# BEYOND THE NEON LIGHTS

EVERYDAY SHANGHAI IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

"Riveting and solidly crafted." *China Quarterly*

HANCHAO LU

# Introduction

The history of modern Shanghai has in recent years received an extraordinary amount of scholarly attention both in the West and in China. In the West, readers have been struck by the variety as well as academic depth of the literature on Shanghai that has appeared since the early 1980s. Studies on the city's history touch upon a wide range of topics in the political, economical, social, and cultural realms: from the indigenous growth of pre-treaty-port Shanghai to the presence of the West in the city, from the Qing "circuit intendants" (or Daotai) to the "Mixed Court," from traditional merchant organizations to modern entrepreneurship, from public health to higher education, from the police establishment to the underground, from labor strikes to student protests, from native-place associations to social biases, from the divisions among intellectuals to the taxonomy of prostitution, and so on.[1] Like any high-quality research that focuses on a regional topic, most of what has been published has aimed at and, to different degrees, successfully brought out broader issues whose significance reaches beyond that of a single city.

It is a blessing to scholars outside China that a similar efflorescence of research on the history of Shanghai appeared almost simultaneously in the city itself. Starting in 1978 as part of a nationwide program to revive the Chinese tradition of writing local history, or *fangzhi*, researchers in Shanghai made great efforts to continue the work of an official Shanghai history writing group known as Shanghaishi tongzhiguan (Institute for the History of Shanghai), headed by the noted scholar-official Liu Yazi (1886–1958).[2] Under this movement, research on Shanghai has reached beyond the limits of conventional gazetteer compilation. Source materials on Shanghai of various types, including collections of historical materials on a given topic, archival materials, reminiscences, historical anecdotes,

and documentary photographs, as well as research monographs and treatises, appeared in good quality and quantity.[3] More significant, research in Shanghai has been internationally oriented; although scholarly engagement based on mutual understanding of analytical theories and methodologies between researchers in and outside China still leaves much to be desired, communications among researchers of Shanghai are among the best in academia.[4]

In this rich and colorful gallery of portraits of Shanghai, what has not been adequately portrayed is the daily life of ordinary people. If human history involves primarily the people, and if what shapes people's outlook and affects their activities involves the places they live and work, then the importance of daily life in historical research needs no further explanation. The purpose of this book is to portray the quotidian aspects of the lives of the people of Shanghai in the first half of the twentieth century, with particular attention to everyday life in the city's residential quarters.

A city as large and complex as Shanghai—indeed, it has been one of the world's largest and most cosmopolitan metropolises—contains within it an incredibly wide variety of people. Although in most years less than 3 percent of the city's population was foreign born, this portion of the population came from virtually everywhere in the world and, as far as social composition is concerned, included an impressive array, from vagabonds and prostitutes to diplomats and parvenus. The Chinese residents of Shanghai were, in a sense, also foreigners: they came from all provinces in the nation. The majority were rural folk who flocked to the city looking for a better life.

The most numerous of the Chinese immigrants were of two major groups: the little urbanites (*xiaoshimin*), as they have been called, and the urban poor. About three-quarters of the city's dwellings consisted of a single type called *lilong* (alleyway or lane) houses: these were the homes of the average city people (the little urbanites) for about a century following the 1880s. A close look at alleyway-house neighborhoods—where well over half the residents hailed from the countryside—reveals how life was lived in the world of the middle and lower-middle classes of Shanghai. This forms the subject of most of this book. As for the poor of Shanghai—who, like the xiaoshimin, were almost entirely from the countryside—most ended up in the many shantytowns that sprang up across the city. I will also explore life in these hovels.

The experiences of the xiaoshimin and the urban poor reveal the interplay of the customs, habits, and traditions that these "peasants of yesterday" brought into the city with the new, modern, and Western aspects of



urban life. With this focus in mind, I have aimed to delineate the daily life of the city's ciphers and nonentities—at least that is what these people were in the eyes of the city's elites, whose life, in turn, receives the least attention in this study.

As my research for this study unfolded, three major issues emerged. Although the research is entirely locally focused, the issues it bears on are national in scope. By the end of my study, these issues had become the themes into which I had woven bits of empirical evidence and against which I had tested theoretical assumptions. The first issue is the character of urban-rural relations in modern China: while the Chinese people rapidly cast off the notion of cities as uninteresting or dangerous and came to think of them as superior to the countryside, was a metropolis like Shanghai in fact so modern, so sophisticated, so Westernized, and in other ways unique that it was alien to hinterland China? How did Shanghai's commercial culture contribute to the sense among outsiders that the city was somehow alien, somehow not quite Chinese? Derived from this issue is the question of how the people of Shanghai identified themselves: what did it mean to them to be a Shanghairen (a Shanghai person, or Shanghainese), and what sense of community, if any, emerged from living in tightly packed neighborhoods? Finally, as part of the issue of modernity and identity, there is the question of how appropriate Western-derived assumptions are to plumbing daily life in a Chinese city.

## *Urban-Rural Relations: A Continuum or a Gulf?*

Researchers of Chinese urban history have argued that there is a striking difference between traditional China and medieval Europe in regard to urban-rural relations. Whereas European cities stood out as islands of culture in a sea of rural backwardness, Chinese cities were integrated with their surrounding rural villages in all political, cultural, and socioeconomic dimensions. One of the central themes that G. William Skinner and his colleagues present in the monumental volume *The City in Late Imperial China* is the urban-rural continuum in traditional China. China up to the nineteenth century was a harmonious landscape in which cities and villages at various administrative and commercial levels as well as in different geographic regions were integrated with each other. Accordingly, there was no sharp contrast or gap between city and country, particularly in the social and cultural realms. Even obvious landmarks like city walls did not set the city apart from the countryside.[5]

As a result of the urban-rural continuum, the sense of urban superior-

ity commonly associated with Western cultural tradition did not prevail in traditional China. The reasons for this are multifaceted. First, Chinese elites were landed gentry-literati whose essential socioeconomic base was in rural communities rather than urban centers. The elites who resided in the city, as well as a large number of people who pursued occupations that kept them away from their rural home, always retained their ties to their native place: it was there that they maintained their formal place of residence and their *hengchan,* or permanent property (i.e., land), and it was there that their family tomb and lineage temple were to be found—in short, their roots and identity were still rural.[6] Also, Chinese cultural life did not fall into two widely divergent spheres or display characteristic dichotomies between the urban and the rural. For one thing, Chinese cities were not necessarily cultural preserves and religious centers, as they were in Europe. Like men on a chessboard or stars in the sky, cultural and religious sites spread across China without any clear-cut division into urban and rural settings, thus denying the notion that the city (perhaps with a few exceptions, such as the capital city) was culturally superior to small towns and villages. Furthermore, unlike European cities Chinese cities did not possess a corporate identity, civic monuments, or "citizens" that set the city apart from its surrounding rural areas. Between towns and villages, frequent communication of various sorts and a flow of population in both directions integrated rural and urban areas in a way that made a sense of urban superiority groundless.[7]

In fact, quite the opposite social sentiment could be detected: the city in traditional China often had a negative image. Before the Song dynasty (960–1279), Chinese cities were predominately administrative centers, inextricably associated with government yamen, taxation, the corvée, criminals, and lawsuits. Its political function tended to make the city a place held in awe, at least by peasants. The commercial character of Chinese cities in the post-Song era did not improve the peasants' overall image of the city. The vicious reputation of merchants and the stubborn social bias against commerce in Chinese society only added to their original awe of the city, the place where the yamen was located: they also came to see it as the place where cunning prevailed. Mark Elvin once observed, "The city was in some respects feared by peasants. One Ch'ing [Qing] official wrote that 'country-folks are terrified to enter their country capital, dreading the officials as if they were tigers.' The city was a place where taxes and rents were often paid, and where lawsuits were tried. It was the haunt of criminals such as the 'market bullies' who were experts at victimizing peasants. In times of



famine, it was in the city that farmers sold starving children whom they could no longer feed."[8]

Not only the peasantry (who were, of course, the overwhelming majority of the population) but all of society to some degree viewed the city as an abomination. In a nation that highly valued its system of rule—an enormous body of peasants governed by a scant elite of scholar-officials—it is understandable that ideal society would be that in which people lived contentedly in the countryside. The great Chinese historian Sima Qian (c. 145–90 B.C.) wrote of men aged sixty or seventy who had never visited towns as evidence of peace, order, and prosperity.[9] Such thinking endured. As the eminent seventeenth-century thinker Gu Yanwu (1613–82) commented, "If people live in the country, the society will be in order; if people live in the city, the society will be in turmoil. People living in the country results in reclamation of land and the peace of farms; people will inevitably have a permanent faith [*hengxin*]. People living in the city results in onerous corvée and frequent lawsuits; it will be impossible to expect people to have a permanent faith."[10] This is a succinct statement of the mainstream view on urban-rural relations in traditional China.

The twentieth century saw a dramatic change in this age-old value system. Although distrust of the city lingered on in some respects, modern, industrialized, and highly commercialized cities came to be seen as better places than small towns and villages. This sweeping reassessment was chiefly brought on by the economic opportunities cities presented. The rural deterioration that paralleled the industrialization of the city in the early twentieth century accelerated urban-rural differentiation and sharpened the gap between city and country—the urban-rural continuum was gradually replaced by an urban-rural gulf. That this occurred in the turbulent age of twentieth-century China itself would have brought a wry smile to the face of Gu Yanwu, inasmuch as his viewpoint had, unfortunately, been confirmed.

In trying to fathom the depth of the urban-rural gulf, one constantly comes up against the inescapable reality that hundreds of thousands of rural immigrants in urban areas lived a life of bare subsistence yet fiercely stuck to the city. These rural immigrants formed the majority of the urban poor in Shanghai. By virtue of their poverty, they were denied access to most of the facilities and conveniences a modern city offers and suffered social discrimination. Yet all the hardship and disadvantages did not drive them out of the city. On the contrary, where possible they brought their families from the villages to the city.

In Republican-era Shanghai, two groups of urban poor best reflect the lure of the city: rickshaw pullers and street beggars. Both were multitudinous and ever present. In his renowned novel *Camel Xiangzi,* Lao She describes his protagonist, a former farmer lured by opportunity to Beijing in the 1920s, where he made a living as a rickshaw puller: "The city gave him everything. Even starving he would prefer it to the village. . . . Even if you begged in the city you could get meat or fish soup. In the village all one could hope for was cornmeal." Citing Lao She's unadorned words, David Strand comments, "Because of the great disparity in urban and rural incomes, even a 'lower class' occupation like rickshaw pulling might satisfy a peasant's ambition for a better livelihood."[11] This was certainly so in Republican Shanghai. Close to 100,000 public-rickshaw pullers labored in Shanghai in the late 1930s, competing for about 25,000 rickshaws for hire in the city. Two shifts around the clock yielded about 50,000 jobs for pullers. Fifteen to sixteen shifts per month was considered a normal, full-time workload for a puller. In addition, there were thousands of men hired to pull private rickshaws.

The overwhelming majority of this army of rickshaw pullers were peasants who had come directly from the poverty-ridden villages to the city seeking opportunity. Many of them, in fact, could not survive in their native villages, which had been devastated by natural disasters, banditry, and war. They came to the city for bare subsistence. For them, the move was not necessarily a search for a better life but for *life* itself. Merely to survive in the city was a powerful measure of the economic opportunity they found there. Although the majority of them lived in sheer poverty, survival itself was reckoned to be success. As a popular Chinese saying put it, "A bitter life is better than a comfortable death" (*haosi buru ehuo*).

There was another group of former peasants whose experience in the city fit, unfortunately but perfectly, the philosophy expressed by this proverb: beggars. Shanghai in the 1930s had about 20,000 to 25,000 professional beggars who were, like the rickshaw pullers and most of the other urban poor, refugees from rural poverty. Of all the 360 callings (*hang*) that the Chinese used as an analogy for all walks of life, mendicants were the lowest. As another Chinese saying goes, in a human life "there is no catastrophe except death; one cannot be poorer than a beggar"[12] (*chu si wu da'nan, taofan zai buqiong*).

However, an exploration of the beggars' world in Shanghai reveals that mendicancy was not necessarily, as generally thought, a downward movement in social status, a mark of improvidence, or the outcome of individual failure. In Republican Shanghai, mendicancy was a highly organized profession and one that not every newcomer could easily enter. For rural immigrants in the city, mendicancy was sometimes a preferred livelihood, and one that denoted privilege. A popular Chinese saying dramatizes the preference for begging: "Having been a beggar for three years, one would decline an offer to be an official."[13] This truly happened in some cases. A beggar in Guangzhou once declined an offer from his brother-in-law to serve as an official in a county office, saying that he would rather "be accompanied by the Five Hundred Monks [i.e., his fellow beggars] than bow himself down for the Five *dou* of Rice [i.e., a salary]."[14] With all its myths, tactics, and organizations, begging became an urban "job" option and a part of the lure of the city in modern China.



As I have suggested, urban poverty was more a result of rural crisis than a product of urban growth. The lure of the two lowest urban occupations (one, pulling a rickshaw, was described as a job that literally entailed "running like oxen and horses" [*niu ma zou*] and the other, begging, was mournfully paired with death) reveals more than anything else the depth of the urban-rural gulf in modern China. Since urban poverty in twentieth-century China was primarily the result of rural depression that made the city a symbol of opportunity for the impoverished and desperate masses of the countryside, any means that promised bare subsistence was taken as a straw to be grasped before drowning in an ocean of destitution.

Shanghai in its heyday was notorious as a city where, in famine years, police and charities had to pick up thousands of corpses. Most of the victims were new arrivals from the countryside and the abandoned infants of the poor.[15] One may argue that a city like this can hardly be described as a paradise for the poor. Truly it was not. However, in comparison with the wretched who died on the streets and the much more numerous victims of famine and war in the villages, the destitute survivors in Shanghai—of which rickshaw pullers and beggars were the most visible—could justifiably be regarded as the lucky.

The idea of the superiority of the city has been criticized as "a cliché of our Western cultural traditions," and one that does not fit traditional Chinese society.[16] But by the early twentieth century this Western cliché had clearly captured the imagination of the common people of China. Rural people clinging to the city for sheer survival gave substance to the notion in a down-to-earth and unadorned way. It also showed that the concept was not imported but was a product of Chinese social reality and a summary of ordinary people's life experiences. The economic opportunities, convenience of daily life, and richness of cultural and social life in the city, all granted incomparable and irresistible advantages to the city over the coun-

try. As twentieth-century China's most modernized city, Shanghai concentrated and highlighted the attractions of an urban life, giving birth to the boastful saying "East and West, Shanghai is the best."[17] This sense of Shanghai's superiority is also apparent in a folk song that mocks the vanity of a country girl:

> A country girl wants to imitate the manners of Shanghai.
> Desperately trying, with all her strength, she still cannot get it.
> Ah! she is now a little bit closer
> —but fashions in Shanghai have already changed.[18]

What we see here is not just a satirical sketch of an innocent country girl, but an allegory of the backwardness of the countryside.

## *The City and Modernity: The Making of a Commercial Culture*

Although the old negative image of the city faded, it did not entirely disappear. While the city was generally seen as a better place to live than the country, many (and not only the peasantry and earthbound gentry class) continued to despise the city as somehow irrational and dangerous. By the twentieth century, judgment on the city was not single-minded but had become a mixture of contradictions, with admiration, envy, fear, and contempt all mixed together. Although sentiment for the city became increasingly positive, some measure of the old awe lingered even after the Communist revolution.

This contradiction became something people were aware of, and it was often revealed in satirical literature written by socially sensitive writers. Lu Xun (1881–1936) epitomized peasant mentality in his famous character Ah Q, a day laborer in Wei village who always thought well of himself. At the top of Ah Q's "list of prides" was that he had been to town a couple of times.

> Yet he could be contemptuous of townsfolk too. For instance, Wei Villagers called a seat made from a three-foot plank a longbench and so did Ah Q, but the townsfolk called it a stickbench. "That's not right, that's flatass dumb!" he thought to himself. And how about fish? When frying bigheads, Wei Villagers would toss chopped scallions into the pan, but the townsfolk always used shredded ones. "That's not right, that's flatass stupid!" he thought to himself. "On the other hand, I gotta remember that next to me, Wei Villagers are just a bunch of hicks. They've never even seen how bigheads are fried in town."[19]



Naturally, if the object of attention were not a nearby town but a great metropolis like Shanghai, this mixed feeling toward urban life would be still more drastic and dramatic. Indeed, mixed or contradictory sentiment was a frequent topic in popular fiction in early-twentieth-century Shanghai. Bao Tianxiao's *The Countryman Revisits Shanghai,* which was serialized in Shanghai's leading newspaper, *Shenbao,* is a good example. Bao described the unpleasant but comical experience of a hayseed in Shanghai in the early thirties. From the countryman's point of view, Shanghai is "expensive, foreign, irrational, petty-minded, impersonal, depraved, and chaotic." The obstinate man dislikes virtually everything he sees in the city: from the name of railway station tickets, the classes of streetcars, and the arrangement of shops to the distant relations of the people, the calculating character of society, the shamelessness of prostitutes, and so on. However, while the city's moral decay is most evident in the case of a village girl lured to the city to be a prostitute, even this old peasant realizes that the city is a place where great money can be made: "Did not even this poor lost daughter send enough money back to the countryside to build a fine cement house for her parents?"[20]

Two years after Bao published this piece, Mao Dun in his classic *Midnight* started with the dramatic death of old Mr. Wu, a wealthy member of the gentry who arrives in Shanghai to visit his elder son, a modern entrepreneur. Sitting in a motorcar of the latest design, holding an ancient classic, and observing the street scene of the "Sinners Paradise," the old man is overwhelmed by the frenzy of the city. He is shocked when he sees "a half-naked young woman sitting up in a rickshaw, fashionably dressed in a transparent, sleeveless voile blouse, displaying her bare legs and thighs." In the old man's eyes, the countless lighted windows of the towering skyscrapers gleam like the eyes of devils and the traffic becomes a snakelike stream of black monsters, "each with a pair of blinding lights for eyes, their horns blaring, [which] bore down upon him, nearer and nearer!" All this causes him to close his eyes tight in terror, and tremble all over. The first thing that the old man seizes upon when he recovers from his dizziness is the ravenous way his younger son had gazed at the half-naked woman from the car window, accompanied by his daughter's complaint that "father would not like me to dress pretty!" The overwhelming contrast of what he saw upon entering the city, and the constant thought that "of all the vices sexual indulgence is the cardinal; of all the virtues filial piety is the supreme" drumming in his mind, bring on a fatal stroke the very evening of his arrival at his son's luxurious modern home.[21]

In some way Mao Dun's novel reflects the feeling of alienation and disorientation experienced by many people who came to the city from a rural or less urban background, including the author, who himself grew up in a Jiangnan rural town and came to Shanghai to work as an editor at the Commercial Press. While Mao Dun delineated alienation and disorientation through a fictional figure, his contemporary Yu Dafu (1896–1945) was forthright in expressing his own feelings. Born and raised in a small town in Zhejiang, where his neighbors included firewood choppers and vegetable peddlers, Yu Dafu noted that his first impression of Shanghai was of "being surrounded by women's pearls and make-up, smelling their perfume, and living in the shadow of the hairs on their temple; all of these almost made a newly arrived country youth like me out of breath. I felt that I was going to fall into a coma." Yu described city life as "perverted and decadent," characterized by a "scramble for money, openness of crime, waste of spirit, and rampage of carnality"; he asked, "after all, was this the goal of mankind?"[22] His diaries, particularly those written in Shanghai, were full of sad and depressed sentiments over things urban, yet without the city, he proclaims, his life would have been meaningless.[23] Yu was known for portraying sensational female characters, and his personal love life and marriage were much publicized. His female protagonists were remarkably consistent: all were urbane, charming, novel, yet full of temptation and danger—like the city itself.[24]

Perry Link describes the popular mentality toward the city (in particular, Shanghai) as "anxious ambivalence."[25] Other scholars of Shanghai have made a similar observation: the city's "everyday life was suffused with ambivalence."[26] But, why was there this ambivalence? Why was it not limited to outsiders who lived in the country (whose complaints about the city might be dismissed as "sour grapes"), but felt as well by those who lived in and apparently benefited from the city?

The ambivalence was arguably derived from the gulf between the countryside—which, with some noticeable exceptions, was bound by tradition, largely untouched by modernity, and conservative—and the city, which was less concerned about tradition, more open to modernity, and progressive. Like many commonly used but loosely defined terms, both "tradition" (or "traditionalism") and "modernity" invite broad and sometimes divergent interpretations. In modern China, traditionalism was frequently associated with things indigenous and an attitude of looking back in time. Modernity, however, was associated with things foreign and an attitude of looking forward.[27] This is particularly true in the case of Shanghai: the city was the nation's leading treaty port, its largest commercial center, and its most Westernized metropolis. Ambivalence toward the city in general and Shanghai in particular reflected earthbound China's contradictory feelings towards things new, unorthodox, and foreign.



From the late Qing through the socialist era, the Chinese have seen Shanghai in many different ways, but in the final analysis there are only two views that count: the city is a symbol of economic opportunities to be seized, or it is a trap of moral degeneration (including the triumph of Western imperialism) to be shunned or condemned. One might think that strong, contradictory views like these could easily divide people into opposing groups. But in Shanghai these views were by no means divisive. Rather, it was clear that any individual could hold both views and not feel ridiculous about doing so.

