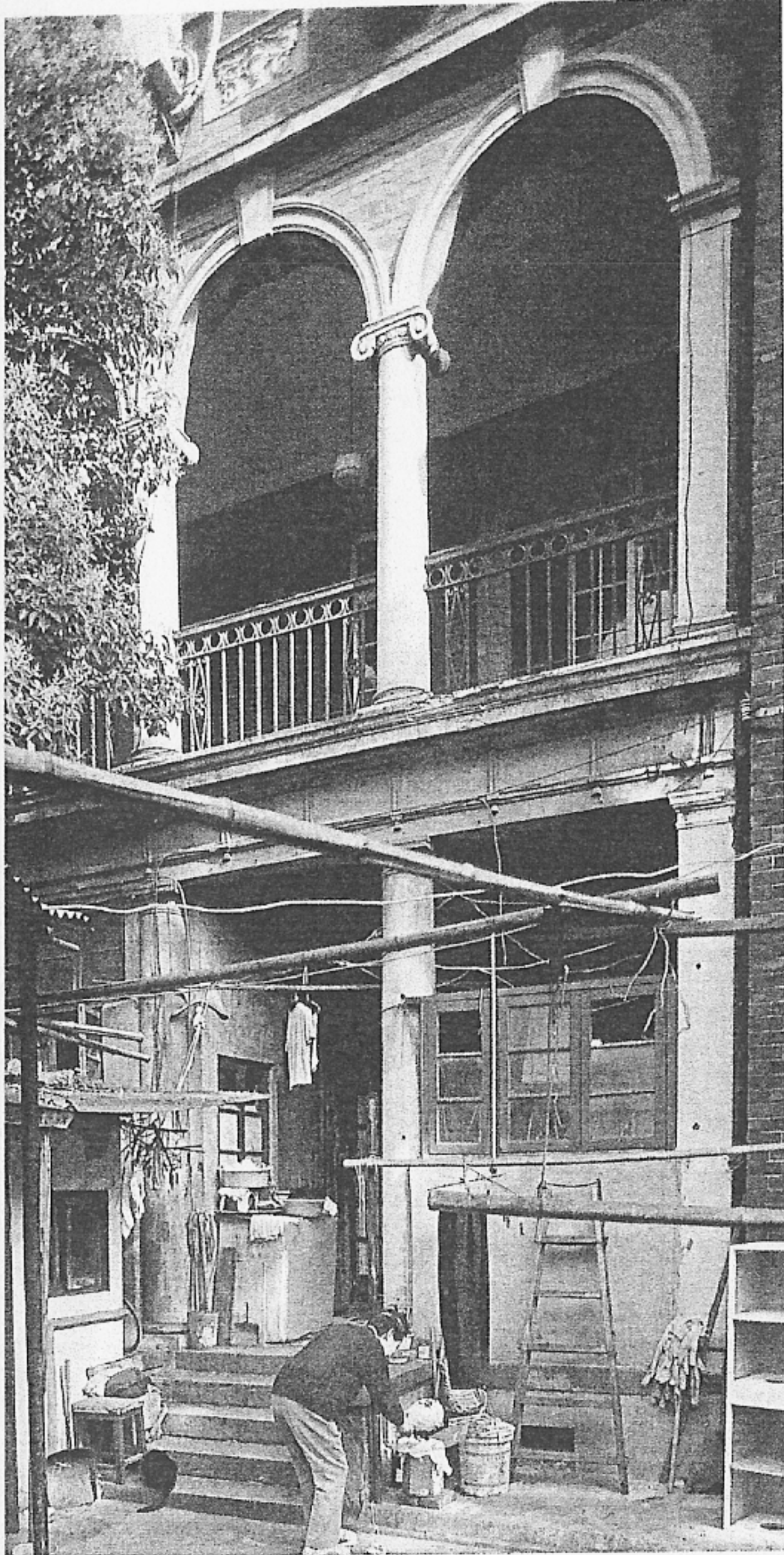
## Xiao Tao Yuan Mosque

The Xiao Tao Yuan Mosque, situated in the western part of the former walled city, had been one of Shanghai's most renowned mosques. The land for its complex was donated to the Muslim community by one of the Shanghai Islamic mosque directors, Jin Zi Yun, in 1917. Construction of the present mosque began in 1925 and was completed in

1927. Like most religious sites in China, the mosque was severely damaged during the GPCR, though it escaped the worst atrocities since the Muslim communities from Pakistan and Iran, with whom China had amicable relations at the time, managed to avert much of the devastation that was inflicted on other similar sites.