Criticism of the city came from not only the conservative, Confucianism-minded moral camp but also the progressives. From Wang Tao (1828–97), one of the nation's pioneer reformists in the late Qing, to Chen Duxiu (1880–1942), the Communist radical, writers portrayed Shanghai as an evil empire where human dignity was crushed by greed and lust, and Chinese pride was trampled by barbarian foreign devils (or, to use a later term, Western imperialism).[28] Even the terminology used to convey the image of Shanghai was consistent across ideological lines and time periods. From the late Qing to the era of the People's Republic, *da ran'gang*, or a gigantic dye vat, was one of the most popular metaphors used to describe Shanghai, implying that the "spiritual pollution" (to borrow a recent political neologism) of the city was so contaminative and inevitable that anyone who lived there might be unconsciously and indelibly "dyed." As a local saying put it, "One could not clean oneself even by jumping into the Huangpu River" (*tiaojin Huangpu jiang ye xibuqing*).[29]

As an essentially rural-based movement, the Communist revolution inevitably inherited the ambivalence toward Shanghai. The city's solid industrial and financial base and fine workforce that were built in the prerevolutionary period have been generally recognized to be invaluable national resources. For decades, the city's contribution to China's national revenue was incredibly high, far beyond any conceivable normal share of a single city in a country of China's size.[30] But Shanghai's economic contributions did not prevent the regime from sticking to its preconceived prejudice, which was of course based on an all too important ideology, that the city had been an evil bridgehead of foreign encroachment and the supreme headquarters of domestic reactionaries and therefore should be condemned.

The story of the "Good Eighth Company on Nanking Road" (*Nanjing*

*Lu shang Haobalian*), a People's Liberation Army unit stationed in downtown Shanghai, offered a national role model in the 1960s. The promotion of the Good Eighth Company preceded and then paralleled the political-moral campaign to "Learn from Comrade Lei Feng" personally trumpeted by Mao Zedong. It dramatized the official, orthodox, negative view of Shanghai. At his post on Nanking Road, a soldier of the Eighth Company sighed to his fellow soldiers that "even the wind on Nanking Road smells good." This unadorned expression of feeling was taken as a dangerous sign of the corrosive influence of bourgeois ideas, of which Shanghai (and, in particular, Nanking Road) was a symbol. The entire story of the Eighth Company involved a single theme: how to resist such influences. The Good Eighth Company on Nanking Road, which was the official honorary title the unit earned in 1963, became a national role model simply because the unit, established in rural north China during the Civil War, was able to maintain an essentially rural lifestyle while stationed in the midst of Shanghai's urban dissipation.[31]

No wonder stories such as the following were propagated. A soldier of the Good Eighth Company was reluctant to see his wife, who had cheerfully come from their home village to visit him in Shanghai. After having experienced the dazzling city life, the soldier disdained the woman's rough and rustic manner. Like the exclamation "Even the wind in Nanking Road smells good," the soldier's "deviation" was treated as an indication—an even more serious indication—of the corrosive effects of the city. After much political education (or brainwashing, one might say), the soldier was back to "normal." The happy ending, as it was plotted into a drama named *Sentries under Neon*, was that once the deviant soldier took off his leather shoes and put on cotton-cloth shoes (handmade by his wife), and once he and his wife together enjoyed their "down home" food—*wowotou* (steamed buns made of maize or sorghum)—things were once again right.[32]

The assumption here, as well as what lay behind feelings of "anxious ambivalence," was that Shanghai was different from the rest of China: the city represented a modernity that was alien to the nation. But the question remains, how sound was the assumption? Or, to put it more precisely, how modern were the city and its people? If modernization is, by one definition, "the process by which societies have been and are being transformed under the impact of the scientific and technological revolution," we encounter two different images of Shanghai.[33] One is a metropolis that was a gigantic receptor of modern technological development. Running water, gas, electricity, telephones, streetcars, automobiles, air-conditioning—all appeared



in Shanghai soon after they were introduced in the West. Nanking Road and the Bund featured imposing Western-style office buildings, including East Asia's tallest edifice (the Garden Hotel) and "the most sumptuous building from the Suez Canal to the Bering Sea" (the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank), and modern facilities such as China's first Otis escalator (in the Daxin Department Store) and the world's longest bar (in the Shanghai Club).[34] In addition to Shanghai's unquestionable position as the nation's first modern industrial, commercial, and financial center, the city was also known for its cultural sophistication—for its prosperity in literature and the fine arts (the first female nude model for painting stunned the nation in 1913), for its initiatives in Western-style higher education, for its development of modern media and the press, for its concentration of China's finest movie studios and theaters (which earned the city the appellation "Hollywood of the East"), for its leading role in fashion, and so on.

But if we step away from the fashionable boulevards and look into the back alleys where the majority of the people of Shanghai lived, we witness another image—a less publicized but perhaps more realistic picture, and one that may be regarded as *not* modern. Calling it an urban village with a small-town type of life would be a more appropriate way to describe the scene. The majority of Shanghainese lived in two- or three-story brick attached houses built row upon row in the narrow alleyways that sprawled all over the city. A typical day in these neighborhoods started with the rumble of the two-wheeled nightsoil cart rolling along the back alleys. The din of the nightsoil man pulling his cart was always the first sound to break the stillness of the dawn. Chickens, commonly raised in these neighborhoods, bestirred themselves; the cockcrow echoed the nightsoil man's yelling for people to bring out their nightsoil to be collected. This daily collection of human waste was followed by the daily chore of lighting a gasoline can–sized coal stove; coal was the only source of cooking energy in the kitchen of the average Shanghai family.[35] Wastepaper and wood chips were used to kindle a fire that in turn ignited egg-shaped briquettes of compressed coal. Wisps of smoke rose slowly into the air, painting streaks of gray against the whitish morning sky. This scene, viewed from a distant building on the Bund, was not unlike what one might see when viewing a rural village from a nearby hill: the smoke from the kitchen chimney of ordinary peasant households is a symbol of a lively community in rural China.

But to see such a scene in Shanghai was odd in the sense that this was the first city in China to have piped gas and a modern sanitary system. But irony can be found in many aspects of the daily life of the city people. While Shanghai has the reputation of having a diverse and rich cuisine, the

standard breakfast fare for the people of Shanghai was, and remains, tasteless *paofan* (made by reheating leftover cooked rice) and pickles.[36] In high fashion, the city led the nation ("the Paris of the East"), but ordinary people seldom purchased clothes off the rack at a fashionable shop. What most Shanghainese wore was made either by the handy housewife (as most of them were) or a Ningbo or Suzhou tailor, whose shop most likely sat right on the corner of the alley. It was also not unusual to see residents returning from a visit to the countryside carrying bundles of clothing with them.[37] While automobiles were found in abundance on the streets of Shanghai, most people had never taken a taxi; for the majority, to ride in a sedan would have been considered a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The two-wheel rickshaw might be considered by some to be a symbol of Oriental backwardness, but it was an improvement over the wheelbarrow popularly used from the late Qing well into the Republican period. By any standard, the city had excellent means of public transportation, but it was not uncommon to see people commuting, sometimes for miles, by the inborn means of transportation: walking, a practice known in jest as taking the "Number Eleven Bus."[38] The scene in the city's shantytowns was even more rural and primitive. Most of the residents there were denied access to the basic facilities that any modern city offers: electricity and running water. Using a pail to lift water from a nearby creek or crude well drilled by the residents and lighting a kerosene lamp were the ways these people got water and light. Paved roads were rare in these areas, not to mention sewers and regular garbage collection. One of the reasons that squatters' neighborhoods often sprang up along the banks of a river or a creek was that these places readily served as both a source of water and a dumping ground. The shantytowns of Shanghai were not just an example of the usual "urban problem" associated with any big city. They were an integral, fundamental part of the city and the home of a good part of the city's population. By the end of the Republican period, nearly 1 million, or about one-fifth, of the city's people lived in shantytowns.

Overall, as far as daily life was concerned, Shanghai can be seen as a honeycomb consisting of numerous small cells—the compact, even crowded, and multifunctional neighborhoods—where people conducted most of their daily activities. For most people these were carried out in an area that at most stretched just a few blocks from their home. Almost all daily needs could be met within walking distance. Public transportation was utilized mainly for commuting to work. Taking a bus to go shopping or for other purposes was seen as a significant event. Of course, the living



quarters of shopkeepers in the neighborhood served as workplace too, not unlike the peasant's home and farm rolled into one. Also, most children went to school within a few blocks of their home or even in the same alley. The city therefore was fragmented into numerous small communities wherein a life of moderate comfort could be obtained and maintained without venturing into the outside world—just a few blocks away. To many residents the few blocks around their homes were what the "city" meant to them, and most of the city's much publicized modern amenities were quite irrelevant to their daily lives.

However, this provincial or urban-village type of lifestyle, so to speak, did not prevent Shanghainese from being viewed, in the eyes of Chinese outside the city, as the most cosmopolitan and urbanized people of China. An old Shanghailander (an old-fashioned way of saying "a person of Shanghai," one that often refers to Shanghai's Westerners) could fastidiously point out the distinctions between a person from the so-called "higher corner" (or *shang zhi jiao*, referring to the city's fine neighborhoods) and a person from the "lower corner" (or *xia zhi jiao*, referring to the city's poor neighborhoods), but such distinctions were too subtle for non-Shanghainese. For them, all Shanghainese seemed to share, among other things, a most distinctive characteristic that one needed to take precautions against: astuteness. This characteristic was, on one hand, associated with being calculating, fastidious, quick-witted, and, if necessary, with benefiting oneself at the expense of others. On the other hand, it was not necessarily associated with bargaining over trivial matters, and certainly not with being niggardly. Rather, it implied a style or a boldness of vision in life to have the daring, as a Chinese saying put it, to look to the long term by "casting away gold like throwing out dirt" (*zhi jin ru tu*). In the twentieth century, all across China "Shanghainese" and "astuteness" became inseparable like body and shadow.

It is more meaningful, and perhaps also less conjectural, to explore the origin of any stereotype than to discuss its legitimacy. In looking at the source of this stereotype—and perhaps all the characteristics of Shanghai's people mentioned above—one inevitably encounters a powerful fountainhead, namely, commerce. One may imagine a "typical" Shanghainese, as envisioned by many Chinese, to be rather like Shakespeare's merchant of Venice but with a breadth of spirit and "merchants' ways" that were veiled with the kind of sophistication tempered only by living in an extremely cosmopolitan and complex city. In other words, Shanghainese were far from philistine, and their "merchant character" was often implicit

and diluted with the higher culture that the city generally represented. Nonetheless, underneath it all nothing could change the fact that the essence of being "Shanghainese" derived from commerce.[39]

As is now common knowledge in the field of Chinese history, commerce and commercial culture were age-old and widespread phenomena in China; in particular, late imperial China witnessed vigorous commercialization in the lower Yangzi delta region, of which Shanghai was a part. Nevertheless, modern Shanghai possessed a more densely clotted and highly localized commercial culture than the nation had ever seen before. Here in a riverside city of little more than a dozen square miles gathered millions of people; each came cherishing a dream, each ventured into this strange land in search of survival or success; and in the process each had become a merchant of a sort. Here, in some way everybody was a commodity and everything was for sale: from the flesh and blood of a newly arrived country girl to the muscle of a simple coolie, from auspicious words uttered by a street urchin to monopolistic protection provided by notorious gangsters, from missing national art treasures to recycled opium dregs, and so on. Such commercialization may well be an inevitable part of modernity—it was certainly not seen as too extravagant in the capitalist West during the Industrial Revolution—but it was novel and peculiar to most Chinese in the early twentieth century. It was therefore all too natural that the Chinese perceived their compatriots in Shanghai as a group of anomalous people immersed in a distinctively commerce-derived culture that somehow differed from the rest of the country; hence they looked askance at Shanghainese.

One is easily tempted to look for Shanghai's commercial culture in the city's bustling, prosperous commercial centers that featured modern, multicolored business mansions, department stores, entertainment centers, theaters, hotels, restaurants, and ever-changing neon lights and commercial advertisements of all sorts.[40] All of these are certainly important components of commerce and commercial culture, and all are present in modern cities elsewhere. This study, however, chooses to focus on something less conventional but more characteristic of a Chinese city with a unique commercial culture rooted in everyday life: the commerce in the back alleys where most people lived. The purpose of this focus is to witness the human drama of everyday life. Here we see how commerce was not limited to just the city's commercial districts but rather was an everyday matter carried out in the narrow paths between residential houses, at the back doors of common households, in people's living rooms, and even in the inner chambers of ordinary homes. It was in this extraordinary mixture of residence



and commerce that a vibrant commercial culture was born: commerce was made such a vital part of life that, we may say, one had to commend one's soul to it in order to survive.

## *How "China-Centered" Are We?*

In the half century since the end of World War II, Western scholarship on the history of late imperial and modern China has in a broad sense moved toward a "China-centered" approach that has gradually replaced, or in some ways remedied, the "Western-impact/China-response" model.[41] This movement has been stimulated by a younger generation of researchers well trained in the Chinese language, and by political changes in China since the late 1970s that have allowed a better research environment, including access to archival materials and local records previously closed to researchers and the possibility of field studies.

The more profound reason, of course, has to do with a change in philosophy: the internal dynamics and logic of a non-Western nation have come to be seen as a more powerful force than a strong but external impact. Applying this outlook to modern Chinese history, scholars have convincingly demonstrated that in some dimensions of Chinese life traditional social and institutional practices continued into the modern era, that modernity in China in some respects had Chinese roots and was not something entirely transplanted from the outside, that some social and political aspects of late imperial China were comparable to those of "early modern" Europe, that the Communist revolution may have carried out programs that had started a century earlier,[42] and so on. Overall, discontinuities and stimulus from the West have come to be seen as less important than the continuation of Chinese tradition and indigenous development. The history of modern Shanghai has been taken as a showcase to demonstrate both perspectives. For decades under the "impact-response" model, the city was seen as the "key to modern China," as representing the path that the rest of China should have taken.[43] This view has been much modified by more recent scholarship, but to see Shanghai as an unusually important city (whether "key" or not) remains unquestioned. This surely is one of the reasons for the boom in Shanghai studies in recent decades. Little explanation is required for the view that a history of the Chinese labor movement, a history of the Chinese bourgeoisie, or a history of modern Chinese literature, among many other subjects, would be unthinkable without research on Shanghai.[44]

Although modern Shanghai was far from being firmly in the grip of

Westernization—as its image of "China's most Westernized city" often conveys—an awareness of the Chinese character of the city should not lead to underestimation of Western influences. In fact, the old "impact-response" model is perhaps more relevant in Shanghai than in any other place in the nation. Most of the changes that occurred in the city after 1843 (when Shanghai was opened as a treaty port) were an obvious consequence of the Western impact or were associated with the West. Indeed, the persistence of tradition in the life of the people of Shanghai is only more striking if we are fully aware that such continuity existed despite the formidable forces that worked to cut Shanghai off totally from the past. In other words, an underestimation of the Western influence on the city—something that a "China-centered" approach could easily lead to—would not only introduce a bias that is opposite on the surface but similar in nature to that of "Western impact," but also prevent us from full appreciation of the tenacity of Chinese traditionalism.

Nowadays an emphasis (or overemphasis, as critics would say) on the Western impact on modern China is vulnerable to criticism—if it is not seen as too hackneyed even to be worth criticizing. But, ironically, the new breed of China-centered studies may not be immune from the dangers of a Euro-centered bias. In analyzing a historical phenomenon in China by examining it from "within" (which is what the China-centered approach attempts), we must choose whether to view that phenomenon as something essentially Chinese in a Chinese context or perspective, or to view it as a *Chinese counterpart* of things Western. The latter has the obvious merit of putting Chinese history in comparative perspective and, for a practical purpose, making things Chinese easier to understand. One may also add that, in the final analysis, all human societies share something in common; thus a counterpart-hunting approach is not altogether inappropriate.

However, such an approach runs the risk of conceptualizing Chinese history based on Western experience or of distorting it to fit Western-derived theoretical models. In analyzing what he has called "the paradigmatic crisis in Chinese studies" (in particular, in social and economic history), Philip Huang points out: "Our field has far too long borrowed analytical concepts entirely from Western-derived schemes, attempting in one way or another to force Chinese history into the classic model of Smith and Marx."[45] Indiscriminately applying Western models to Chinese realities encompassed Chinese Communist orthodoxy that had long declared Marxism to be a theory that "fits well everywhere" (*fang zhi sihai er jie zhun*). Regardless, the counterpart-hunting approach in the field of Chinese history could fall back into the trap of the much criticized Euro-



centered perspective on Chinese history, although this time the trap would be better hidden and, consequently, more dangerous.

These thoughts occurred to me as I tried to employ some frequently applied analytical concepts in the field, some of which seem inevitable tools in my research on neighborhood life in Republican Shanghai. I found the tools blunt and unable to cleanly dissect the empirical material that I have gathered in my research. Neighborhood life is by any definition part of *society*. Thus with such a topic an application of the "state-society relations" approach seems almost imperative. While any research on neighborhood life cannot completely ignore that angle, such an approach produces a rather indistinct and insipid picture in which the neighborhood ("society") is largely free from governmental and political intervention.

A few examples, beginning with the *baojia* mutual responsibility system, may make the point clearer. The Chinese state had a long tradition, or at least a consistent intention, of exerting control down to the urban neighborhood. The baojia system was the most notable, institutionalized, and protracted effort in this regard. The system can be traced back to at least the Song period (960–1279). In the Qing (1644–1911) its importance was frequently emphasized by the imperial court, and the system was refined to an unprecedented degree of sophistication. Nevertheless, in all accounts the baojia turned out to be more an intention of the state rather than a reality in society; it existed largely on paper or was more a matter of form than substance. Even at its zenith in the Qing, it was far from being completely carried out nationwide.

Later, the Nationalist government tried to reestablish the baojia system but achieved no more success than its Qing predecessor. In Shanghai, the regime only followed the same track of drawing up the blueprints with much fanfare, but never really got the institution built. The only time that Shanghai residents felt political control from the above was during the Japanese occupation, when a wartime baojia system was indeed enforced. But the system was brief, incomplete, and taken as a wartime emergency measure.[46] It was not until after the Communist revolution that the people of Shanghai were, in the span of a few years (1950–54), incorporated into a neighborhood organization system unprecedented in Chinese history.[47]

Thus, prior to the early 1950s when a three-tier system of urban neighborhood organization was built nationwide, neighborhood life was essentially free of state intervention. In the saying "Heaven is high and the Emperor is far away," one finds a reflection not only of the peasants' view of state power but of that held by the ordinary city people of Republican Shanghai. Here, the analytical model of state versus society is still useful

in framing the picture (in the sense that it brings out the issue), but in large measure it is irrelevant to the content of the picture.

One of the issues regarding state-society relations that has been the subject of lively and thought-provoking discussions in recent years involves the question of civil society and public sphere in China. Developed by the German thinker Jurgen Habermas in analyzing late-seventeenth-century Great Britain and eighteenth-century France, the public sphere–civil society construct has become a favorite analytical framework for China scholars who are interested in testing whether notions and institutions similar to those that pervaded Great Britain and France may have existed in late imperial and twentieth-century China. Such scholars often bring in the Chinese notion *gong* as the best available equivalent to the "public sphere." Elite and mass participation in local affairs has been interpreted as a form of local autonomy, an expression of society (in contradistinction to the state), and a harbinger of democracy: all are the essence of civil society or, to carry the argument further, signs of modernity.[48] Such arguments have achieved remarkable successes in Chinese urban history, most importantly in William Rowe's study of Hankou in the late Qing and David Strand's study of Beijing in the early Republic. Their works demonstrate the sophistication of city people (in particular, the nongovernmental elite) in dealing with various political, economic, and professional issues. Many practices were Chinese innovations that had developed in the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century and that may bear some similarities to the European experience in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[49]

But if we were to look for local autonomy, the expression of public views, or a sense of community in the homes of Republican Shanghai, we would be in some degree disappointed; at the very least, we would meet forms of "public sphere" and "civil society" very much unlike those in Western Europe. A typical residential neighborhood in the city was a walled and gated compound consisting of several rows of identical attached houses. Each house was, more often than not, subdivided, with its rooms rented to different families, many of which lived under the same roof for decades. Living cheek by jowl with one's neighbors did not create a strong sense of community, contrary to what one might expect. There was no regular or usual neighborhood organization like the *chōkai* (neighborhood associations) that flourished in Japan in the same period.[50] Occasionally, tenant committees cropped up in Shanghai, representing residents fighting rent increases or renovation plans (that would force residents to move out). These committees were loosely organized, occasional and temporary in nature, formed by a few volunteers, and only lukewarmly supported by those who had an interest in the negotiations; often they ended in failure.



Of course, neighbors were not totally alienated from each other. News and gossip were circulated and spread among neighbors through casual chatting at alleyway corners, in daily morning shopping at a neighborhood food market, in the "enjoying the cool" summer-evening gatherings, or at the hot water service and snack store combination that could be found in most residential neighborhoods. Love affairs and marriages among neighbors were uncommon. Disputes among neighbors over trivial matters, however, were frequent, and sometimes physical fights broke out, but more serious violence was rare and disputes seldom found their way into a court of law. Serious disputes were almost always mediated by neighbors, although no formal institution for that purpose existed prior to the Communist revolution.

Scholars are now well aware—or should be—that our knowledge of the public sphere in China is still limited.[51] This limitation springs from our incomplete, and in some areas superficial, knowledge of the warp and weft of everyday life in China. We need a more detailed and nuanced picture of the life of the ordinary people before we can say that any theoretical construct has meaningfully framed the nature of Chinese history.

CHAPTER 1

# Going to Shanghai

The writer Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), who traveled the world extensively, exclaimed in 1926 that none of the cities he had ever seen so overwhelmingly impressed him with its teeming humanity as Shanghai. "In no city, West and East," Huxley wrote, "have I ever had such an impression of dense, rank, richly clotted life. Old Shanghai is Bergson's *elan vital* in the raw, so to speak, and with the lid off. It is Life itself."[1] This spirited life Huxley observed in the Chinese section of the city was just part, perhaps the less vigorous part, of modern Shanghai, a city that in the span of a century grew from a muddy town on the Huangpu River to a booming metropolis of 5 million people. The city drew its inhabitants from all over the country (indeed, all over the world) and from of all walks of life; most were peasants who flocked to the city in pursuit of the dream of a better life.

Like many phenomena in modern China, modern Shanghai's birth was attended by the West. This was not merely in the sense that the modern city grew out of the treaty port classification imposed by the West, but that its origins lay in a somewhat bizarre system, in which a settlement deliberately designated for the British ended by being inhabited overwhelmingly by Chinese, who lived side by side with foreigners of all stripes. It was precisely this unexpected and unintended mixture that eventually turned Shanghai into the single most cosmopolitan city of China.

## *From Segregation to Mixed Residence*

### THE BIRTH OF A CITY

Shanghai has been the largest metropolis in twentieth-century China, and one of the five or six biggest cities in the world. Its actual area, however, was small in the middle of this century: the city proper (i.e., urban districts,

excluding rural counties under the Shanghai municipality) was 31.8 square miles (82.4 square kilometers), and the main part of the city, the former foreign concessions where modern Shanghai arose, was barely 13 square miles (33 square kilometers). The core of the city virtually coincided with the 1848 boundaries of the former British Settlement, an area of about 470 acres (.7 square mile).[2] In Shanghai's heyday in the Republican period, if one walked from Nanking Road or the Bund—the prosperous commercial heart of downtown Shanghai—in any direction for a distance of about 5 miles, one would find oneself in the midst of fields of cotton and rice. If one departed from the Bund by ferry and crossed the Huangpu River—a trip of less than ten minutes—one would land in an almost untouched, traditional bucolic setting.[3]

Thanks to the more than two decades of rigorous research on the commercialization of Ming-Qing China, especially in Jiangnan and the lower Yangzi delta region, nowadays few scholars would still say that pre-treaty-port Shanghai was but a fishing village.[4] Early in the nineteenth century, the walled town of Shanghai was ranked as a so-called third-class county seat. This placed it under the provincial capital of Nanjing and the prefectural capital of Songjiang, but still accorded it some prominence for its commercial prosperity, based primarily on a booming cotton trade in the Qing period.

However, the northern outskirts of the city, where the future International Settlement and the French Concession were to be located, was truly rural in November 1845 when Gong Mujiu, the Shanghai Daotai, or circuit intendant, assigned the first piece of land there to the British: the landscape was dominated by cotton and rice fields, uncultivated fields of reeds, and winding footpaths for towing boats along the waterways.[5] What was to become the famous Bund was then just one of the footpaths near the waterfront at the confluence of the Huangpu River and Suzhou Creek. The walled county town, in spite of its prosperity before the mid-nineteenth century, formed only a small portion of modern Shanghai, about one-twentieth of Shanghai proper in the Republican period. In that sense, the modern city of Shanghai did spring from obscure rural origins.

In population, too, Shanghai grew from an insignificant beginning. The population of all of Shanghai county reportedly reached 540,000 in the mid-nineteenth century, about half of whom lived in the walled county seat and its immediate outskirts and the rest in villages and small towns scattered throughout the county. The northern suburbs of the town, where the International Settlement later appeared, had merely five hundred inhabitants. The population there was so sparse and considered so insignificant that contemporary surveys of Shanghai simply ignored it.[6]



However, half a century later, the population in this part of the city had skyrocketed to half a million residents. Another half century later, the population of Shanghai reached more than 5.45 million. In other words, Shanghai experienced a tenfold growth of population in a span of a century. Equally significant was the tremendous concentration of the population: the overwhelming majority were not dispersed throughout old Shanghai county, but densely packed into what had previously been the northern suburb of the county seat. This was one of the world's most densely populated places: average population per square kilometer was 43,570 in 1930, 50,032 in 1935, and 76,880 in 1940–42.[7]

By the mid-nineteenth century, Shanghai had exceeded Guangzhou in population and become China's leading treaty port.[8] The rapid growth of Shanghai could be measured by economic data such as shipping volume in and out of the port of Shanghai. In 1844, the first year after the port was open, a total of 44 foreign ships (together carrying 8,584 tons) entered Shanghai; in 1849 a total of 133 ships (52,574 tons) entered; and in 1863 a total of 3,400 foreign ships (964,309 tons) entered, and a total of 3,547 foreign ships (996,890 tons) departed. The staples of this busy trade were (among imports) opium and (among exports) tea and silk.[9]

The dynamic of development in modern Shanghai fundamentally diverged from that in traditional Chinese cities. Scholars in China view the development and prosperity of modern Shanghai as a result of Western imperialism and the exploitation of the hinterland by the treaty port.[10] In the final analysis, such a view is not substantially different from the Western interpretation of Shanghai as a proud product of Western sophistication or as a city literally built on the notorious opium trade.[11] Putting moral concerns aside, views on both sides of the Pacific share the common ground that the city was nurtured by the commercial vigor and entrepreneurship brought by the West. Although Shanghai had been a busy commercial center prior to its opening to the West, the new dynamic brought by the Westerners meant that traditional commerce, such as the cotton trade, was largely irrelevant to the modern development of Shanghai.

The composition of the people of modern Shanghai also differs from that of the old city. Researchers have shown that pre-treaty-port Shanghai was by no means a city inhabited only by local people. For instance, the role in the city's commercial life played by so-called guest merchants (*keshang*)—who came from a variety of places ranging from the southern

provinces of Guangdong and Fujian to Anhui in the Yangzi River valley and the provinces of north China—was vitally important.[12] Still, the population of Shanghai, like that of other county seats, was overwhelmingly local. In contrast, the great majority of the inhabitants of modern Shanghai came from elsewhere. From the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, immigrants consistently made up about 80 percent of the city's population.[13]

So here we have a city that was *new* in three basic senses: it sprang from pastoral farmlands, but quickly overshadowed the old walled county town; its population consisted overwhelmingly of newly arrived immigrants; and it was spiritually stimulated and driven by Western commercial values and vigor, something that was novel to China. All of these changes began with a system of residential segregation.

### THE FOREIGN SETTLEMENTS

The foreign concessions, the focus of growth in modern Shanghai, were originally designed in 1845 to be settlements reserved exclusively for Westerners. Except for a handful of farmers already living there at the time the settlement was created, Chinese were banned from purchasing and renting land within the boundaries of the settlement, either for residential or commercial purposes. The segregation was terminated in 1854 and thereafter could not be restored. Except for a few years during the Pacific War, the foreign population in Shanghai had never exceeded 3 percent of the city's total population.[14] The residents of Shanghai's foreign settlements (namely, the International Settlement and the French Concession) were overwhelmingly Chinese. Shanghai, in spite of its heavy foreign accent, remained predominately a Chinese city.

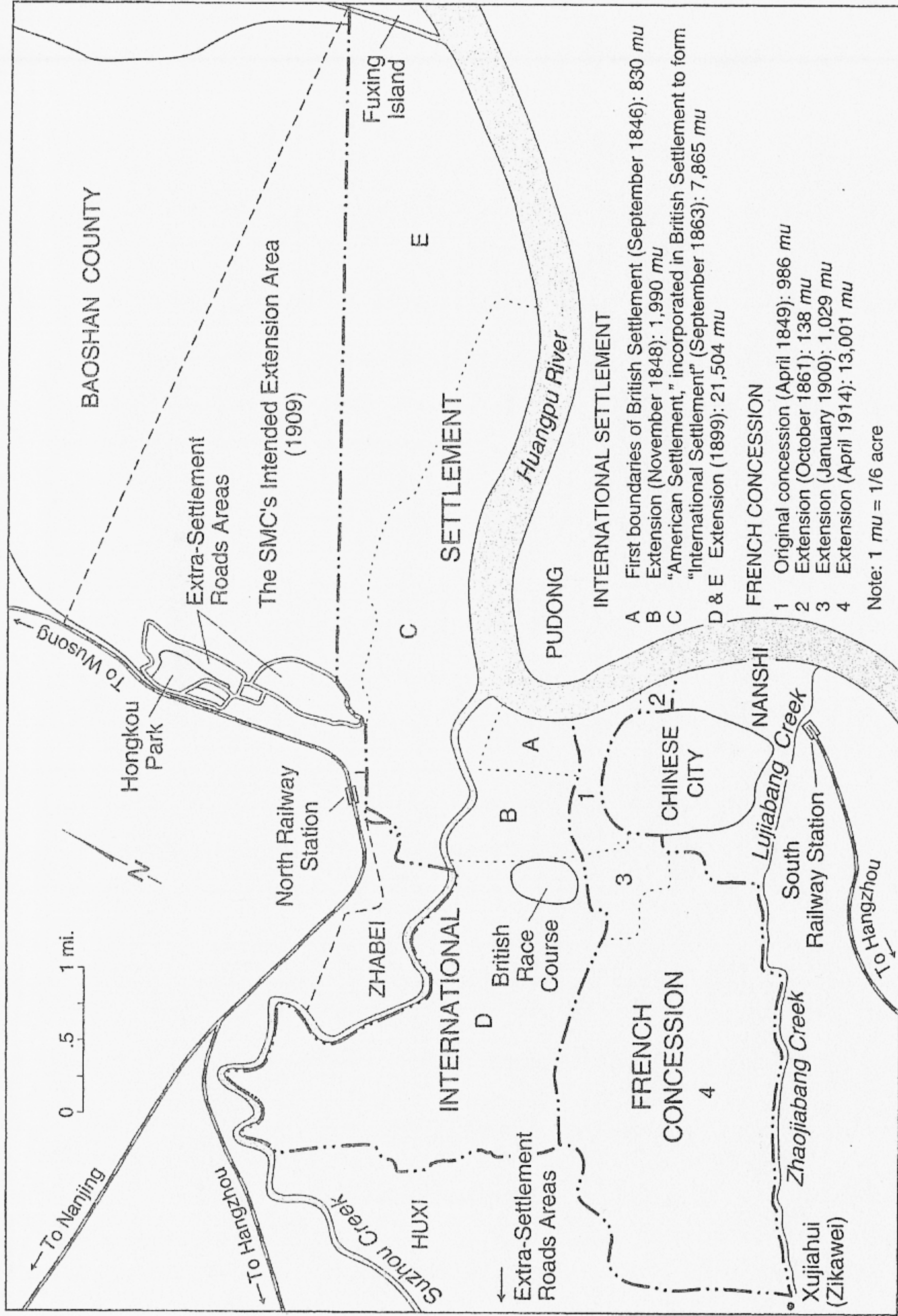
There was virtually no justification in treaties for the legal status of Shanghai's foreign settlement. The only document that can be considered as possibly providing a legal basis is an agreement known as the Land Regulations, signed in 1845 by Gong Mujiu, the Shanghai Daotai, and George Balfour (1809–94), the first British consul in Shanghai. The agreement allowed British subjects to rent property in a designated area in the northern suburb, outside the walled Chinese city. This area, later to become the core of the International Settlement, covered an area from the Bund in the east to Boundary Road (today's Henan Road) in the west, and from Lijiachang (at the confluence of the Huangpu River and Suzhou Creek) in the north to Yangjingbang Creek (today's Yan'andong Road) in the south, a total area of about 830 Chinese *mu* (138 acres). According to the Chinese notion that "all the lands under heaven belong to the emperor" (*putian zhi xia, mofei wangtu*), foreigners were in theory not allowed to purchase land within the area but were permitted to permanently rent real property there. This is an early example of how the Chinese saved face while granting privileges to foreigners.[15]



The French Concession was bounded by the walled Chinese city in the south and the newly created British Settlement in the north—as a result of a lengthy negotiation in 1849 between the French consul Louis Montigny (1805–68) and the Shanghai Daotai, Lin Gui.[16] The American Settlement in Hongkou, located on the north side of Suzhou Creek about five miles northeast of the Chinese city, was more a fait accompli presented by a concentration of property purchased (or permanently rented) by the American Church Mission than an officially designated area for the Americans. As Hosea Ballou Morse (1855–1934) put it, "The American Settlement was not created, but 'just growed.'"[17] In 1848, Bishop William J. Boone (1811–64) got oral agreement from the Daotai Wu Jianzhang that Hongkou was to be an "American Settlement." The official boundary was settled in June 1863 by the American consul George Frederick Seward (1840–1910) and Shanghai Daotai Huang Fang. Three months later, on September 21, the British and American Settlements were formally amalgamated. The resulting concession was known (especially after 1899) as the International Settlement. Thus, by the end of the 1840s, three major powers all had settlements in Shanghai.

The land regulations prohibited Chinese from renting property within the International Settlement and the French Concession. Chinese inhabitants of the area were to be gradually evacuated, and eventually the area was to become completely segregated. By the end of the 1840s, even a casual visitor could observe that the Chinese who lived within the settlement "generally left of their free will and were liberally remunerated for their property by foreigners." These natives "were moving gradually backwards [i.e., westward] into the country, with their families, efforts, and all that appertained unto them" including their family tombs.[18]

This system of segregation was not entirely imposed by the West. Rather, at the beginning, it was a mechanism that the Qing authorities adopted to limit foreign influence and minimize disputes between local people and the "barbarians." According to the Bogue (Humen) Treaty, which was signed October 8, 1843, as a supplement to the Treaty of Nanjing, local Chinese authorities in concert with the British consul in the five




Map 1. The growth of Shanghai, 1846–1914.



treaty ports of China were to designate a limited zone within which foreigners could travel, as well as an area where British subjects could reside.[19] This was considered a victory by the Qing, as can be seen from the correspondence between Qiying (1790–1858), the imperial commissioner who negotiated and signed the treaty, and Emperor Daoguang (1782–1850). Qiying reported to the emperor that, by signing the supplemental treaty, he had successfully arranged that in the treaty ports "the boundaries of an area should be designated which foreigners are not allowed to exceed" (*yiding jiezhi, buxu yuyue*). The Chinese version of the Bogue Treaty actually carried this wording, but the tone was not clearly reflected in the English version.[20] The Qing rulers, by confining the "barbarians" to an officially designated special zone, apparently hoped to resurrect the old Canton system, that is, a system that strictly confined foreigners to a segregated zone in the treaty ports.[21]

Locally, in his first announcement of the opening of Shanghai to foreign trade dated November 14, 1843, George Balfour, the British consul in Shanghai, informed the British subjects in the city that "arrangements are in process for selecting a suitable site for dwelling and store-house for settling by assay."[22] In order to ensure that things went smoothly, the Daotai or one of his officers always went in person to Chinese landowners to negotiate the sale of land to the foreigners. This proved a difficult task. Frequently, the owners simply refused to "rent." In one case, an old lady "went so far in her opposition to all proposed bargains, that, after pouring on the head of the party a torrent of colloquial Billingsgate, she actually . . . spat in the Taotai's face and declared that she would never sell her patrimony to foreign devils!"[23] Such things would not have happened to a *huiguan* (guilds) merchant who came from another part of the country. Also, it was never a problem for Chinese "guest merchants" to establish guild houses in the walled city. For the British, however, this was the foremost difficulty that they encountered in Shanghai. At the beginning, Balfour could not even find a house for the consulate.[24] The intention of the Chinese officials was clear: to keep the foreigners out of the city. The British finally decided to located themselves in the northern suburbs and asked the Daotai to designate an area there as a segregated British settlement. This dovetailed with the mandarin's intentions.

For a decade after 1845 this segregation continued without much difficulty. In 1848, with the permission of the Manchu Daotai Lin Gui, the British Settlement was expanded westward to Nichengbang (lit., Muddy Town Creek; later filled in and transformed into Tibet Road) and northward

to the southern bank of Suzhou Creek. This rural area was soon inhabited by an increasing number of foreigners, as the following statistics on the foreign population in Shanghai show:[25]

| 1844 | 1845 | 1846 | 1847 | 1848 | 1849 | 1850 | 1851 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 50 | 90 | 120 | 134 | 159 | 175 | 210 | 265 |

The total population in the settlements in 1852 was about 500. This means that foreigners were gradually coming to outnumber the local Chinese residents.[26]

This was the dawn of what was to become a great city, although few at that time would have predicted greatness for Shanghai.[27] For the Western adventurers in Shanghai, life was enjoyable and placid. By 1850, a public park, a race course, and amateur theater clubs were founded in the foreign community. On summer evenings, Westerners driving ox carts relaxed in the breeze on the broad waterfront of the Bund, the business center of the settlement and site of much new construction.[28] A new term, "bunders," was coined to refer to these Westerners, and the Bund was often poetically associated with, in the words of an insider, "its gossip, its cool evening breezes, its ever-changing outlook, its pleasant promenades, its reminiscences of valued friendships, its pensive regrets."[29] The availability of a variety of wild game (mainly birds) in the region and the peaceful nature of the local people made hunting a real pleasure for the Europeans.[30] Shanghai was, as a British botanist who traveled extensively in China at that time exclaimed, "one vast beautiful garden, by far the richest which I have seen in China."[31] This pastoral, even romantic, life was perhaps typical of what Western sojourners enjoyed in Asia. Similar lifestyles could be found in the early colonial history of other Asian cities such as Calcutta and Yokohama.

But the foreigners in Shanghai would soon face an unexpected event that would dramatically bring to an end the tranquillity of their life and, much more important historically, change the course of the development of the city.

### THE END OF RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION

On the morning of September 7, 1853, an uprising organized by the Small Swords, a Fujian-based secret society headed by the Cantonese vagrant Liu Lichuan (1820–ca. 1855), killed the Shanghai county magistrate at the site



of an ongoing annual ceremony at the city's Confucian temple.[32] The rebels then took the county seat and declared the establishment of the "State of Great Ming" (Da Ming Guo). This event was the beginning of seventeen months of warfare in Shanghai and its vicinity. Two days after their success in Shanghai, the rebels marched to attack other county towns near Shanghai. In ten days, Baoshan, Nanhui, Chuansha, and Qingpu were under the control of the Small Swords. Jiading, a county seat twenty-five miles northwest of Shanghai, was occupied by the rebels prior to the Shanghai war. In the turmoil of the fighting, thousands of refugees, mostly from the county town of Shanghai but also from other occupied towns, poured into the foreign settlements, which were within walking distance of the war-torn city.[33] The population of the combined British and American Settlements jumped from 500 in 1853 to more than 20,000 in 1855.

These refugees encountered two different attitudes in the settlements. Foreign merchants saw them as an opportunity to make a fortune: the quickest way to get rich was to build dwellings for the refugees. Rows of simply constructed, single-story wooden houses appeared literally overnight along the Bund, in the northwest part of the British Settlement, as well as on the banks of Yangjingbang, the creek that separated the British and French settlements.[34] Many of the refugees were well-off merchants and landlords who could afford the prices that the foreigners asked.[35]

Another group of Westerners, however, was more concerned about the comfort and safety of the foreign community. This group was represented by the British consul, Sir Rutherford Alcock (1809–97), who in January 1855, after consulting the Shanghai Daotai, ordered "the removal of objectionable natives and demolition of objectionable tenements." Alcock's order left thousands of Chinese homeless in the bitter cold of winter.[36] This action sparked some antiforeign sentiment among the Chinese, but from the viewpoint of the British authorities, such a move seemed necessary if the idea of segregation from the Chinese was to be preserved. Shortly after the rebellion, the British Settlement, according to one observation, had been transformed from "a purely foreign reservation" into a "native Alsatia, the southern portion being blocked with abominably overcrowded and filthy hovels, fraught with the danger of fire and pestilence, rife with brothels, opium shops, and gambling dens."[37]

The debate over whether to continue accepting Chinese refugees was therefore a burning topic in the foreign community. The foreign settlement was at a crossroad. But no one could have predicted the impact that the ultimate decision would have on the fate of the city. Thus, when an out-

spoken British merchant approached Alcock to express his views, he was quite unaware that his words would result in a milestone for the city:

> No doubt your anticipations of future evil have a certain foundation, and, indeed, may be correct enough, though something may be urged on the other side as to the advantages of having the Chinese mingled with us, and departing from the old Canton system of isolation; but, upon the whole, I agree with you. The day will probably come when those who then may be here will see abundant cause to regret what is now being done, in letting and subletting to Chinese. But in what way am I and my brother landholders and speculators concerned in this? You, as H.M.'s Consul, are bound to look to national and permanent interests—that is your business; but it is my business to make a fortune with the least possible loss of time, by letting my land to Chinese, and building for them at thirty or forty percent interest, if that is the best thing I can do with my money. In two or three years at farthest, I hope to realize a fortune and get away; and what can it matter to me if all Shanghae [Shanghai] disappear afterward in fire or flood? You must not expect men in my situation to condemn themselves to years of prolonged exile in an unhealthy climate for the benefit of posterity. We are money-making, practical men. Our business is to make money, as much and as fast as we can; and for this end, all modes and means are good which the law permits.[38]

The view expressed here was no doubt representative of the majority of foreign merchants in Shanghai. Alcock was "quite convinced" by this lecture and the warning that he "was losing time in any efforts to stem the tide of land-jobbing and house-building for Chinese tenants"; thus he ended his struggle to keep the Chinese out of the settlement.[39] It is doubtful that even if the British authorities had continued to forbid renting houses to Chinese tenants, they would have been able to stem the tide of refugees flooding the foreign settlement. As Alcock admitted, to insist on a purely foreign settlement in Shanghai under these circumstances was "too evidently hopeless."[40] The official abandonment of segregation by the British consul, who was the most influential if not the most authoritative leader in Shanghai's foreign community, cleared the road for creating a mixed settlement of Chinese and foreign residents. In this regard, the combination of the Small Sword Uprising and Alcock's decision was a turning point in the development of Shanghai.