Below The Xiao Tao Yuan Mosque





Schools and universities were closed for a decade, factories and workplaces were disrupted, and cathedrals, churches and temples were seized and desecrated. Among others, Xu Jia Hui, Holy Trinity Cathedral and Union Church lost their spires. Jing An, Jade Buddha and Lung Hua Temples were smashed and their statues and ancient scriptures destroyed, along with countless other temples and religious sites, including the Xiao Tao Yuan Mosque (47) in the former walled city.

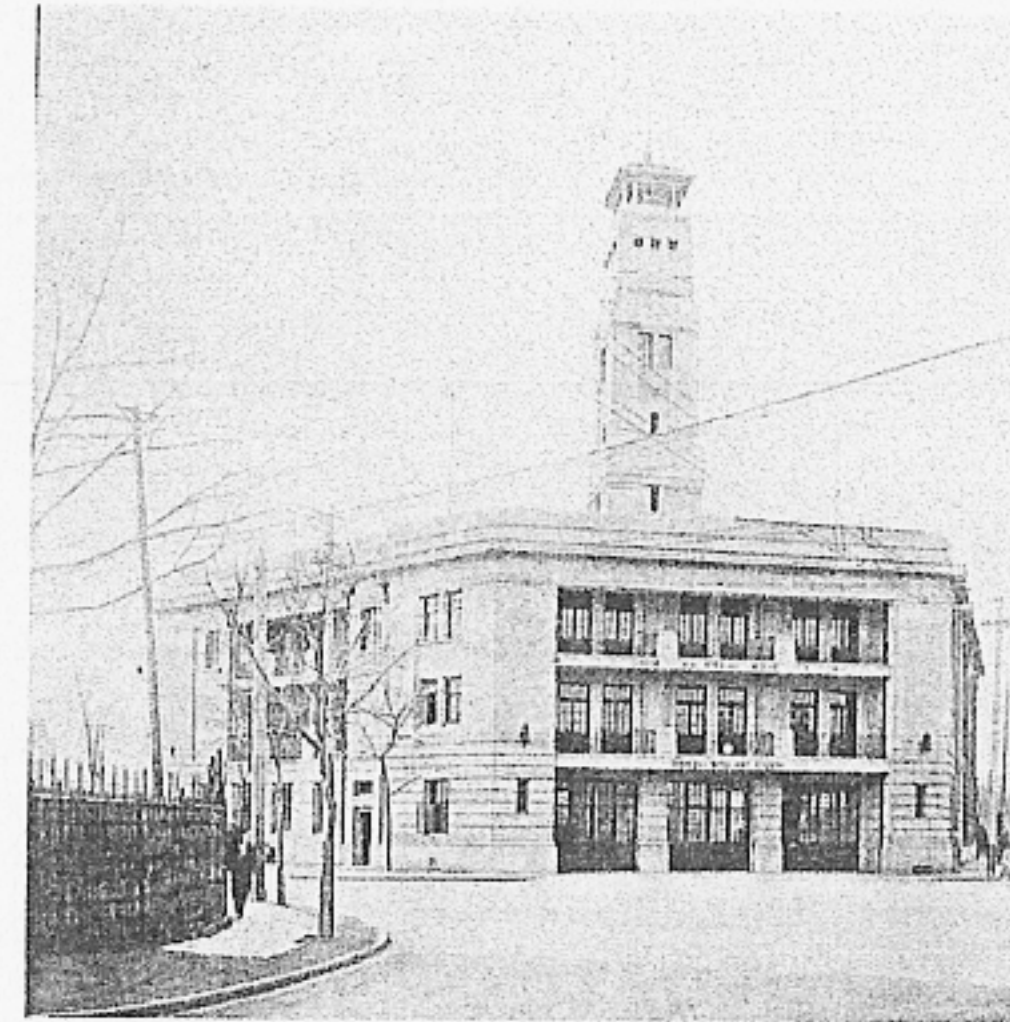
In the chaos, rural peasants descended on the city, occupying former garden and lane houses. Unable to pay the rent or adapt to the lifestyles intended for these properties, many continued their rural ways, cooking with charcoal fires on the ground, oblivious to the teak parquet flooring and decorative inlaid motifs designed to satisfy the whims of former owners with very different modes of living. While the government's nationalisation programme after 1949 had attempted to redistribute property to the masses in accordance with their version of the law, the Red Guard and Revolutionists ran riot in a ten-year rampage of pillaging and butchery that laid waste to China's cultural landscape and social fabric. In the name of political ideology, tens of millions were murdered or took their own lives.

Shanghai had faced many vicissitudes, but all previous experiences, however appalling or immoral, fostered at least a grain of progress – a seed from which new life could emerge. The GPCR contained no such hope. Instead, it demonstrated only that man's 'constant falling back into the uncivilised makes a mockery of any notion of a fundamental evolution of the species', surpassing perhaps even war as 'the most extreme case of ontological designing'.<sup>18</sup> While architecture and design represent human endeavour in pursuit of progress, the GPCR proved only to be its antithesis.