This decision was soon legalized, at least from the viewpoint of the Western powers. In July 1854, Alcock, together with the American consul, Robert C. Murphy, and the French consul, B. Edan, signed a new set of Land Regulations. Although this document was never approved or signed



by the Chinese authorities, it was nevertheless proclaimed as a revision of the 1845 Land Regulations, and on July 11 it was passed in a public meeting of foreign residents in the settlement. After that, the Land Regulations served as the fundamental law, or "constitution," for Shanghai's foreign settlement until the settlement was abolished in 1943.[41]

A number of important institutions set up by this law dominated the fate of Shanghai for almost a century. In September 1869, the Land Regulations were revised and approved by the European envoys in Beijing to create the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC, which replaced the former Executive Committee of the settlement),[42] which would govern the International Settlement until 1943. The 1869 Land Regulations also served as the legal basis of the merger of the British Settlement and American Settlement, although for practical reasons (such as policing) the latter already had been under the administration of the British Settlement since September 1863. Officially, the French insisted on having a separate concession in Shanghai. The French Concession was therefore governed by a separate municipal council headed by the French consul-general and was not subject to the Land Regulations. In reality, however, much of the administration of the French Concession duplicated the regulations and practices of the International Settlement.

The new regulations also deleted the segregation provision of the 1845 regulations, although officially Chinese were still not allowed to acquire land in their own name within the Settlement. At this stage the Chinese government was still unwilling to see mixed residence in Shanghai. According to a proclamation issued by Daotai Lan Weiwen in 1855, "No Chinese subject can acquire land, or rent, or erect buildings, within the Foreign Settlement, without first having obtained an authority under official seal from the local Authority, sanctioned by the Consuls of the three Treaty Powers."[43] When the foreign consuls wrote a letter asking the Daotai to take care of health and moral conditions in the settlement, the Daotai responded with a complaint rather than a solution: "According to the original land regulations, native domicile was interdicted within the settlement; now, however, tenements were built by foreigners to accommodate natives, regardless even of the risk incurred in harbouring people of bad character indiscriminately, and of the difficulties this unregulated state of affairs would entail in criminal cases."[44]

Despite the opposition of the Daotai, by the late 1850s there was no doubt that the concessions were no longer a reserved area for foreign residents, but rather were a special district mostly populated by Chinese but governed by Europeans. The suppression of the Small Sword rebellion in

1855 did not end population mobility into the foreign settlement. The Taiping Rebellion, which was most violent and destructive in Jiangnan, continued to drive refugees to Shanghai. In 1860–62, the Taipings several times attempted to seize Shanghai; this created even more panic among the people of the region, and, consequently, refugees continued to pour into Shanghai's foreign concessions for protection. By 1865, the population of the British-American settlement had increased to 92,884. At the same time, almost 50,000 Chinese moved into the French Concession. By the end of the Taiping Rebellion, well over 110,000 Chinese had moved into the foreign settlements.[45]

### *From the "Five Lakes and Four Seas"*

The opening of Shanghai in the mid-nineteenth century, first to "barbaric" foreigners and then to a great variety of Chinese refugees from outside the Shanghai area, represented the continuation of a local tradition of easy acceptance of outsiders. Traditional Chinese writers, including the compilers of local gazetteers (*fangzhi*), often described the people of Jiangnan as *rouruo* (soft and weak).[46] The tradition of ready acceptance of outsiders was seen as part of this "soft and weak" nature. In the mid-nineteenth century, when Shanghai was a hot spot in Sino-foreign relations, the Qing court frequently cautioned officials to beware of the "soft and weak" nature of the Shanghai folk when dealing with "barbarian affairs" (*yiwu*).[47] Lin Yutang (1895–1976) once contrasted the "simple thinking and hard living" northern Chinese and the "progressive and quick-tempered" southerners with the people of Jiangnan, who were, Lin claimed, "inured to ease and culture and sophistication, mentally developed but physically retrograde, loving their poetry and their comforts, sleek undergrown men and slim neurasthenic women, fed on birds'-nest soup and lotus seeds, shrewd in business, gifted in belles-lettres, and cowardly in war, ready to roll on the ground and cry for mamma before the lifted fist descends."[48] Such views added up to a stereotype, of course, and in any case might have applied more to the upper classes than to working people, but, like many stereotypes, there was some truth to these words.

There was also a more charitable interpretation of the "soft and weak" nature of the people of Shanghai that emphasized their virtues of openness, amiability, tolerance, flexibility, and so on.[49] The commercial boom of Shanghai in the Qing period was initially led by the "guest merchants," who came from nearby places as well as from remote provinces to conduct business in Shanghai. The influence of these merchants, particularly those



of Guangdong and Fujian, was strong prior to the treaty-port era. Apparently, prosperity created by the "guest merchants" eventually led to a proclivity to value commerce and easily accept outsiders and outside influences. Such a tendency was, even by the modest standards of the time, viewed as a departure from orthodoxy and, therefore, was condemned as evil.[50] But it was precisely because of this heterodoxy that Shanghai rose above the horizon of a vast conservatism and became a great, modern city.

#### FOREIGN ADVENTURERS

This tradition of openness was even more characteristic of Shanghai during the treaty-port era. By the late nineteenth century, Shanghai was an exceptional place where the natives welcomed sojourners, while elsewhere in the country the normal pattern was the reverse. As an indicator of its openness, a variety of Chinese dialects could be heard in the streets and neighborhoods of the city; everyone lived side by side, seemingly without fear of discrimination. Indeed, Shanghai seemed most receptive to those who spoke a Western language, because people who spoke a foreign tongue could, as a late-nineteenth-century poem put it, "do as they please."[51]

At the beginning of the treaty-port period some Westerners had apparently bought into the stereotype of the "soft" Shanghainese. A British Royal Navy commander who traveled extensively along the China coast and lived there for five years immediately after 1842 wrote:

> The English merchant at Canton is almost a prisoner in his house; he has only a few streets open to him for the required recreation, even for the benefit of exercise, and then with the probability of insult. Experience has taught him that even his own house may be a very unsafe refuge from a furious and ignorant mob; any excitement, from whatever cause it originates, is sure to vent itself on the unfortunate foreigners, and, perhaps, bring the building about his ears with very small chance of redress. On the other hand[,] at Shanghae [Shanghai], he is surrounded by a peaceable and hospitable community, where crime is a matter of such rare occurrence, that His Excellency Kun Mŭkiŭ [Gong Mujiu], the civil governor, said in my presence that, during his government of so large a population, which had lasted, I believe, nine years, one execution only had taken place. . . . Besides the absence of crime in Shanghae, the city is always open to the foreigner equally with the native; and I have had several years' experience to ground my statement on, that insults or annoyance, of every kind, are less frequent to strangers than in any part of the world.[52]

Although the rise of modern Shanghai must be explained from a multifaceted analysis—including the favorable geographical location of the city,

sitting as it does at the middle of the nation's lengthy coastline facing the Pacific to the east and the Yangzi Valley to the west—the "soft" nature of the Shanghainese no doubt played an important role. To put this softness into a broader and perhaps philosophical perspective, one may relate it to the value of liberalism. A Chinese author who tried to analyze the nature of the people of Shanghai from a historical perspective argued that the "strongest psychological character of Shanghai civilization was tolerance and coexistence based on individual freedom."[53]

Be that as it may, unquestionably liberalism contributed to the cosmopolitanism of the city. In few Asian cities could foreigners feel as at home as in modern Shanghai. By the twentieth century, "Shanghai became a legend. No world cruise was complete without a stop in the city. Its name evoked mystery, adventure and license of every form."[54] Going to Shanghai was a classic adventure for Westerners and a solution for many who had problems in their homeland. Shanghai was thus a city of dreams and a city of escape. In the Republican period, its foreign population included people from more than twenty European nations, a sizable community of Japanese, Indians, Vietnamese, and Koreans, and citizens from Middle Eastern and South American nations—as well as the nationless.[55]

The largest foreign contingents were, of course, the British, the Americans, and the French, whose respective concessions formed the heart of the city. The European-style office buildings on the Bund and the sumptuous and secluded residences on the west side of the city were constant reminders of the foreigners' status as masters of the city. By the twentieth century, despite the decline of the British Empire, old Shanghai residents still put the British ahead of other Western nationals, and even ahead of all other Anglophones: witness the word order in the term "British-American people" (YingMeiren).[56] Despite whatever privilege the sentiment might have accorded the British, all foreigners in Shanghai had reason to feel at home. "To be a Shanghailander—whether British or American, whether stateless Jew or Russian refugee—had always seemed an honoured privilege. Shanghai was a city of homes, not a city of transients. Young people might in the first instance be posted by a trading house to work there for a few years, but often as the moment of transfer approached, they begged to stay. People of every nationality settled there, married, raised children."[57] The following missionary report tells of a vivid street scene in the downtown area in 1909:

> Shanghai, with its mixture of races, with its national antipathies and jealousies, is indeed one of the most attractive but strangest towns in the whole world. Every race meets there; and as one wanders down the Nanking Road, one never tires of watching the nationalities which throng that thoroughfare. There walks a tall bearded Russian, a fat German, jostling perhaps a tiny Japanese officer, whose whole air shows that he regards himself as a member of the conquering race that has checkmated the vast power of Europe; there are sleek Chinese in Western carriages, and there are thin Americans in Eastern rickshas; the motorcycle rushes past, nearly colliding with a closely curtained chair bearing a Chinese lady of rank, or a splendid Indian in a yellow silk coat is struck in the face by the hat of a Frenchman, who finds the pavements of Shanghai too narrow for his sweeping salute; one hears guttural German alternating with Cockney slang; Parisian toilettes are seen next to half-naked coolies; a couple of sailors on a tandem cycle almost upset two Japanese beauties as they shuffle along with their toes turned in; a grey-gowned Buddhist priest elbows a bearded Roman missionary; a Russian shop where patriotism rather than love of gain induces the owners to conceal the nature of their wares by employing the Russian alphabet overhead, stands opposite a Japanese shop which, in not too perfect English, assures the wide world that their heads can be cut cheaply.[58]



In later years, the cultural shock suggested in this report became attenuated, but the cosmopolitanism of the city lasted well into the 1940s.[59]

Not all Westerners played the role of "master" of the city. About 25,000 to 50,000 White Russian émigrés arrived in Shanghai in the Republican period.[60] Although most of them were poor—Russians were the only Westerners to include a sizable number of prostitutes and beggars—the businesses they opened along Avenue Joffre (now Huaihaizhong Road) in the French Concession helped create an elegant European atmosphere on the street.[61] The concentration of Japanese in North Sichuan Road in Hongkou caused the area to be known as Little Tokyo. The city's traffic was largely directed by Sikh policemen, nicknamed "Turbaned Number Three" or "Number Three Redhead" (*hongtou asan*), whose presence in the streets became a feature of the city.[62] The success of Jewish merchants in Shanghai is an often-told story. Real estate magnates such as the Sassoons and Silas Hardoon (1847–1931) contributed to the "get-rich quick" reputation of Shanghai, and their grand office buildings and extravagant homes were proud landmarks of the city. Partly because no visa or papers of any sort were required to enter the city, during World War II Shanghai hosted about 20,000 Jewish refugees who had escaped the Nazis and made the arduous journey across the hemisphere. Most of them lived in the alleyway-house (*lilong*, or lane) neighborhoods in Hongkou in the north-

east section of the city. Half a century later, although practically all of the Jews had gone elsewhere (particularly to the United States), most of their former homes remained little changed and became sentimental relics for those who returned to visit.[63]

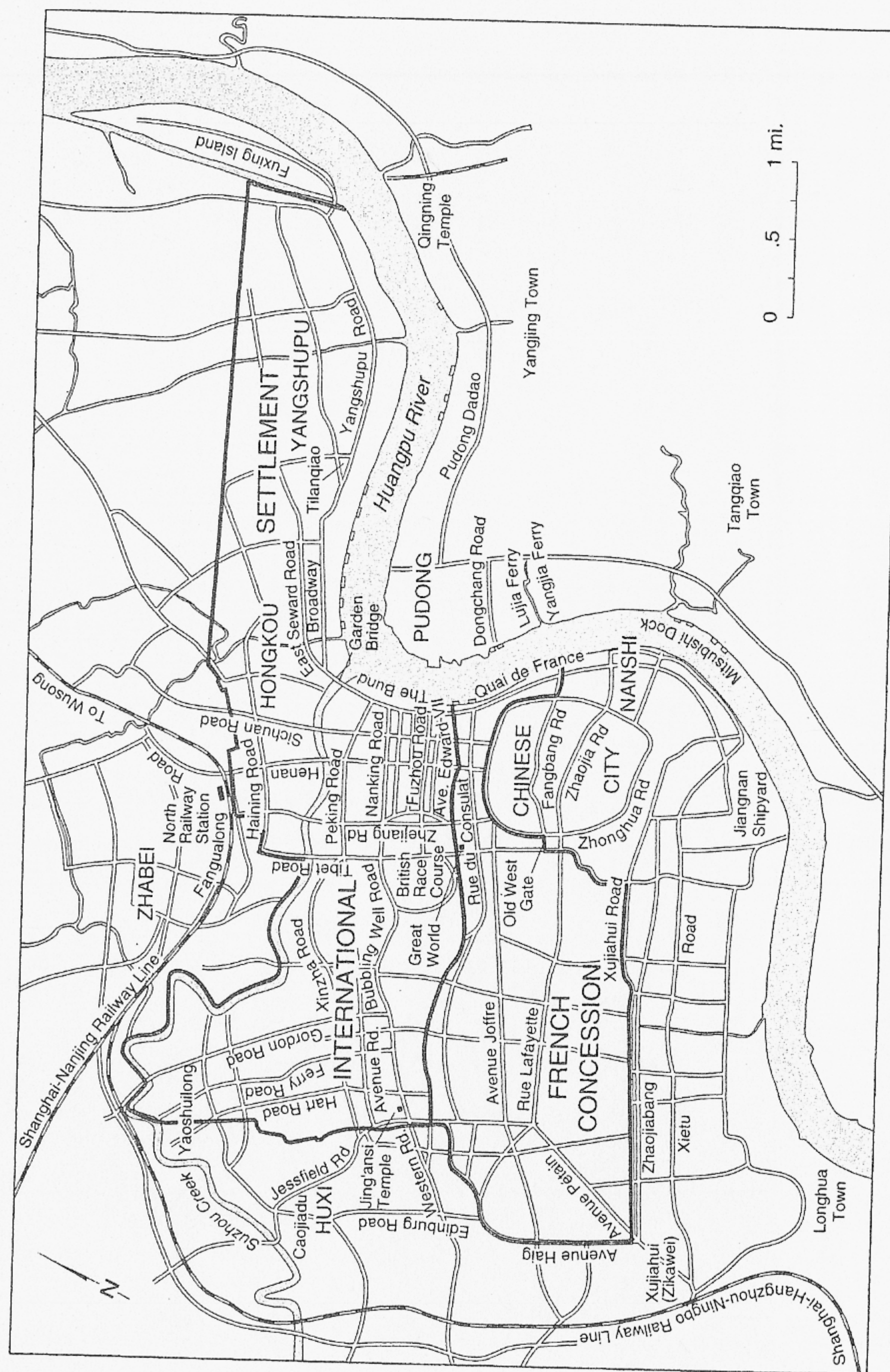
Despite Shanghai's wide-open cosmopolitanism, some foreigners may well have had reason to feel that they were "strangers always," as the title of Rena Krasno's memoirs of Jewish life in wartime Shanghai suggests. Yet loneliness, or perhaps homesickness, never prevented foreigners from coming to Shanghai and making a living, if not a fortune. In the early 1930s a Shanghai writer listed the reasons foreigners of various nationalities came to the city:

> Shanghai's foreigners pack together in the city for the same reason our Chinese do: they could not make a living in their home country and came to Shanghai in search of a livelihood. Japanese prostitutes come to Shanghai to make a living by selling sex.[64] The White Russians, who are anti-Red, came to Shanghai to make a living by begging. The overbearing British toughs came to Shanghai to make a living by running the police department. The bored Spanish came to Shanghai to make a living by playing jai alai [*huiliqiu*]. The nationless Jews came to Shanghai to make a living in real estate. The merchants of American trust companies came to Shanghai to make a living by selling gasoline. The French, who love a life of ease, came to Shanghai to make a living by selling cosmetics. The oppressed Indian and Vietnamese came to Shanghai to make a living by working as policemen, and so on and so forth—there are just too many such cases to give a complete account of the subject.[65]

By the thirties, many foreigners considered the city their permanent home (see Fig. 1). As a Britisher indicated on the eve of the Japanese attack on Shanghai in 1937, "It is time the old idea that foreigners come to Shanghai for a few years and then go away with a fortune was abandoned. This is a place of permanent residence for most of us."[66] The Japanese attack on Shanghai in 1937, and their occupation of the whole city after the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941, cast a shadow over the Western presence in the city. But it was really not until the victory of the Communist revolution in 1949 that the century-long golden age of the Westerners came to a close.[67]

## CHINESE IMMIGRANTS

Despite the seeming ubiquity and importance of foreigners in Shanghai, the growth of the modern city lay not in its attraction for foreigners but,




Map 2. Shanghai in the Republican era.

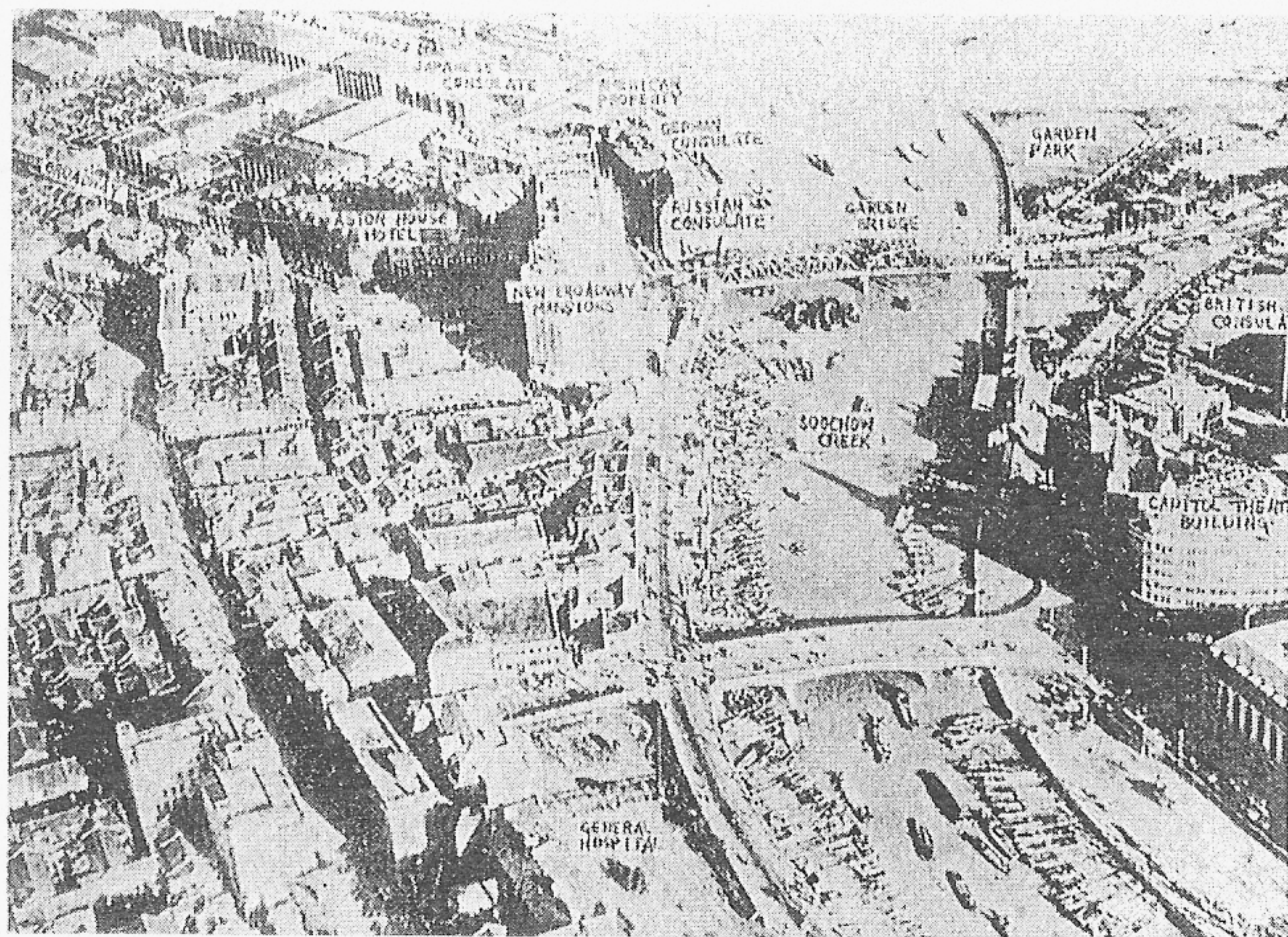



Fig. 1. This bird's-eye view of where Suzhou (Soochow) Creek joins Huangpu River was photographed in 1937. The right (i.e., southern) side of the creek is the core of the International Settlement, with Garden Park (across from the British Consulate) at the northern end of the Bund. Nanking Road is just one block out of the scene, to the right. The 350-foot-long Garden Bridge was Shanghai's first iron and concrete bridge, built in 1906–7; it is one of the symbols of modern Shanghai. Across the bridge to the north is the New Broadway Mansions, built in 1934. The area behind the mansion is Hongkou, where residential neighborhoods featured alleyway houses mixed with consulates, warehouses, and bars in the Broadway area. The second bridge in the picture is the Zhapu Road Bridge, built in 1927. The area across this bridge to the north consisted mainly of lilong neighborhoods. Courtesy of Shanghai Municipal Archive.

essentially, in its attraction for the Chinese. Ever since the end of the system of residential segregation, the overwhelming majority of the people of Shanghai had been Chinese immigrants. In the span of three-quarters of a century (from 1855, when the segregation ended, to 1930, when the city entered its heyday), the population in the core of the city, the International Settlement, had increased about fiftyfold, and about 97 percent were Chinese.[68] By 1937 and the end of the Republican period, the city's total population had increased at least tenfold, or possibly twentyfold in the city proper.[69]



The administrative area of Shanghai did not significantly expand in the century prior to 1949; rather, such rapid population growth was the result of immigration. Modern Shanghai attracted and absorbed immigrants from everywhere in the nation. From the late nineteenth century to the late 1920s, non-Shanghai natives consistently made up about 85 percent of the city's population.[70] During the Nanjing decade (1927–37), the percentage of non-Shanghai natives dropped slightly, possibly because after a few generations of migration some people born in Shanghai considered themselves Shanghainese and reported their native place as Shanghai. But the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, followed by the Civil War (1946–49), brought new tides of immigrants to the city. By the end of the Sino-Japanese War, nonnatives still accounted for 80 percent of the population; in January 1950, the percentage of nonnatives had increased back to 85 percent.[71]

Most of these immigrants came from the provinces of the lower Yangzi delta (in particular, Jiangsu and Zhejiang) and from Guangdong in southern China. In the early 1930s, the five provinces from which Shanghai drew most of its immigrants were Jiangsu (53 percent, including 20 percent of local Shanghai origin), Zhejiang (34 percent), Guangdong (5 percent), Anhui (3 percent), and Shandong (1 percent).[72] This pattern continued up to 1950.[73] To apply a Chinese expression, modern Shanghainese came from the "Five Lakes and Four Seas" (*wuhu sihai*), that is, everywhere in the nation.[74]

Immigrants came to the city for their own individual reasons and purposes, and included everyone from multimillionaires who came to pursue an extravagant yet secluded lifestyle that could hardly be found in other Chinese cities, to the absolutely destitute who roamed the city's streets in search of bare survival; from political dissidents who fled to the "safety zone" of the foreign concessions, to criminals who came to join the nation's largest underground; from modern women (or flappers) who found in this city the freedom they sought, to innocent rural girls who were inveigled by labor contractors to come work in the city but who ended up being sold to brothels. Yet virtually all who came to Shanghai had a simple, shared goal: to find a better life.

In the winter of 1928, the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Social Affairs conducted a survey of homeless people in seven public shelters. The 1,471 vagrants surveyed were all recent immigrants to the city, and they hailed from all eighteen provinces of China proper and from Manchuria. These people listed more than forty previous occupations, but the largest group (310) were jobless. There were 138 demobilized soldiers who were sup-

posed to return to their home villages, but who decided to stay on in Shanghai although they had no job. In response to the question "Why did you come to Shanghai?" 586 replied, "To look for a job." Another 354 said they came to Shanghai to look for relatives or friends. For most of these people, the purpose of visiting a relative or friend was to connect with someone who could help them find a job. Thus, virtually 64 percent of the respondents were motivated by the job opportunities to be found here.[75]

This survey was echoed by a 1989–90 survey of residents in seven neighborhoods who were immigrants in the Republican period. About 70 percent of the male interviewees gave "to look for a job" as the main reason for coming to Shanghai. In this they were successful. The percentage of employment among these immigrants increased from 46.6 before coming to Shanghai to 75.3 after arrival. The survey also found immigrants to Shanghai had a great variety of occupational backgrounds. More than half (56.4 percent)—by far the largest group—had been farmers; almost all found a job in the city, mostly in manufacturing and commerce. The remainder of those surveyed had come from diverse occupational backgrounds. This is consistent with another aspect of their background: half of the immigrants (50 percent) had come directly from the countryside, 21 percent from small rural towns, 15.3 percent from county seats, 11 percent from medium-size cities, and about 2.7 percent from large cities.[76] Shanghai's immediate "radiation zone" for attracting immigrants included its suburban rural areas and the more distant lower Yangzi delta counties. People in the nearby countryside looked upon Shanghai as a place to get ahead. "Where is the market for agricultural and handicraft products? Shanghai. Where is the place for people to seek an occupation? Shanghai." The gazetteer of Chuansha, a rural county adjacent to Shanghai, exclaimed: "Overpopulation? Move to Shanghai! Unemployment? Look for opportunities in Shanghai!"[77] It is probably the case that most rural immigrants came to Shanghai looking for factory work, for in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Shanghai grew to be the nation's largest industrial center.[78]

The recruitment of workers from nearby villages for Shanghai's industries started as early as in the 1870s. Shanghai's earliest workshops were the Western-run shipyards in the Hongkou area (along the northeast banks of the Huangpu River).[79] The shipyards at first hired skilled Cantonese workers. By the late 1870s, as the industry grew, workers from Nanjing, Ningbo, and local villages gradually outnumbered the Guangdong workers, for the obvious reason that local residents were closer and easier (and cheaper) to recruit. But, unlike the Guangdong workers, who were experienced artisans, workers from Jiangnan were mostly peasants and hence started their careers in industry as apprentices.[80]



A veteran worker in the machinery industry, Qian Rendao (born 1881), recalled that his grandfather was a local farmer who only had two or three mu of land planted in vegetables. Since it was difficult to support a family on such a small farm, the grandfather went to the International Settlement in search of a job and became a porter in the Hongkou dock area. Apparently he still kept his vegetable farm; thus his son (Rendao's father) as a child worked as a vegetable peddler to earn extra money to support the family. But the family had already become urban oriented. When Rendao's father grew up, he became an apprentice in the Chinese-owned Fachang Machine Factory. After serving out his apprenticeship, he entered the British-owned Xiangsheng Shipyard (Boyd and Co.) with the help of his wife's brother, Song Milong. Song also had been a vegetable farmer in his youth. He used to sell vegetables to the Fachang Machine Factory, which is how he got to know the people there; through this connection he later found a job in the factory as an apprentice. After his apprenticeship, he transferred to the Xiangsheng Shipyard in 1880 and worked as a coppersmith. His skill and performance got him quick promotions. He became a section chief a few years later and served in this position until 1905. Having an uncle like Song Milong in the factory, Rendao entered the Xiangsheng Shipyard as an apprentice at age eighteen and became a second-generation coppersmith.[81] Stories such as this were by no means uncommon. In 1960–62, when veteran workers in the machine industry were interviewed by a group of historians, the interviewees recalled that their experiences were similar to those of the Qian and the Song families.[82]

The same pattern of securing labor from nearby villages obtained in the textile industry, the largest industry in modern Shanghai.[83] A 1920 investigation into the life of textile workers in Shanghai found that all had been farmers from nearby areas.[84] The experiences of these workers reveal in a number of ways the process by which peasants sought an urban life in this still-fledgling stage of China's industrialization. Even after moving to Shanghai, many of this group continued to maintain land and houses in home villages where their families had lived for generations; some even still lived in the village while working in a factory.[85]

The 1920 survey found that workers known as *kemin* (guest people)—who hailed from the three counties of Nantong, Chongming, and Haimen, all near the mouth of the Yangzi River—did not become factory workers immediately upon arrival in Shanghai. Instead, they worked as tenants or farm hands in villages near Shanghai; in other words, they replaced the la-

bor of local peasants who had gone to work in the city's factories. Land in Shanghai was much more fertile than the saline-alkali soil in their native places, so to farm land near Shanghai was already a move upward for these peasants. Their ultimate goal, however, was not to farm but to work in a factory. After settling in villages near the city, many of them managed to get acquainted with people in cotton mills and eventually found jobs there (Fig. 2).[86] This pattern of urban-rural transformation continued into the 1930s. As the sociologist H. D. Lamson reported in 1931, villages near Yangshupu, just northeast of Shanghai, served as stepping stones into the city for those from more distant regions. "Families move into our villages from such places as Tsung Ming [Chongming] Island," Lamson wrote, "remain some time, and perhaps eventually some or all of them move into the city itself."[87]

Compared to peasants from outside the region, local farmers were sometimes less enthusiastic about new industries invading their homeland and upsetting their peaceful rural life. When Nie Zhongfu established the Hengfeng Cotton Mill and Sheng Xuanhuai established the Sanxin Cotton Mill—both were among Shanghai's earliest modern textile mills—nearby farmers saw the plants as strange creatures and called cotton looms "the deity's vehicles"; few wanted to work in the factories.[88] When the Jiangnan Shipyard, one of China's earliest and largest modern enterprises (in 1894 it alone employed about 4 percent of all of China's industrial workers), opened in Gaochangmiao in suburban Shanghai in 1865, rumors spread among local peasants that the factory recruited workers to be "thrown into the chimney" and that workers would be "smashed by the machines." For a while the situation was so unfavorable that the shipyard had to recruit apprentices from the local orphanage. The peasants also had another reason to resent the factory. Veteran worker Qian Haigen recalled that his grandfather was a farmer of Gaochangmiao whose land was taken over by the Jiangnan Shipyard to build the factory. Qian refused to work for the new factory and instead made a living by selling green onions. He even established a family rule that none of his offspring or their descendants should work for the shipyard. However, facing the much stronger trend of industrialization, neither the rumors nor the old farmer's resentment could count for much. Barely two decades later, the Jiangnan Shipyard had become a highly desirable place to work. The Qian family, after the grandfather died, ignored his behest and entered the shipyard.[89]

The job opportunities in the city included much more than just employment in the mills. In a suburban village of Pengpu, women commonly worked in textile mills and men earned a living as peddlers in the city.[90]



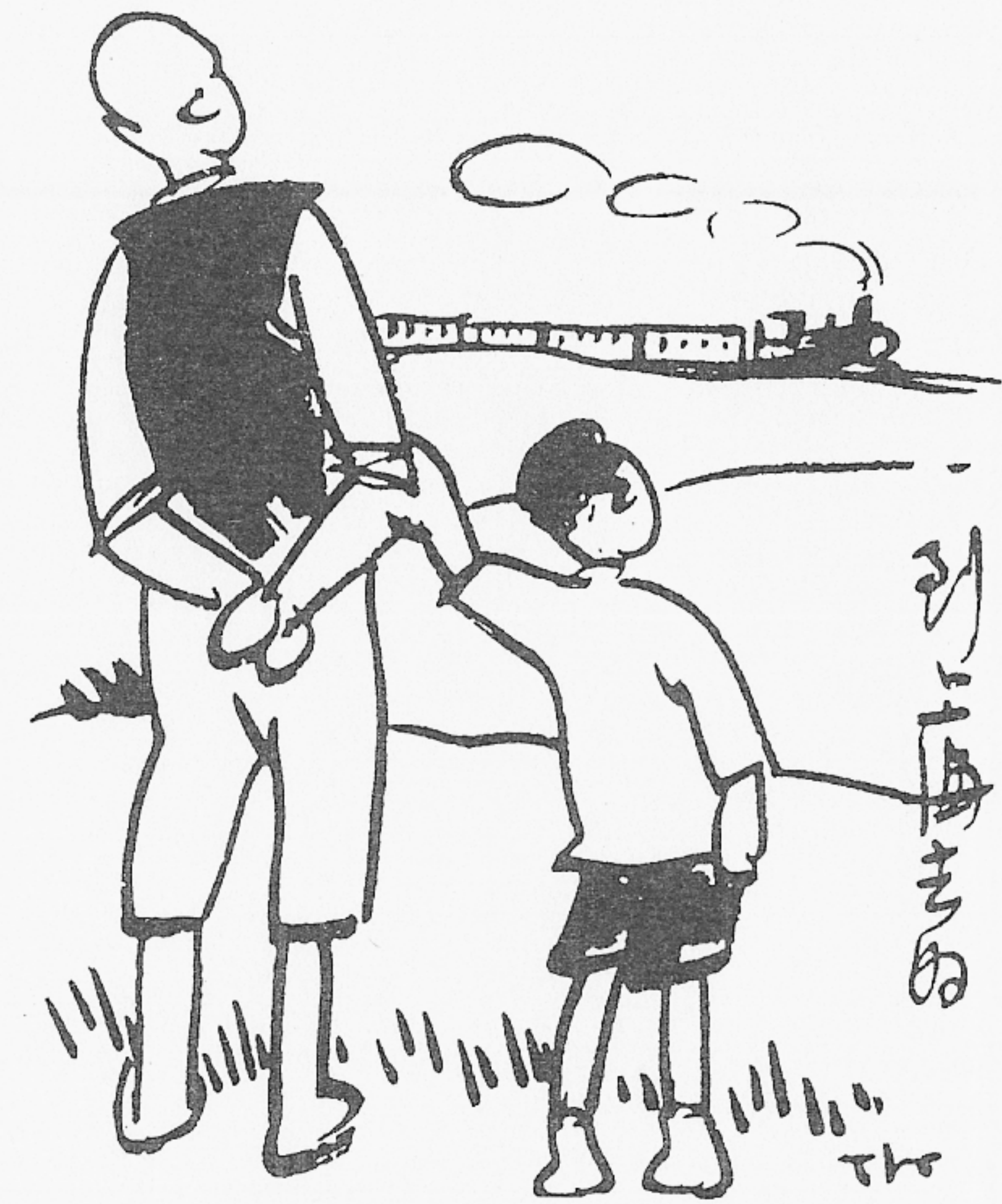


Fig. 2. The artist and writer Feng Zikai (1898–1975), a native of Zhejiang but a lifetime resident of Shanghai, was known for his unique style of plain ink drawings on subjects of everyday life, an approach similar to that of Norman Rockwell. This drawing dates to about 1932: a farmer and a boy watch a passing train. The caption reads, "[This train] is heading for Shanghai." In an implicit but sprightly way, the cartoon expresses rural people's general longing for Shanghai. From Feng Zikai, *Feng Zikai wenji.*

Peasant women from Fengxian county, which was close to the southern boundary of the city, made matchboxes for Shanghai's factories. Also making matchboxes were peasants in other nearby villages, as well as in Pudong (east of the Huangpu River).[91] The 1922 gazetteer of Fahua, a tiny town southwest of Shanghai, reported that, in addition to its farmers becoming mill workers, the men also worked in Shanghai as gardeners, road construction workers, cart drivers, and unskilled workers of all sorts, while the women earned a living by making lace trimmings, hair nets, paper *yuanbao* (joss money to be burned for the dead). They also worked as do-

mestic servants, a popular occupation among peasant women (Fig. 3).[92] As early as the Guangxu period (1875–1908), women from Shanghai's neighboring counties, such as Qingpu, were described as "going after the job [of domestic servant] like a flock of ducks." Some even abandoned their families to live in the city.[93] The popularity of domestic service never faded. The number of servants in the city increased in parallel with the general population: Shanghai in 1930 had about 50,000 servants; by 1950 the size of this army had almost doubled.[94]

## A DUAL IDENTITY

A popular saying in Shanghai had it that "having explored up to the edge of the world, one could not find a better place than the two sides of the Huangpu River."[95] Other local sayings expressed the same sentiment, declaring, for instance, "what a great fortune for a person to live in this colorful and dazzling world [of Shanghai]" (*ren zhule huahua shijie, dayou fuqi la*) and "Shanghai is a mountain of gold and silver" (*Shanghai jinyinshan*).[96] For most people the very word "Shanghai" provoked excitement, stimulated the imagination, and raised hopes. "So this is Shanghai!" was a usual exclamation of newcomers, both foreigners and the Chinese.[97] After being absent from the city for eight years and having lived in many places in the hinterland during the Sino-Japanese War, Wang Xiaolai (1886–1967), one of Shanghai's leading entrepreneurs (he originally came from a village in Zhejiang), returned to Shanghai on September 8, 1945. He wrote of his feelings as the airplane was about to land: "I see about 40 percent of the red-tiled houses in Huxi [west Shanghai] are newly built. Nanshi and Zhabei [the Chinese districts] have declined and show little vigor, but the former foreign concessions look like before. The happy lot of Shanghainese is indeed great. To compare Shanghai with the hinterland is to compare paradise and hell."[98]

Almost as a rule, a new immigrant to the city would soon be proud of being not just a city person but a "Shanghai person," or Shanghairen. Along with the rise of Shanghai as China's number one city, Shanghairen were popularly associated with sophistication, astuteness, and a certain degree of Westernization. The writer Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) wrote in 1943, "The Shanghainese are not only traditional Chinese but are tempered by the high pressure of modern life. . . . Everybody says that Shanghainese are bad, but they are bad with a sense of propriety. Shanghainese are good at flattering, good at currying favor with the powerful, and good at fishing in troubled waters. However, because they know the art of conducting oneself in society, they play along without overdoing it."[99]

Fig. 3. In an alleyway, a newly arrived country woman carries her children and belongings in two rattan baskets. Immigrants like this often ended up living in a squatters' area but made a living in the city's better-off alleyway-house neighborhoods, working as domestic servants, street hawkers, tinkers, itinerant artisans, or the like. From R. Barz, *Shanghai: Sketches of Present-Day Shanghai.*

While the people of Shanghai were proud to call themselves Shanghairen, they were not always ready to totally identify themselves with the city. Since the people of Shanghai were mostly immigrants, ties to one's native place were acknowledged as a social norm. The statement "I want to be buried in my hometown" was, for example, commonly included in wills, and virtually all children, not necessarily only those who were filial, carried out this wish. One of the major functions or services of the city's numerous "native-place associations" (*tongxianghui*) was to send the dead to their hometown for burial. Consequently, for many Shanghainese it was routine to go back to their home village or town to visit the family tomb—a practice known as "sweeping the graveyard" (*saomu*), which usually involved a ritual ceremony for the dead and cleaning of the family graveyard. Leave for this purpose was sometimes part of employees' benefits. For instance, up to 1924 all employees of Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company had a month's leave with full pay solely for the purpose of "sweeping the graveyard."[100]

One's hometown or village was not only a place to be buried but also a place that modern Shanghainese, as well as others, regarded as a home to which one could return. This tie to one's native place was frequently utilized to solve social problems. For instance, one of the conventional methods adopted by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Social Affairs to deal with unemployment was to send the unemployed back to their home villages at the government's expense (*ziqian huanxiang*).[101] At the nongovernmental level, laid-off employees commonly received travel expenses (*chuanzi*), based on the assumption that people who lost their job would return home. Sending people back to their native places was also a mechanism for dealing with wartime crises in the thirties and forties, and in fact was the principal solution adopted by government and charities for the crush of wartime refugees in late 1937 and early 1938.[102] The Communists not only inherited this mechanism but used the power of the state to make it more effective. Mobilizing the people of Shanghai to go back to their hometowns or villages (*dongyuan huixiang*) was frequently integrated into the political campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s.[103]

While the authorities used native-place ties for their own purposes, the poor looked upon strong ties with their hometown or village as a necessity. Rickshaw pullers, port coolies, unskilled casual laborers of all sorts, the unemployed, and vagabonds tended to return to their home villages if life in the city became too difficult or their city job could provide only part of their livelihood. Some of the urban poor still had land or were tenant farmers in their home village.[104] The sociologist Lamson observed during his in-



Table 1. The Overlap of Native Place and Trade in Republican Shanghai

| *Native Place (xiangbang)* | *Trade (yebang)* |
|---|---|
| Shandong | silk cocoons |
| Huining | tea, timber, ink sticks, pawnshops |
| Jiangxi | Chinese medicine, chinaware, paper, cotton cloth, Sichuan Chinese medicine, wax |
| Wuxi | silk, pork, preserved pork |
| Jinhua | ham |
| Qianjiang | silks and satins |
| Shaoxing | wine, coal and briquettes, dyeing, traditional banking (*qianzhuang*) |
| Ningbo | cotton cloth, groceries, coal and briquettes, fish, Chinese medicine |
| Fujian | timber, lacquer, tobacco |
| Guangdong | silk cloth, groceries, sugar, Cantonese food |
| Suzhou | fans, tea and snack bars |
| Wenzhou | mats, umbrellas |

SOURCE: Shen Bojing and Chen Huaipu, *Shanghaishi zhinan*, 347.

vestigation of working-class families in the Yangshupu area in 1929–31, "Sometimes people are unsuccessful in business ventures or become unemployed and move back to the rural regions."[105]

Better-off people and those who had firmly settled in the city also had their reasons to value native-place ties. Businesspeople found that networking based on native-place origins was one of the most convenient and reliable ways to conduct business in this sojourners' city. Table 1 shows some samples of the overlap between native place (*xiangbang*) and trade (*yebang*) in the city. The phenomenon of certain trades being dominated by people of certain native origins had its roots in the pre-treaty-port era. Traditional trade organizations such as guilds were formed either according to the merchants' native place and named after it (such as the GuangZhao gongsuo, or the Canton guild), or according to the product or service provided and named after that (such as the *douye gongsuo*, or the bean guild). Thirty native-place trade organizations could be found in Shanghai prior to 1842. These institutions did not fall into desuetude after the coming of the West, but instead flourished along with the rise of modern Shanghai. By 1911, at least 108 such organizations were operating in the city.[106] The

overlap of trade and native place was such common knowledge in the city that an average resident might be able to give a list of the overlap in a casual conversation, reporting, for example, that the Cantonese were known for trading in tobacco, opium, and foreign groceries, Anhui merchants in tea and silk, merchants from Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanxi in banking and finance, and so on. At a time when industries were developing in the city, local origins divided not only business owners but their employees as well. Examples of such divisions were everywhere (although they were not necessarily rigid): silk weaving, printing, and dyeing were mostly done by people from Shenxian, Dongyang, Xinchang, Hangzhou, Shaoxing, Huzhou (all countries in Zhejiang province), and Changzhou; flour milling and oil pressing were done by people from Wuxi, Haimen, Ningbo, Shaoxing, and Hubei; shipping was the business of people from Guangdong, Tianjin, and Ningbo; and the ranks of the police force were filled with natives of Hebei and Shandong.[107]

In industries, business owners tended to recruit employees from their native places. Mu Ouchu, an America-educated entrepreneur whose investment in textiles represented an early Chinese effort to promote modern industry, began to recruit workers from his native province of Hunan for his Shanghai cotton mills in 1919.[108] A recruiting poster read: "Since Hunan has frequently suffered from war, the life of people there, especially of women, is difficult. So, a portion of the hiring quota in my factory in Shanghai is reserved for Hunan women in order to promote the idea that women can earn a livelihood by themselves, to train skilled textile workers, and to prepare for the growth of the textile industry in Hunan in the future."[109]

Recruitment policies such as this became almost a standard. Liu Hongsheng, one of the best-known entrepreneurs of twentieth-century China, had his enterprises recruit workers from his home county of Dinghai in Zhejiang for more than a decade, beginning in 1936. Liu himself decided on this policy.[110] A less well known capitalist, Wang Daban, who started as a shop assistant in Ningbo and later came to own five factories in Shanghai and Ningbo, also favored hiring people from his native Ningbo. When Wang established a new printing and dyeing factory in Shanghai in 1935, the first bunch of workers were all from his hometown; the Ningbo *bang* (Ningbo group) formed the backbone of Wang's enterprises.[111]

Native-place ties were perhaps even more central in the Fufeng Flour Mill, the first Chinese-owned modern mechanized flour mill. Its owners, the Sun family of Anhui, came to Shanghai to establish a mill in 1898. By 1937, the factory they had established was known in the trade as "number one in the Far East." But the management of this enterprise was rather provincial. For half a century, chief executives and management personnel were, with only one exception, all members of the Sun clan from Anhui. About 90 percent of the employees were of Anhui origin, and many had been directly recruited from Sun's hometown, Shouzhou, and its vicinity. These employees were not only "peasants of yesterday"; they were to some extent still regarded as peasants by the Suns: while they worked in the Suns' mill, many of them kept their families back in their native village as tenant farmers of the Sun family.[112]



Native-place ties between employers and employees provided a natural linkage between the two and made for easier management: the owners felt comfortable and safe having *tongxiang* (fellow villagers or townsmen) wield the hammers in the workshops while the employees were grateful to their boss for giving them a job. But native-place ties in business and work were not simply a matter of practicality; they were also a matter of emotion. They reflected the dual identity of the people of Shanghai, who, while they happily saw themselves as Shanghainese, also liked to maintain every possible tie with their native place. This is not unlike an ethnic group in the United States that tries to preserve some degree of its culture. As most of the people of Shanghai were immigrants, only about 10 percent of the entries in a typical *Who's Who of Shanghai* would be identified as natives of the city. Although all people in such publications were supposed to be Shanghairen—since they were listed as "Shanghai celebrities" and the publications customarily bore titles such as *The Celebrities of Shanghai's Enterprises and Commerce* (Shanghai gongshang mingren lu), *Pictorial Biographies of Shanghai's Celebrities* (Shanghai mingren xiangzhuan), and so on—a native place was always put before the person's name. Thus, one reads of "Yuhang (native place) Zhang Taiyan," "Wuxing (native place) Chen Qimei," "Foshan (native place) Wu Yanren," and so on.[113] These people were Shanghainese because they lived in the city, had careers there, and perhaps would stay in the city all their lives. But at the same time they identified themselves by their native origins, just as contemporary Americans are sometimes distinguished as "Irish American," "Jewish American," "Chinese American," and so on.