The death of Chairman Mao in 1976 coincided with the end of the GPCR and led to the almost immediate arrest of the infamous 'Gang of Four', under which soubriquet their names were collectively inscribed in the histories of China and the Communist Party as those responsible for the GPCR. China, it appeared, was turning a crucial corner. However, the complexities underlying the political squabbling within the Party were not as simple as to be the work of four individuals. Shanghai's radical administration was replaced with Party diehards, whose priority was not economic revival, but the purging of 'Gang of Four' sympathisers from Shanghai's bureaucracy. The economic lifeblood of Shanghai, laden with political burdens, was sapped from the city, while China began slowly to move forward.

#### Out of the mire

Following the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai was a city in which it appeared 'that not a single structure has been erected' since 1949.<sup>19</sup> In 1979, Shanghai was denied the opportunity to join a select few 'economic zones' in the south of China, handpicked by Beijing to lead China forward through its Open



Door policy. As southern China enjoyed special privileges, Shanghai, for the first time since the 1840s, was losing its primacy among China's cities.

The Communist Party knew it could not ignore Shanghai and the tax revenue which the city fed to the treasury's coffers, but its officials were wary of its latent potential and the threat it could pose to the Party's power base. With Party allegiances playing a critical role in defining the fortunes of a region or city in China, it was unfortunate for Shanghai that in the early 1980s its leaders had no strong connections with Beijing's elite, and so cast the city into the political wilderness. When the mayor, Wang Dao Han, pressed Beijing to support a plan to develop Pudong into an economic development zone, the proposal was ignored. Instead, piecemeal steps were taken to improve living standards in spite of there having been practically no improvements for three decades. The sale of public property started in 1981 with the lowest-quality lane houses. A year later a new regulation was implemented that allowed tenants to improve their living conditions by adding structures to existing properties, as long as it did not affect detrimentally the structure of the building or the appearance of the street and neighbourhood. Although many buildings had had floors added since 1949, approximately 70,295 square metres of extra living space were created by these makeshift structures. In the same year, a census showed that Shanghai's population had reached 5.86 million, housed in 28.6 million square metres of property. On average, every resident of Shanghai had a little less than 5 square metres of space, making the centre of Shanghai one of the most densely populated places on earth.

History, it seemed, had enveloped Shanghai and was bent on suffocating it. The city's ageing infrastructure and degraded housing stock were a burden that its rivals in the



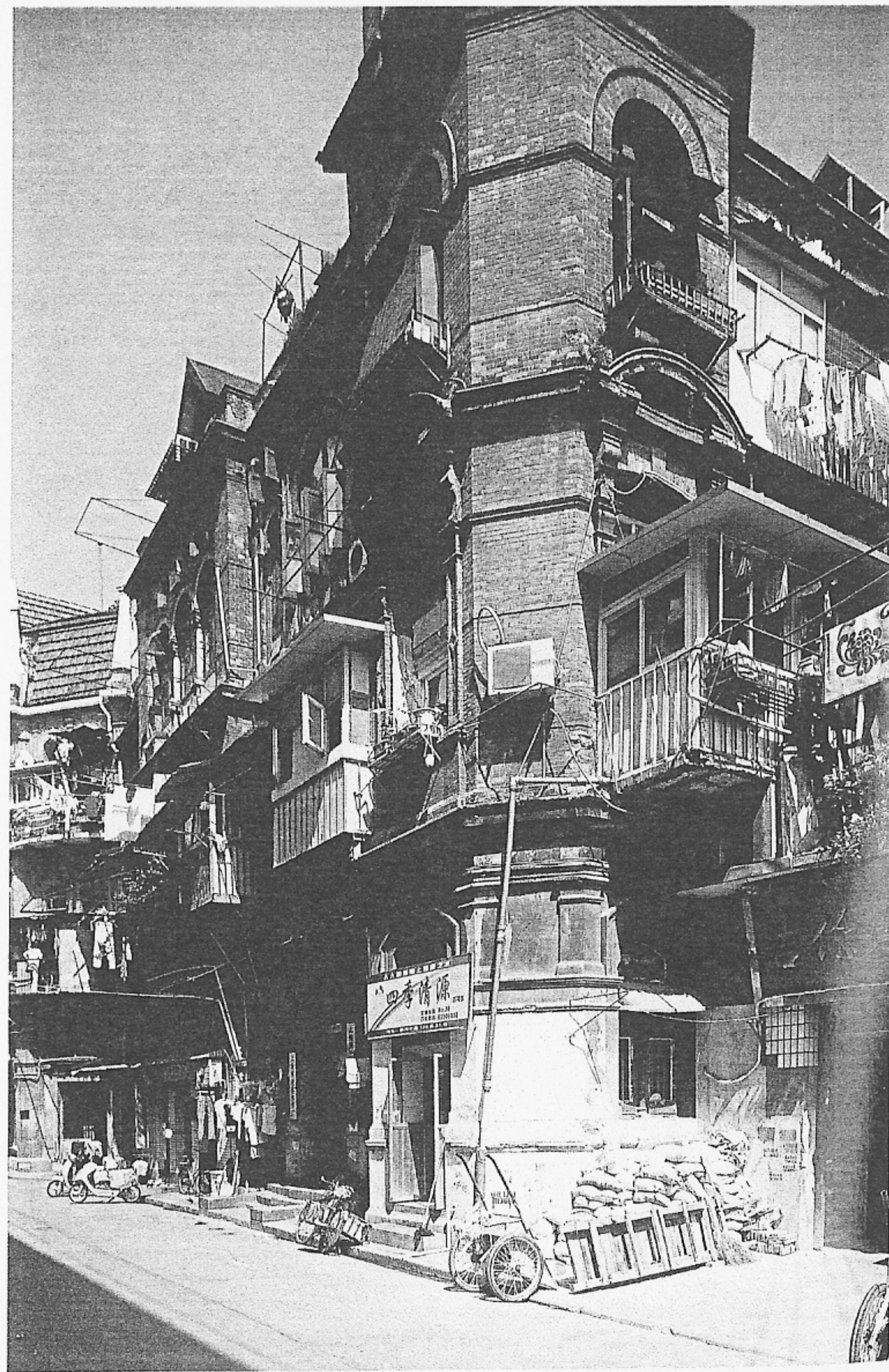
Above, left and right The three-storey fire station (C5) built in the 1930s near the former Bubbling Well (old) and in 2005 with an extra four storeys. The building has sunk by over two feet.