Among all the factors that immigrants identify with or assimilate from a new culture, language is perhaps the most essential and profound. The historian Xiong Yuezhi points out that the first criterion for distinguishing a "Shanghai person" was the fact that the person spoke the Shanghai dialect. Without speaking the standard Shanghai dialect (that is, the dialect as spoken in the city proper), he asserts, one could hardly be recognized by

one's peers as Shanghainese.[114] This statement is more applicable to contemporary Shanghai, where the strictly imposed urban household registration system has produced at least two generations of Shanghai-born people who speak the pure Shanghai dialect, while reducing immigration to an insignificant level, than to pre-1949 Shanghai, when immigrants poured into the city, bringing with them all sorts of local tongues. Moreover, the Shanghai dialect itself has undergone some changes directly caused by the impact of dialects spoken by the immigrants.

The Shanghai dialect was originally a branch of the Songjiang dialect. At late as the third quarter of the nineteenth century it was still the language commonly spoken in the city. The phonetics of the Shanghai dialect recorded by the Sinologist Joseph Edkins (1823–1905) in the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, were those of the Songjiang dialect with a slight Pudong accent. In other words, in the first few decades of the treaty-port era, the Shanghai dialect essentially retained its original form.[115] To this day this dialect is still spoken by people in the vicinity of Shanghai, especially in the counties of Shanghai, Fengxian, Nanhui, and Songjiang.

The modern Shanghai dialect, the one spoken in twentieth-century Shanghai proper, diverged from its source by absorbing influences from the Suzhou and Ningbo dialects. Obviously, this was because immigrants from these areas were numerous in the late nineteenth century. The Shanghai dialect is perhaps the youngest in China: it was gradually formed at the turn of the century, and in the early Republican period it became distinguishable as the dialect of Shanghai proper. In 1916, when the philologist Gilbert McIntosh published his book on the Shanghai dialect, he had to include many new expressions and idioms, which suggests that the dialect was absorbing new blood.[116] In the Republican period, the original Shanghai dialect, the one with a Songjiang or Pudong accent, gradually came to be regarded as the language of the country folk (*xiangxiaren*), and the new dialect prevailed as what might be called urban speech. Indeed, the Shanghai dialect had a very limited "speech zone," literally only the city proper. It was the dialect spoken in the foreign concessions and their immediate vicinity, that is, an area of about 60 square miles. To the east, across the Huangpu River, the accent was slightly different, but different enough so that a Shanghainese from the west side of the river felt he was in the country.[117]

It is ironic that the Pudong, or Songjiang, accent, the original Shanghai dialect, came to be regarded as countrified speech, while in this city of immigrants, accents of all sorts were generally seen as normal. People who spoke the Shanghai dialect with an accent were sometimes nicknamed, according to their native origin and age, as "Little Shaoxing," "Old Guangdong," "Little Suzhou," "Old Ningbo," and so on, but this was customarily regarded as a cordial form of address, and there was little or no sense of discrimination or prejudice involved.[118] Like many immigrants in the United States who speak a foreign tongue at home, it was common for people in Shanghai to speak the dialect of their native place as well as the Shanghai dialect.[119]



## *Dragons and Fishes Jumbled Together*

By the 1930s, Shanghai was a city of 3 million strangers, each of whom, it may be presumed, had his or her own reasons for living in this metropolis. For the privileged—the wealthy, the politically powerful, the intellectually outstanding—the city was a foundation for their elite status. For the poor, the city was a fragile life buoy. And for those in between, the city was the substance out of which the dream for a better life might be spun. While every city is a mixture of types and classes, and Shanghai may have had its share of the universal social stratifications, it also was unique.

So far I have reckoned the diversity of the people of Shanghai horizontally, by observing the various races and nationalities of the foreigners who lived in the city as well as the variety of native-place origins among the Chinese residents. Now let us turn to a vertical reckoning in order to uncover the social and economic strata of modern Shanghai.

### THE ELITES

Shanghai's commercial prosperity and security (assured by the foreign powers) made the city a real paradise for wealthy Chinese. From the early twentieth century on, bureaucrats, warlords, politicians, landowners, literati, and magnates of all sorts came to the city seeking a life of comfort and luxury.

During and after the Taiping Rebellion, many of those who fled to Shanghai were wealthy landlords, merchants, and literati from Jiangnan. These well-to-do immigrants were generally of two types. One took advantage of the favorable commercial environment of the city by investing in various types of businesses and, generally, got richer. It was from this type that the compradors and China's modern entrepreneurs sprang, as discussed below. The other type consisted of those who lived in Shanghai chiefly for the comforts and freedom that it afforded. In time, retreating to Shanghai became popular among the rich and the celebrities of China. The epithet "Mr. Hermit" (*yugong*) was applied to those whose goal seemed to

be a comfortable exile in the city, free of responsibilities and concerns. Needless to say, not every Mr. Hermit was a real recluse, and it was not unusual for politicians to retreat to Shanghai as a strategy for restoring their prestige or staging a comeback.[120]

In any case, these celebrities left a legacy to the city in the form of the grand houses and gardens they built. The late Qing reformist Kang Youwei (1858–1927), for instance, spent his later years in Shanghai. From 1914 until his death, Kang had three spacious homes in Shanghai. The site of one of his residences in the International Settlement was big enough, after he had moved out, to build first a Buddhist temple and, later, a pharmaceutical factory (which is still there today). Another of Kang's residences was demolished in 1930 and replaced by a residential compound of twenty-nine three-story alleyway-houses (with a garage on the first floor) that, in 1988, housed 222 households, or 828 residents.[121] The bureaucratic bigwig Sheng Xuanhuai (1844–1916) also lived in Shanghai after the 1911 revolution: his luxurious Western-style residence is now the consulate general of Japan.[122] Even many busy politicians who never had time to be a "Mr. Hermit" maintained villas in Shanghai. Li Hongzhang (1823–1901), for instance, had a villa for his concubine, Dingxiang. The villa is preserved to this day as a resort known for its combination of charming traditional Chinese garden and chic European architecture.[123] High-ranking politicians of the Nationalist regime almost without exception kept a residence in Shanghai. The quiet tree-lined avenues on the west side of the city were dotted with the residences of many major political figures in the Nanjing government.[124] Shanghai proved to be a better place to settle complicated and subtle political issues than the capital city of Nanjing. It was said that after 1927 the capital was the stage where political drama was performed, while Shanghai was the backstage.[125] The relationship between Nanjing and Shanghai was rather like that, in contemporary China, between Beijing and the summer resort of Beidaihe, which has been the favorite site for secret gatherings (and sometimes formal meetings) of top Communist leaders.

Not only was Shanghai the place where big political deals were arranged; it was also where big business deals were made. And, at least in the nineteenth century, big business deals were rarely cut without the intervention of middlemen known as compradors. These men served as agents for foreign firms. They were generally quick-witted, spoke a foreign tongue—most often pidgin English—and had some knowledge of foreign customs and business norms. Without them, foreign companies would have found it difficult, if not impossible, to do business in China. In the middle of the nineteenth century, few Chinese spoke a Western language, and few Westerners spoke Chinese. Furthermore, Western businesspeople had at best an imperfect knowledge of the Chinese market and Chinese ways of doing business. Finally, many Chinese merchants simply would not deal directly with foreigners. Compradors were thus crucial to conducting business, and consequently they were well compensated: their high salaries and commissions (which were usually much higher than the salary) soon made them China's foremost nouveau riche in the second half of the nineteenth century.[126]



Compradors in Shanghai were almost exclusively immigrants from Guangdong and a few Jiangnan cities such as Ningbo and Suzhou. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Russell and Company (American, founded 1846) employed ten compradors in Shanghai, Jardine Matheson and Company (British, founded 1843) employed fifteen, and Dent, Beale and Company (British, founded in 1843), six: none of these compradors was a native of Shanghai.[127] Compradors of foreign banks were mostly Ningbo and Suzhou natives. These men were usually from well-to-do families that had moved to Shanghai late in the nineteenth century. They learned English in their youth and entered a foreign firm, sometimes first as a clerk and then, later, as a comprador. Compradors of foreign banks often had experience in a traditional Chinese bank (*qianzhuang*) before entering a foreign bank. The position of comprador was often passed down from generation to generation, and thus by the turn of this century so-called comprador clans (*maiban shijia*) had emerged.[128]

Most compradors simultaneously had their own businesses in addition to working for a foreign firm. Thus after the 1920s, when the role of the comprador declined, these people managed to remain the richest class in Chinese society. The Communists labeled them the "comprador-capitalist" class and made them a chief target of the revolution. Indeed, many successful capitalists in the city, especially the biggest industrialists, had been compradors. This is reflected in the membership of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce (*Shanghai zongshanghui*), which was founded in 1902 and became the city's most influential business organization in the early twentieth century.[129] In 1925–26, 45 percent of the chamber's board of directors and 22 percent of its members had a dual identity: as both comprador and business owner.[130]

No matter what kind of trade or business the entrepreneurs of Shanghai followed, the majority of them were not local people but immigrants. In 1923, 86 percent of the members of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce were from Zhejiang. Of the thirty-five members who served on its board of directors in 1924, only four were natives of Shanghai.[131] Of

69 Chinese banks, or qianzhuang, in 1921, only 7 were run by Shanghai natives; by 1933, out of 72 qianzhuang in Shanghai, only 3 were run by natives.[132] In 1944, of the 177 real estate companies in the city, only 35 (one-fifth) were run by natives.[133]

Shanghai was the capital of modern Chinese industry, and in the early twentieth century the capitalists of Shanghai were, as Parks Coble has pointed out, "the most powerful native economic group in China."[134] Prior to 1927, more than one-fifth of the nation's industrial enterprises (exclusive of mines) were located in Shanghai; more than a quarter of the country's industrial capital was concentrated there. In 1932–33, half of China's 2,435 modern factories (defined as mechanized and employing at least 30 workers) were in Shanghai.[135] Thus any serious study of the Chinese bourgeoisie must begin with Shanghai. As Bergère has indicated, this is not just because the Shanghai bourgeoisie "are the easiest to find out about; it is also because, of all the [Chinese] entrepreneurs, they were both the most active and the most numerous. Furthermore, most of the entrepreneurs, in their ordinary activities, always appear to function as a group at an essentially local or regional level. To disregard their geographical anchorage would [lead] to the empty categorizations characteristic of a familiar kind of Marxist analysis."[136] One may add that the Shanghai bourgeoisie was not really "Shanghai," or local. The diverse native-place origins of Shanghai's capitalists and the reach of their activities beyond the boundaries of the city (the former often contributed to the latter) greatly increased the significance of this class at the national level.

Turning our scan from businesspeople to educated modern professionals, we find another elite, which included doctors of Western medicine, executive managers, accountants, attorneys, engineers, and other higher professionals who were either employed in the modern sector (industry, banking, transportation, and communications) or were self-employed. Although these people constituted less than 1 percent of the population of Shanghai, Shanghai had more of them than any other Chinese city.[137] Many professionals were also investors of sorts; thus they were not merely white-collar workers but capitalists as well. All had received a higher education, often in mission schools and universities; some were so-called returned students, who had been educated overseas. Professionals appeared in public in Western attire, socialized with foreigners, and (some at least) spoke fluent English. They lived in quiet and comfortable areas in west Shanghai, typically in what were called garden alleyway-houses (*huayuan lilong*) or in detached houses (*yangfang*). The western part of Bubbling



Well Road (today's Nanjingxi Road), Zhaofeng Road (today's Yuyuan Road), and the so-called extra-Settlement roads (*yuejie zhulu*, lit., "roads that exceed the boundaries")—areas that were immediately west of the foreign concessions—were known for their concentration of elegant homes.[138] Many of the residents had private cars (or rickshaws), kept servants, and were avid club-goers. In the eyes of their fellow countrymen, the west-end residents were a different kind of Chinese: a "superior Chinese" (*gaodeng Huaren*).

Another elite included writers, actors, painters, musicians, movie stars, and so on—what might be called the cultural elite. This group gave birth to and nurtured the so-called Haipai (Shanghai school) culture, which became locked in battle with the Jingpai (Beijing school) tradition. The division between the two started in the late nineteenth century over differences in painting styles, but later spread to other cultural dimensions such as theater and literature. Eventually, the contest (at least in the eyes of the Haipai) became one between a vibrant, liberal culture centered in Shanghai and a conservative, traditional culture symbolized by Beijing.

In the Tongzhi period (1862–1874), among the immigrants to Shanghai from the Jiangnan region were professional and amateur painters, many of whom were traditional "men of letters" (*wenren*). Instead of following the regular, orthodox track of pursuing a career in the imperial government, these people chose to live in the foreign concessions and make a living by selling their artistic works. Inasmuch as polite society had always considered the purpose of painting to be self-cultivation, the commerce-driven paintings done in Shanghai were regarded as vulgar.[139] Later, this same tendency toward commercialism was also found in theaters. "Peking opera" as played in Shanghai was known as the southern style or simply the Shanghai style; it had a reputation of emphasizing—for the purpose of attracting a large audience—lavish and sensational effects (such as costume and stage sets) over skillful performance.[140]

By the Republican period, the word "Haipai" also came to be associated with literature. The so-called Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies fiction can be regarded as the first "Shanghai-style" literature. This writing took entertainment to be the purpose of fiction; plots were dominated by sensational and often tragic love stories, although a sober-minded reader might still find social and moral value in these stories.[141] In the early Republican period, the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school dominated the literary world of Shanghai: about half the literary magazines published in China in the second decade of the twentieth century were published in Shanghai,

and most of them were works of this school. In the three decades between 1908 and 1938, 180 newspapers and magazines of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies type were published in Shanghai; the year 1914 alone saw 21 new newspapers and magazines of this type founded in Shanghai.[142]

But this was just one type of publication. Modern Shanghai was China's publishing center. From the late nineteenth century to 1956, when private ownership was transferred to state or collective ownership, about six hundred presses (not including newspaper and magazine publishers) opened in the city, most of them during the Republican period. The concentration of bookstores in Fuzhou Road and Henan Road in the International Settlement made these "cultural streets" famous nationwide.[143] No city in Republican China enjoyed more freedom of the press and cultural prosperity than Shanghai.

The city therefore attracted, or produced, China's most predominant intellectuals. Hu Shi, the hero of the New Cultural Movement, recalled that it was his early education (from 1904 to 1910) in Shanghai that made him an enthusiastic follower of Charles Darwin (1809–82) and Thomas Huxley (1825–95) and a pioneer advocate of the vernacular language.[144] A galaxy of twentieth-century China's outstanding writers, such as Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Yu Dafu, Xia Yan, and revolutionary intellectuals, such as Chen Duxiu and Qu Qiubai, all lived in Shanghai for a substantial period of time and published there. None of them was a native of Shanghai. All sojourned in the city; its dazzling life inspired and stimulated them to create works fated to become classics of an era.

Financially, these intellectuals occupied the lower rungs of the elite group. In wealth, they simply could not be compared with the city's capitalist bigwigs. But their incomes allowed them to live comfortable lives. A productive writer of popular fiction in the second decade of the twentieth century, for instance, could earn as much as $300 per month. The writer Bao Tianxiao got $120 a month in 1907 by writing three hours in the morning for a fiction magazine and spending afternoon and evening hours writing for a newspaper.[145] Working as an editor of the Commercial Press, Mao Dun earned a monthly salary of $100 in 1921; Yu Dafu's wife recalls that in the late 1920s, every month she collected $100–200 in royalties for her husband.[146] By comparison, a skilled worker's monthly salary in 1926 was $30–40; that was sufficient to support a family of five.[147] Still, given Shanghai's congested living conditions, the income of a writer typically allowed him or her to rent a house in an average alleyway-house neighborhood, next door to, say, a skilled worker or a shop clerk. But the differences were still there. Many a writer (including such luminaries as Lu Xun, Mao



Dun, and Yu Dafu) was able to rent a whole alleyway-house, while his neighbors shared a house with other tenants.

These well-off and popular writers were the top of the heap that included many young intellectuals who had come to Shanghai to make a living as freelance writers. Economically, these junior writers may or may not have been part of the elite. In any case, their income from selling their works was not necessarily greater than that of an average mechanic or shopkeeper. Many struggling writers rented a little "pavilion room" (*tingzijian*) in the city's common alleyway-house neighborhoods (discussed in detail in chapter 4) and lived among the populace while maintaining the mentality of an elite. Indeed, these intellectuals in Republican Shanghai bore some similarities to the French writers and poets who worked during the time of the rise of French industry after the Napoleonic Wars, as well as to American writers of the 1920s who escaped to Europe in search of a better environment for self-expression. Cowley's description of American writers in Paris in the twenties could also apply to intellectuals who sojourned in Shanghai in roughly the same period (the 1920s and the 1930s): "Some of them became revolutionists; others took refuge in pure art; but most of them demanded a real world of present satisfactions, in which they could cherish aristocratic ideals while living among carpenters and grisettes."[148]

### THE PETTY URBANITES

"Petty urbanite," or *xiaoshimin* (translated in this book as "little urbanite"), was a blanket term popularly known and liberally used to refer, often with condescension, to city or town people who were of the middle or lower-middle social ranks. Like most conventional labels for a social class or group, xiaoshimin was never precisely defined. It was less clear who should be included in the category than who should be excluded. The elite at the top and the urban poor at the bottom would never be referred to as xiaoshimin. It was the people who stood in between who were called "petty urbanites."

The liberal use of the term contributed to its vagueness. Although people who used the word—which was almost everyone—certainly knew what it meant, nowhere in Chinese sources is the term adequately analyzed and carefully defined. In the West, Chinese petty urbanites have been discussed mostly in connection with the readership of twentieth-century Chinese fiction and periodicals. Perry Link, who is the first scholar in the West to have taken up the issue of xiaoshimin in academic research, applies an annotation from a Chinese dictionary to explain that xiaoshimin refers

to "the middle class or the petty bourgeoisie." Links points out that "the term is taken to include small merchants, various kinds of clerks and secretaries, high school students, housewives, and other modestly educated, marginally well off urbanites." These people were the major audience of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies novels of the second and third decades of the twentieth century.[149] According to Frederic Wakeman and Wen-shin Yeh, in the Republican era the petty urbanites "constituted a huge new urban audience for periodicals like *Shenghuo* (Life)." These people were "literate clerks and apprentices in trade, manufacturing, the professions, the public and private service sectors, as well as among elementary and normal school teachers."[150]

While the term "middle class" often does not convey the precise character of a social group and sometimes is even misleading (because of, among other things, our contemporary stereotypical notion of this category), the xiaoshimin of Shanghai in some ways resembled the Kleinburger of early modern Germany. Like the xiaoshimin, the Kleinburger were "socially and economically as distinct from capitalist bourgeoisie as they were from the propertyless proletariat." They were predominantly craftspeople but also shopkeepers, petty traders, and minor officeholders, men with a "narrow, particularistic outlook on life." These words precisely describe the mentality of the Chinese xiaoshimin (as we shall see in later chapters). The historian Christopher Friedrichs has selected "lower middle class" as the best available translation of "Kleinburger."[151]

It seems to me that the approaches to defining xiaoshimin have paid attention only to occupational or vocational criteria; none has focused on what made these people a community. In fact, the expression itself has a connotation associated with community. From a purely terminological point of view, the word "xiaoshimin" consists of two parts: *xiao* (little) and *shimin* (urbanite). Here, "urbanite" stresses one's residential orientation (i.e., city people, not country people), and "little" stresses one's social standing (i.e., a small potato, not a big shot). Combining these two parts of the expression, the term xiaoshimin has strong implications for one's community background. When people used the term "xiaoshimin" to describe an individual, it was often with the idea of "a person from a common neighborhood." In premodern times, there was a similar term to describe townspeople, that is, *shijing zhibei* (a fellow from the marketplace). Thus the image of "petty urbanite" carries implications for social rank based on community, and it is the residential community that is being emphasized. When people used the term, the first thing that came to mind was usually



a type of person whose outlook was limited by the community in which he or she lived.[152]

In modern Shanghai, the xiaoshimin were identified with a type of residence known as the *shikumen* house. Emerging in the late nineteenth century, shikumen houses were first a type of dwelling for well-to-do families. Later, the structure of the shikumen underwent a number of simplifications, mainly a downsizing of the house and a reduction of its cost. By the early twentieth century this type of house had become the single most common form of residence in the city, and those who lived in these houses were mostly middle- and lower-middle-income people. In other words, the shikumen were the homes of Shanghai's petty urbanites. The expression "the petty urbanites of the shikumen neighborhood" was common in the city.[153]

One of the major constituents of Shanghai's petty urbanites, as well as one of the primary residents of the shikumen neighborhoods, was so-called *zhiyuan*, a broad social category chiefly composed of office workers, clerks, all types of white-collar workers, and shop assistants. According to one definition, zhiyuan were "service personnel who work in economic, cultural, and political offices or institutions."[154] Table 2 lists various types of zhiyuan in Shanghai in the 1930s. By the late 1930s, there were about 250,000 to 300,000 people in this category in the city.[155] Zhiyuan and their family members numbered no fewer than 1.5 million persons, or about 40 percent of the city's population in the middle thirties (when Shanghai had 3.5 million people).[156]

Another major group of petty urbanites was factory workers. In discussing industrial workers in modern China, scholars both inside and outside China have often resorted to broad generalizations and even stereotyping. Inside China, this was largely because official ideology needed to forge an image, however distorted, of a unified proletariat as the leading class of the revolution. Outside China, scholars simply lacked information that would have made possible a nuanced picture. This latter weakness has been significantly remedied by recent research on Chinese labor, which sees industrial workers as a highly stratified social group divided by local origins, type of work, and gender.[157] But it is also important to examine the residential patterns of factory workers. Where workers lived and what type of house they lived in was not only a measure of their economic status but also, like the role played by the workplace, a vital influence on their outlook.

Surveys conducted in the early 1930s found that Shanghai's factory workers lived in three major types of houses: alleyway or shikumen

Table 2. Zhiyuan (White-Collar Employees) in Republican Shanghai

| *Year* | *Trade or Institution* | *Number of Zhiyuan* |
|---|---|---|
| 1934 | Stores (old type) | 82,900 |
| 1936 | Six major department stores | 3,000 |
| 1936 | Hardware stores and Western-type pharmacies | 9,200 |
| 1936 | Banking and finance | 10,000 |
| 1936 | Schools and colleges | 13,500 |
| 1933 | Media | 15,000–17,000 |
| 1934 | Postal service and transportation | 10,000 |
| 1937 | Foreign firms | 45,000 |
| 1936 | Municipal Council of the French Concession | 1,400 |
| 1936 | Municipal government | 2,100 |
| 1938 | Factory office and other office workers | 80,000–100,000 |

SOURCE: Zhang Zhongli, ed., *Jindai Shanghai chengshi yanjiu*, 724; Zhu Bangxing et al., *Shanghai chanye yu Shanghai zhigong*, 701–2.

houses, old-style one-story houses (*pingfang*), and straw shacks. Of 76,218 houses inhabited by workers, 37 percent were alleyway houses, that is, the typical type of house in Shanghai's petty urbanite neighborhoods. These houses were found virtually everywhere in the city; they were the homes of about half of Shanghai's factory workers and their families.[158]

The surveys found that the distinction between so-called workers' zones and nonworkers' zones was by no means rigid; families of industrial workers were frequently found in areas quite distant from factories, intermixed with white-collar households.[159] In other words, a considerable part of Shanghai's industrial workers lived side by side with people of many other social types. Factory workers in these neighborhoods were mostly skilled or semiskilled men (and some women) who had a relatively stable or long-term (in contradistinction to casual) job in an industrial enterprise. These workers and their families who lived in shikumen houses were quite distinct from their "class brothers" who lived at the bottom of society: casual workers, day laborers, and unskilled coolies of all sorts. The latter group was driven by poverty to the squatters' areas on the outskirts of the city proper and were despised by the contented petty urbanites in shikumen—let alone the aloof elites in the city's wealthy neighborhoods—as rustic coolies or simply country bumpkins.[160]



THE URBAN POOR

It is understandable that most people in Shanghai tended to see shack dwellers as hayseeds. The urban poor were overwhelmingly former peasants. They may have migrated to the city but they were not quite urbanized, if one defines urbanization as primarily involving having a stable job and place of residence in the city. These people lacked any of the three basic conditions that allowed a newcomer to find a fairly desirable and relatively stable job: skill, money, and a good social network.

First, most peasant immigrants were illiterate and unskilled. Their opportunities were further blocked by the fact that they could not afford the lump sum payment or nonrefundable "deposit" (which was virtually a payment) required by many trades in Shanghai for obtaining a starting position or an apprenticeship. The amount of the deposit varied by trade (or individual enterprise); commonly, it was equivalent to two months' salary in the trade in question.[161] The poor simply could not afford such a large payment; hence they could not take the first step toward a permanent job. Finally, poor rural immigrants usually did not have connections in the city that would have helped them find a good job. The best networking connection they might have was a relative, a fellow villager, or an acquaintance who had come to Shanghai earlier. But these earlier arrivals themselves were, more often than not, at the bottom rung of society and could hardly offer much assistance. At best, if connections ever worked, they only helped the newcomer find a place in the ranks of Shanghai's poverty-stricken multitudes.[162]

On one hand, the growth of Shanghai's modern industries during and after World War I, and the urban development that paralleled it, resulted in countless job opportunities, as well as all the amenities and accoutrements of modern urban life; this proved to be a powerful attraction. On the other hand, in the countryside economic and social deterioration, wars, banditry, and natural disasters that frequently marked the Republican period created an army of uneasy peasants who imagined the city to be a refuge. Thus, the city and an army ready to surrender to its attractions met in early-twentieth-century Shanghai. The result was an onslaught of rural poor who stuck to the city for sheer survival.

The most sizable groups of the urban poor in Republican-era Shanghai were rickshaw pullers, dockworkers, street beggars, and countless casual workers—and the unemployed. In the mid-1920s, there were about 62,000 rickshaw pullers, 22,000 wheelbarrow and handcart operators and carriage

drivers (*mafu*, or "grooms"), and 35,500 dockworkers in Shanghai. In the late 1920s, there were about 50,000–60,000 dockworkers; in the mid-1930s, 20,000–25,000 street beggars; and in the late 1930s and early 1940s, 100,000 rickshaw pullers.[163] These figures do not include the army of casual factory workers and the unemployed. By the end of the Republican period, close to 1 million people like these lived in the city's shantytowns.

Although, as noted above, not all factory workers were necessarily among the urban poor, many of them were. While some skilled and semiskilled workers obtained stable positions in factories, lived in average lower-middle-class alleyway-house neighborhoods, and therefore ascended to the ranks of the petty urbanites, casual workers (*linshigong*) descended to the bottom of society. Available statistics do not give us the number of casual workers in Shanghai in any given year, since the category "factory worker" in all statistics does not distinguish casuals from long-term workers (*changgong*). According to official statistics, Shanghai in 1920 had 181,485 factory workers; the number increased to 223,681 in 1928 and reached 394,654 by January 1950.[164] Although these statistics give us no hint of the relative proportion of long-term and temporary workers, hiring of casual workers was increasingly common in Shanghai's factories through the Republican period. It is therefore safe to say that a sizable portion of the city's factory workers were casual or day workers who were poorly paid and under constant threat of unemployment.

By the end of the Republican period, these temporary laborers, vagabonds, the unemployed and underemployed, and the like, plus their families, made up nearly one-fifth of Shanghai's 5 million people.[165] Like the disadvantaged in any society, they were despised and discriminated against by the city's general public; but they could not be ignored.

The importance of these people in the life of the city lies not only in their large number but also in their backgrounds. The poor moved to the city for virtually the same reason that most of the city's better-off people did: to find a better life. Thus the overwhelmingly rural backgrounds of the urban poor reflected a profound social phenomenon in twentieth-century China: for millions of peasants, an urban life, no matter how arduous and difficult, meant a better life. The world of rickshaws, with its everyday presence in the city, provides a powerful and illuminating example of such pursuit.

CHAPTER 2

# The World of Rickshaws

In July 1926, Hu Shi (1891–1962), while visiting Harbin, dubbed the "Shanghai of North China" by virtue of its f sions and foreign (in this case, Russian) influence, was stri ference between the former Russian concession, where ( foreign administration) rickshaws were not permitted, and tl trict, where rickshaws still operated in abundance.[1] Hu Shi d had found "the boundary between Eastern and Western That dividing line was, he later concluded, "precisely the tween the rickshaw and the automobile civilizations."[2]

In the early twentieth century, the rickshaw was a symb wardness of Chinese cities, and the rickshaw coolie remain example of his class."[3] Shanghai would have been a totally had there been no rickshaws. The importance of these conve just in their role in the city's transportation system nor in t tion to the exotic appearance of the city. More significant, ri the means of livelihood for thousands of people.[4]

The story surrounding this simple vehicle is a richly mul The rumble of the rickshaw reflected the rhythm of life in tl the sense that the din of the rickshaws' wheels as they rolled asphalt streets literally contributed to the hubbub of the ci sense that the rickshaw trade, or "racket," was part of the city culture. The rickshaw puller was certainly exploited and opp the same time he also saw his opportunity to survive by playi the trade. Just as the "backwardness" of the rickshaw was plight of the pullers also had its context.

# Conclusion

In modern Shanghai, urbanization, modernization, and Westernization were inextricably linked. Since Shanghai was populated mostly by rural immigrants, its rapid rise early in the twentieth century from a county town to one of the world's great metropolises inevitably involved a vigorous urbanization of its people. As China's foremost cradle of new ideas and innovations, the city itself was a product of modernity. And finally, because it was a leading treaty port with countless ties to the West, urbanization and modernity in Shanghai always involved a certain degree of Westernization.

Yet in looking at the everyday life of the people of Shanghai, one repeatedly encounters the past, the persistence of tradition, and reminders of things indigenous. While the influence of the West could be found virtually everywhere in the city, in some quotidian aspects of life the West seemed to be absent. When the Communists came to power, they paid special attention to Shanghai: the city lay at the intersection of the past and the West; both were to be swept away by the revolution. But thirty years of Communist "ground cleaning" did not completely uproot tradition. Rather, decades after the supposed break with the old world the past endures with remarkable tenacity.

While these broader categories—urbanization, modernization, and Westernization—are intricately linked, one certainly should be cautious not to equate them. It is now an accepted fact that the vigorous commercialization (and hence some degree of urbanization) in late imperial China demonstrates that social transformation in modern China had its own, indigenous, roots and was far from being a matter of foreign influence. One may also add that for any nation the criteria of modernization are relative: they have their historical context and do not always need a foreign refer-





ence. To emphasize the perdurability of Chinese tradition, therefore, is to correct some thinking in the field that tends to overemphasize the "modern" and "Western" aspects of the treaty-port cities in general and Shanghai in particular. But this should not be interpreted as a call to emphasize the other side of the somewhat hackneyed dichotomy of "tradition" versus "modernity" or "Chinese" versus "Western."

Quite the opposite, our stories of daily life in Shanghai suggest how sophisticated were the common people of China in adaptation and integration. As we have seen, the basic setting for the daily life of most people of Shanghai, that is, the lilong house, was itself a half-breed, incorporating both Western and Chinese architectural features. Or, to take another example, the Zhongshan suit, which could serve as a standard man's suit for all occasions, was itself an amalgam of the Chinese long gown and the Western suit. Shanghai's food markets were yet another instance in which a Western initiative was adapted and imbued with Chinese characteristics. Such cases, described by a Chinese idiom as "a jade combining Chinese and Western parts" (*ZhongXi hebi*), are too numerous to list: they are ubiquitous in Chinese life.

For years, the Communists in China declared that feudalism (a synonym for tradition in Maoist terminology) and imperialism (a synonym for the West) were the chief targets of the revolution.[1] Ordinary people, while their lives were greatly affected by the revolution that was essentially made of this ideology, saw the ideology itself as largely an empty cannon.[2] Is our approach to the history of modern China, at least sometimes and to some extent, an inherited empty cannon? If we go farther down this line of thinking, we may find that even notions such as "compromise" and "integration" have the lingering weakness of tending to observe the world in a binary fashion. Was this also the way that the people who lived in Chinese society saw their own lives and lifestyles? Or, is it more our habitual practice in academia?

For ordinary people, the dominant way of thinking was pragmatism, a pragmatism of incorporating whatever was appealing and available to make life better (or in some cases to make life possible). This does not imply that people had a narrow outlook, lacked imagination, or were absolutely unconcerned about ideology. Rather, it suggests that the ways that common people coped with the epic changes in modern China were much more sensible, multifarious, and substantive than generally thought. People of all walks of life in China cite a folk adage to justify their pragmatism: "It is all too natural that man goes to a higher [better] place, just like water flows to a lower place."[3] In the first half of the twentieth century, when

thousands upon thousands of people moved to Shanghai, they were going to a "higher" place, and they did so in part to survive in an age full of uncertainties and calamities. The story of daily life in Shanghai is as a tale of how the little people, in their own creative ways, lived through the gigantic changes in modern China.

In this process, ideology was often too luxurious for, if not irrelevant to, daily life. People stuck to some old ways of living not because of any serious concerns about keeping "tradition," and even less for the sake of patriotism, but because they felt comfortable with old ways or because it was economically beneficial to do so. And, whenever prudent or necessary, they would not hesitate to shun the old and take up the new—or more commonly, people happily adopted or absorbed whatever they felt was good for them in order to create multifaceted lifestyles, which cannot easily be framed by any dichotomy. The writer and artist Feng Zikai (1898–1975) once observed with admiration what he believed to be a Chinese peasants' invention: using Chinese chopsticks to eat European food. This had the merit of letting one enjoy exotic cuisine without the trouble of wielding the knife and fork that many Chinese felt clumsy using; at the same time, European-style meals avoided the Chinese way of sharing dishes directly with each other, a custom Feng (and many other Chinese as well) regarded as "unhealthy."[4] There may have been an economic reason too: Western-style tableware was often much more costly than chopsticks and usually not readily available, so why not employ something more comfortable, handy, and less expensive? Examples such as this may be trivial but they are certainly not insignificant, for "trifling matters" in daily life often reveal certain plain truths that more sophisticated or abstruse theories fail to convey.

## *The Past*

Just as the city's innumerable alleyway houses were overshadowed by its skyscrapers, so too the lives of ordinary people were often obscured by the dazzling light cast by the city's elite. But it was Shanghai's multitudinous yet obscure "little urbanites" who wove the most colorful part of the warp and weft of the city. In the early twentieth century, changes in life in Shanghai were obvious and predictable—in the final analysis, the rise of Shanghai from a relatively obscure county seat to the nation's first city was itself a powerful manifestation of change. But Shanghai's image as modern China's showcase of Westernization often overshadowed the persistence of the past in the daily life of the "little people." While things Western were



literally a daily part of life (although they were not necessarily exploited by every person every day), the people of Shanghai comfortably kept and adapted many old customs and lifestyles. Though the influence of the West was readily apparent on the city's major thoroughfares and played up by the Chinese upper classes, in the narrow alleys that crisscrossed the city tradition prevailed. Moreover, changes often had to coexist, integrate, or intertwine with continuities. If Shanghai was a place where two cultures—Chinese and Western—met but neither prevailed, it was not because the two were deadlocked but because both showed remarkable resilience. It was precisely in this conjunction that, for many, lay the charm of the city.

To conclude this point, I choose not to elaborate on a purely conceptual discussion that might easily slip into abstraction or even emptiness. Rather, my disposition is to let the empirical evidence unbosom itself, so to speak. I will examine, among other things, two seemingly contradictory phenomena of life in the city: namely, how traditional festivals were popularly celebrated at a time when the Western calendar had been officially adopted as the national calendar, and how some "outmoded" conveyances such as the sedan chair and wheelbarrow continued to ply the streets at a time when Shanghai had already become a motorized city. Again, the vitality of tradition in Chinese life should be seen as an indicator of the elastic or even buoyant nature of the people in their way of coping with a rapidly changing world.

### FESTIVALS AND THE LUNAR CALENDAR

After the 1911 revolution that brought an end to more than two millennia of imperial rule, the new republican government abolished the traditional Chinese calendar and adopted the Western Gregorian calendar as China's national calendar (*guoli*).[5] To show a break with the past in this regard, for a few years immediately after the revolution the traditional calendar was called the "abolished calendar" (*feili*). Gradually, however, the term disappeared; instead, the Chinese calendar came to be referred to as the "old calendar" (*jiuli*), the "agricultural calendar" (*nongli*), the "lunar calendar" (*yinli*), or the "Xia calendar" (Xiali, referring to the then still legendary first dynasty in Chinese history). The changes in name had their reasons. As Richard J. Smith has indicated, "Neither the feeble government in Beijing, nor local provincial officials, could eradicate centuries-old traditions by decree."[6] The Chinese calendar was in fact not abolished after the revolution but remained in use in various aspects of life. For instance, in the countryside the twenty-four solar periods on the Chinese calendar contin-

ued to be the most relevant benchmarks for events during the year. In the cities too the old calendar far from disappeared.

In Shanghai, popular beliefs such as the idea that a thunderstorm prior to Jingzhe (the Waking of Hibernation, third solar period) foretells a bad year, eating many watermelons after Liqiu (the Beginning of Autumn, thirteenth solar period) may cause typhoid, tonics are most efficacious if taken after Dongzhi (the Winter Solstice, twenty-second solar period), and so on remained powerful in the twentieth century. By the same token, the three most important festivals in Chinese life—the New Year (known also as Chunjie, or the Spring Festival), the Dragon Boat Festival (Duanwu or Duanyang), and the Full Moon Festival (Zhongqiu, or "middle autumn")—remained the most important days on the Chinese calendar.[7] Customs related to these three festivals, such as paying off debts before New Year's Eve and using the three festivals as occasions for laying off or hiring new workers, especially in the retail trade, remained unchanged.[8] Also unchanged was the way people reckoned their age. Virtually all the people I interviewed in Shanghai counted their age and celebrated their birthday according to the Chinese calendar, although their birthday in official documents, such as the household registration book (*hukoubu*), was reckoned by the Western calendar.[9]

The clearest example of how the old calendar continued as an indispensable part of Chinese life was the fact that New Year's Day, the foremost event of the year in the Chinese tradition, continued to be celebrated according to the Chinese calendar, not the "national calendar." Immediately after the 1911 revolution, Shanghai's Chinese authorities ordered, as part of their effort to popularize the Western calendar, the forthcoming New Year's celebrations to be held on the first day of the new year according to the Western calendar, that is, on January 1, 1912 (Chinese New Year fell on February 18 that year). But the day passed without any spontaneous celebration. To make up for this disappointment, the authorities mobilized merchant organizations and the army to celebrate the "lantern festival" (which is traditionally the last event of the New Year's celebrations) on January 15, instead of on the fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar year. That night, the city was lit up with lanterns, and crowds of some size were drawn. But this officially sponsored event did not seem to appeal to the public. Those who were out on the streets that night lacked enthusiasm and spirit. The crowds were, it was observed, drawn not by a mood of celebration but by curiosity: people came out to watch the soldiers rather than the lanterns.[10]



After 1912, the authorities surrendered and the New Year was again celebrated on the first day of the lunar year. Indeed, during the entire Republican era the New Year season was celebrated in much the same way as it had been celebrated for centuries: as in the past, "sending the Kitchen God" (*song zaoshen*) was on the twenty-third day of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar, "ancestor worship" (*jizu*) on New Year's Eve (an event that lasted until the dawn of New Year's Day), "(Buddhist and Daoist) deity worship" (*jishen*) on New Year's Day, "receiving the God of Wealth" (*jie caishen*) on the fifth day of the first month, and the "lantern festival" (*yuanxiao*) on the fifteenth day of the first month. All of these events, which were part of a national tradition, were universally celebrated in Shanghai. Even during the Sino-Japanese War, when Shanghai was encircled with battlefields, the old New Year's celebrations and ceremonies were still undertaken in the city, following the traditional pattern in all its meticulous detail.[11]

Many minor festivals and special occasions on the Chinese calendar also continued to be part of life in the city. Except for the eleventh month, every month in the lunar calendar had some festival days, most of which were based on religious and folk beliefs and, in particular, on legendary birthdays of Buddhist and Daoist deities.[12] The absence of festivals in the eleventh month was probably for the purpose of reserving energy for the busiest holiday season of the year, that is, New Year's. These minor festivals were by no means taken lightly. On these occasions, even foreigners, and not necessarily the most perspicacious ones, "could see through the front windows of Chinese homes the front-room joss pieces, statues of the major gods or incense-burners arranged on little tables covered with embroidered cloths and set with lighted candles and dishes of sacrificial food."[13]

Sometimes activities on these occasions extended into public spaces. For instance, the thirtieth day of the seventh month was traditionally celebrated as the birthday of the God of Earth (*Dizangwang pusa*). During that night, joss sticks and candles were placed on sidewalks and on alleyways to honor the earth. Often candles and joss sticks were wedged between curbstones and in the crevices surrounding manhole covers. The flickering light from the joss sticks and candles added charm to the powerful illumination of neon shop signs and electric road lamps. The scene was an unwitting but striking microcosm of the coexistence of tradition and modernity.[14] In fact, the survival of a minor festival like this demonstrates more powerfully than the New Year's celebration the tenacity of the past. Given the impor-

tance of New Year's Day to a calendar (any calendar) and the particular prominence of New Year's celebrations in Chinese culture, it is perfectly understandable why people wanted to continue celebrating it at the time and in the manner to which they had become accustomed. But the connection to the past was certainly deeper than that.