Opposite An example of subdivided living in a former villa, now housing many families.

Left Extra floors and enclosed balconies are common methods of increasing living space.



Right Extra floors and enclosed balconies are common methods of increasing living space



Left Shanghai was said to have lost its colour in the Cultural Revolution



south did not endure, while the politics that had infused the city from the 1920s had inflicted unmitigated destruction on the city's social and economic fabric. During the first three decades of Communism, it 'appears that not a single structure was erected in the former International Settlements and French Concession'.<sup>29</sup> Old properties suffered from multiple occupancy and a total lack of maintenance, causing a legal minefield in property ownership that could not be addressed without opening the floodgates to millions of claimants. Once the symbol of progress in China, its residents synonymous with modernity, dynamism and the fashionable, Shanghai emerged from the GPCR sorely abused and dispirited with a population stifled and downtrodden.

The tragedy that China and Shanghai endured through the GPCR might be viewed from a macro-historical perspective as yet another cycle of political turmoil caused by China's unruly rulers. Even in such relatively recent times as the 1870s, Walter Medhurst, a former British Consul to Shanghai observed prophetically:

I firmly believe they ['the ruling and influential classes'] would hail the day when they could see (were such a thing possible) the last foreign factory razed to the ground, and the last ship dismissed the coast ... But it by no means follows that progress is to be despaired of in the future of China. Further shocks and awakenings through collisions with foreign powers must occur ... And whenever such collisions take place, they must inevitably be followed by the forcible introduction of new ideas, to the disruption of old-established

and cherished usages. We can only hope that when the shock does come, the aggressive influence may be wielded by a wise and humane power, and that it may be so directed as to accomplish what is needed for the country with the least possible amount of loss and calamity to its unhappy people.

The damage done by decades of foreign domination and arrogance cannot be underestimated in terms of its consequence on the Chinese psyche and their desire for retribution, summed up by Finch as 'modern history's most colossal failure of East-West relations' or, as Miller stated in 1937, 'The Dragon sleeps with one eye open and his tail slowly wagging in anticipated retaliation. The forces of retribution are slowly but surely gathering momentum.'

However, the backlash after 1949 was more to do with domestic politics than vengeance for a century of international subjugation and humiliation. Vociferous anti-foreign rhetoric was chiefly political expedience, emanating from a Communist Party beset with internal power struggles, which spilt out into the public domain through disastrous political campaigns that caused untold suffering to the masses. Being in the frontline, Shanghai bore the brunt of the political infighting and had the most to lose. This once economic colossus suffered bitterly during the first three decades of Communism, but the inevitable change of political tide was bringing with it hopes of resurgence. With China once again engaging in international trade, Shanghai's innate potential for trading would soon be unleashed.