The Midyear Festival (Zhongyuanjie, the fifteenth day of the seventh month) further illustrates the point. The holiday was also known as the "ghost festival" or the "birthday of ghosts," because it was said that hungry ghosts appear in the seventh month of the lunar year, ghosts that should be respected in some measure in order to ensure peace and prosperity in the world. This ancient festival—although unequal in importance to New Year's Day, the Qingming Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival, and the Full Moon Festival—continued to be popular and was taken seriously. Because the activities surrounding the festival lasted for a couple of weeks and involved people of all walks of life, the arrival of autumn in Shanghai was, in the words of a resident, "accompanied by an increasingly ghostly bustle in the city. No matter where one goes one feels a ghostly atmosphere." On street corners and at alleyway entrances, everywhere one turned were posters that read "The King of Ghosts," "Make a Fortune Wherever You Look," or "Peace on Earth." These posters were hung together with various articles of clothing, shoe-shaped gold or silver ingots, and various types of furniture and household items all made of colorful paper. Early in the evening, on stages circled with colored lanterns and ribbons set up at the entrances of lilong compounds, Buddhist monks and Daoist priests chanted scriptures, sang songs, struck percussion instruments, and otherwise made all sorts of peculiar sounds. The purpose of all this activity, known as "Public Worship for Great Peace" (*taiping gongjiao*) or "Yulanpen," was to expiate hungry ghosts so that their souls could be released from purgatory or hell and peace could reign on earth.[15] There was much bustle and excitement associated with these performances and, as is generally true of festivals, plenty of commercial activity. In describing the Midyear Festival of 1933, one writer jeered:

> Among the crowd in threes and fours there is the "Shopkeeper of the Tobacco and Paper Store," the "Owner of the Hot Water Service," "Old Number Four of the Mah-Jongg Shop," "Little Number Three of the Sesame Cake Stall," and others. These people purchase yellow paper from which they make booklets to solicit signatures and donations from household to household. Having solicited one or two hundred dollars, they now can play a massive game between man and ghost. Thanks to the king of the ghosts, these solicitors can get some extra income from the donations—what is called in Shanghai "taking advantage of ghosts"!
>
> The "Great Gathering of Lanpen" and the "Public Worship for Great Peace" are popular not only among the lower classes but also among well-off families, store owners, and old-type gentry who are all scared of being haunted by hungry ghosts. In order to prevent themselves from being the last offspring of their family lines, they are willing to spend hundreds of dollars in the Zhongyuan Festival to hire Buddhist monks and Daoist priests to hold a large-scale ceremony, although in ordinary times these people are stingy about giving a penny to poor people.
>
> So, in autumn, Shanghai is full of a ghostly atmosphere and one can observe people worshiping and praising ghosts in every street![16]



In contrast to this rather fervid mass undertaking during this relatively minor Chinese festival, only two major holidays on the national calendar ever caught the fancy of the public: Christmas and New Year's Day. Neither, however, was celebrated with any real enthusiasm. Once the Western calendar had been officially adopted, January 1 became the major holiday of officialdom. The city government took three days off on New Year's. It became a matter of social etiquette for officials as a group to make New Year's calls (*tuanbai*) during the holiday.[17] However, tuanbai were carried out rather perfunctorily, as a mere matter of form rather than real celebration. What is more, the public remained generally indifferent to the Western New Year, partly perhaps to reserve their energy and money for the Chinese New Year (which usually arrived a little more than a month later).

The public was still less enthusiastic about Christmas. Most people considered Christmas as a holiday for foreigners, Chinese Christians, and Western-oriented Chinese families. The last category consisted mainly of the so-called high-class Chinese (*gaodeng Huaren*). In many parts of the city but particularly in the concessions, department stores displayed Christmas trees, stockings, and lights, Christmas choirs sang in the churches, and Santa Claus was a familiar sight to pedestrians—all seemingly confirmed that the city was an authentic Westernized enclave. But a common name in Shanghai for Christmas reveals what might be called the Shanghainese "power of adaptation," as well as the public's image of this Western holiday as something alien: Christmas was known as the "Foreign Winter Solstice," referring to the twenty-second solar period in the Chinese calendar, Dongzhi (Winter Solstice), which usually falls on December 22.[18]

SEDAN CHAIRS AND WHEELBARROWS

As in other Chinese cities, sedan chairs were the main conveyance in Shanghai before the middle of the nineteenth century. The sedan chair could easily negotiate the narrow and winding streets and alleyways of the walled city. A foreign visitor described the walled city in 1897: "The streets, with houses built of slate-colored, soft-looking brick, are only about eight feet wide, are paved with stone slabs, and are narrowed by innumerable stands. Even a wheelbarrow—the only conveyance possible—can hardly make its way in many places. True, a mandarin sweeps by in his gilded chair, carried at a run, with his imposing retinue, but his lictors clear the way by means not available to the general public."[19]

A very similar scene was recorded, in intimate detail, by a Chinese resident early in the twentieth century:

> Most streets of [the old city of] Shanghai were very narrow. For example, Sanpailou [lit., the Third Decorated Archway] Road was known as the main thoroughfare of the city, but one can imagine the narrowness of this street by merely observing that residents on either side of the road could rest their bamboo poles [for drying clothes] on the eaves of the houses across the street. A permanent feature of the street was that a variety of things, from women's pants, baby diapers, to foot-binding strips, were hung on these bamboo poles and waved over the street. Even worse, some lazy women hung wet clothes without ringing them out first, so water dripped on the street as if it were raining. Often, a pedestrian was "lucky" enough to be wet by the "finest cream" [the water] and scolded [the owner], and the owner scolded back, and then an endless quarrel ensued. At this moment, if the sound of gongs was heard, which announced that the local magistrate was on his way, immediately yamen runners would rush ahead to clear the street, yelling, "Take down your wash!"—in such haste as if they were on fire. People then rushed to take the bamboo poles home, picking up the clothes that dropped to the ground in a great hustle. Those who did not do it quick enough were censured in public, and thus ended the farce.[20]

Not only officials, but well-off families, too, often had a private sedan chair and carriers. A successful physician, for example, often retained three carriers for his private sedan chair. When making a house call, as Chinese doctors often did, two carriers bore the chair, while the third cleared the way or at night held a lantern to light the way ahead and, if need be, to spell the other carriers.[21]

Although most people did not own a sedan chair, and still fewer enjoyed the privilege of having lictors clear a path for them, nonetheless for centuries sedan chairs were available for rent by the public. There were a number of sedan chair stations (*jiaohang*) in the walled city where one could hire the conveyances. This service continued after Shanghai had become a treaty port. In fact, because of the commercial boom brought by the opening of the city to the West, sedan chairs were in big demand and public sedan chairs had to be registered (so they could be taxed). By the Tongzhi period (1862–74), sedan chairs were widely used in the foreign settlements. The SMC taxed each sedan chair for hire 2 silver dollars (the cost of about seventy pounds of rice) per quarter.[22] Sedan chairs with special decorations for events such as weddings and funerals were also available for rent, usually not at a sedan chair station but at the shops that specialized in "red" (wedding) and "white" (funeral) events (Figs. 34 and 35).



After the introduction of rickshaws late in the nineteenth century and trams and taxies early in the twentieth century, the use of sedan chairs quickly declined. In 1905, when rickshaws and other vehicles were already plentiful, there were still 733 sedan chairs registered in the International Settlement. By 1911, their number had dropped to 199. But the custom of using a sedan chair for weddings survived even after Shanghai became a motorized city. Even during the 1930s, many families considered it virtually essential that a bride be carried to the wedding in a sedan chair (Fig. 34). The Shanghai expression "riding a flowered sedan chair" (*cheng huajiao*) remained a synonym for (a woman) getting married. It cost 20 silver dollars to rent a sedan chair for a wedding, which was about equivalent to an average worker's monthly income at that time; taking a taxi to a wedding would have cost only 4 or 5 dollars.[23]

Another old conveyance that persisted into the modern age was the wheelbarrow. Sedan chairs were for carrying passengers only and were rather elegant, but wheelbarrows were all-purpose vehicles and purely utilitarian. The wheelbarrow was in many ways especially suitable for the city, and it continued to have a role even after the introduction of the automobile. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, transportation of goods in Shanghai was mostly by boat. A mid-nineteenth-century manuscript map of Shanghai shows a spider web of waterways that covered the landscape.[24] In contrast, there were only five roads in the walled city in the early sixteenth century, more than two centuries after it had become a county seat.[25] In 1814 the Shanghai local gazetteer recorded a total of sixty-six streets in the city, most of which were narrow alleyways no more than six and a half feet (two meters) wide.[26] These roads obviously served only as a path for residents, not for vehicular traffic. However, in the late nineteenth century, when the volume of trade in the city had increased dramatically,

Fig. 34. Traditional bride's sedan chairs were still common in Shanghai prior to 1949. Here eight men dressed in shirts with the "double happiness" character, a symbol for marriage, carry a fully adorned bride's sedan chair through a street in the International Settlement. From R. Barz, *Shanghai: Sketches of Present-Day Shanghai.*

even the narrow alleyways were needed to supplement waterborne transportation. Thus, for about half a century after the 1860s, wheelbarrows came to be widely used.

The wheelbarrow had several virtues. Like the sedan chair, it could easily negotiate the narrow, winding streets and alleyways inside the walled city. In the foreign settlements where streets were broader, small and nimble vehicles like wheelbarrows seemed to make headway no matter how heavy the traffic. The wheelbarrow needed but one person to operate it, yet could safely carry as much as six hundred pounds of goods. In a regulation issued by the SMC in 1887, wheelbarrows were in fact limited to a load of six hundred pounds, but in reality the limit was often exceeded. Furthermore, although wheelbarrows were primarily used to carry goods, they could also carry passengers, and in fact the latter function survived the former. By the 1930s, when wheelbarrows for transporting goods had been largely replaced by other sorts of vehicles, they were still commonly in use to carry passengers.

Thus, well into the Republican era the wheelbarrow remained a familiar sight on Shanghai's streets. Its popularity as a passenger vehicle even in-



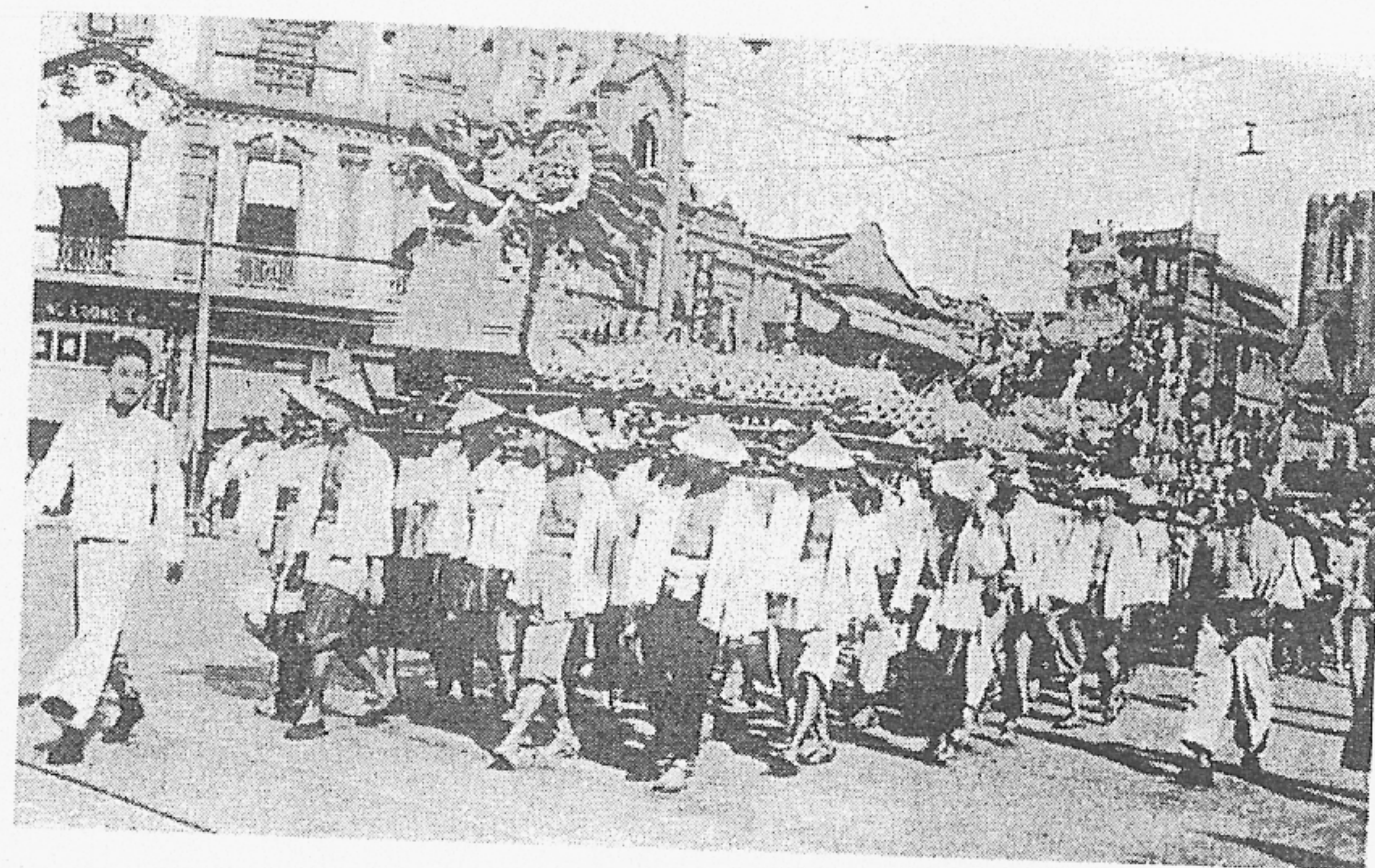


Fig. 35. While Western-style weddings sometimes caught the imagination of Shanghainese, funeral ceremonies in the city remained almost exclusively Chinese. This funeral procession of a wealthy man, featuring a huge dragon ornament and mourners clothed in traditional linen, passes through a street in the French Concession dotted with Western-style restaurants and a Christian church—an indication of the city's mixed lifestyle. From R. Barz, *Shanghai: Sketches of Present-Day Shanghai.*

creased after it was used in the concessions. In the old Chinese city, wheelbarrows were regarded as a conveyance of the working people (*yonggong*). But in the concessions wheelbarrows gradually became a popular form of public transportation. Passengers included those of the educated classes and merchants (*shishang*), reflecting a pragmatic attitude toward this convenient means of transportation.[27] A wheelbarrow could carry as many as eight passengers (Fig. 36). Often, the passengers, sitting on either side of the vehicle, enjoyed chatting with each other or with the wheelbarrow pusher. It seems that the wheelbarrow provided a rare opportunity for passengers of the opposite sex to sit together in some intimacy, an altogether unusual situation in a society that still more or less emphasized the ritual separation of men and women. It was therefore reported that "offenses against decency" occurred on these rides, and some wheelbarrows, by order of the authorities, were reduced in size to allow only one passenger to sit on each side.[28]

But wheelbarrows continued to serve as an easily accessible public conveyance at a time when Chevrolets and Austins were already a common

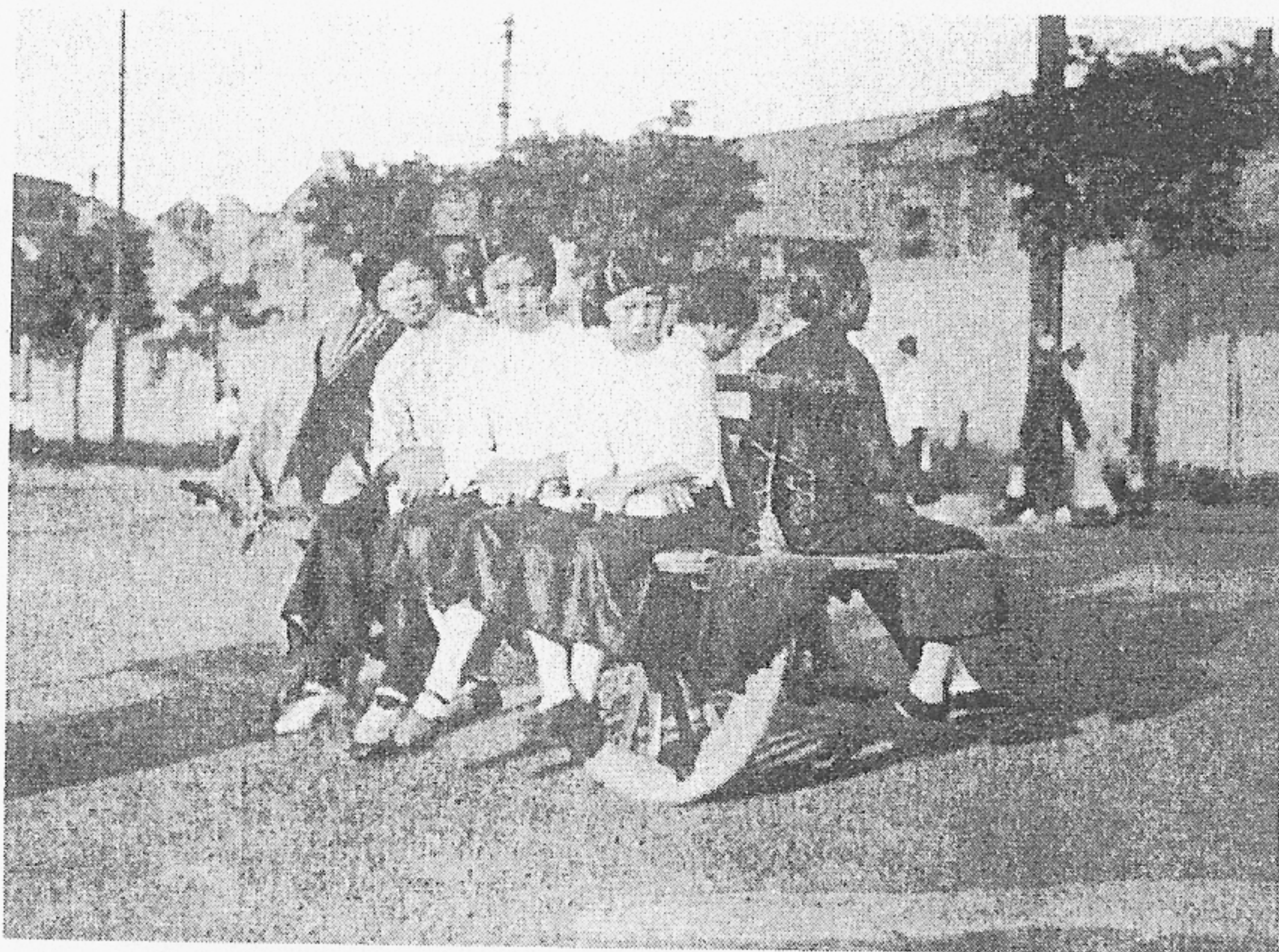


Fig. 36. This ancient means of transportation continued to serve the public in Republican Shanghai. Here, six mill workers ride home on a cart capable of carrying eight. Women workers were typically the main patrons of this conveyance. Courtesy of the Shanghai Museum.

sight on Shanghai's streets.[29] The order reducing the size of wheelbarrows was not strictly enforced it seems, as it was observed in the late 1930s and the 1940s that "it was a common sight to see a long line of wheelbarrow 'taxis' transporting as many as eight plump Chinese mill-girls—four on each side—to and from work morning and evening—and glad of the business."[30] These primitive conveyances were jokingly called "fourth-class" vehicles, in reference to the automobile (number one), the rickshaw (number two), and the tram (number three). Wang Yingxia, wife of the writer Yu Dafu, mentioned in chapter 6, recalled that in the early thirties,

> often . . . when the weather was mild and flowers were blooming, Yu Dafu and I liked to take a stroll. In what was then Jessfield Road (today's Wanhangdu Road) and Yuyuan Road we were often solicited by wheelbarrow pushers who were on their way back to Caojiadu. Yu Dafu always liked to have us ride on these "fourth-class" vehicles. In the beginning I was a little embarrassed and also afraid of falling off. But once we got on and sat steadily on each side of the wheelbarrow, with my left hand holding his right hand, and the pusher behind us, and we chatted from time to time on all sorts of topics, it became a really zestful ride. Sometimes on the way we came across our "automobile class" friends, who waved to us from their cars, and we returned their greeting by nodding, with an expression that we were quite enjoying ourselves and would ignore what others might say.[31]



If one were to take in some of the street scenes in the city—the row upon row of lilong houses, the numerous neighborhood stores of all kinds, every sort of "you name it" service shops, the bustling open-air food markets, the innumerable refreshment stands, the shouting street peddlers, the squeaking wheelbarrows, the wedding parades with their sedan chairs, the great throngs at temple fairs, the hustle and bustle of traditional festivals, the heavily trafficked bridges over Suzhou Creek with urchins at both ends helping to push human-powered vehicles over the slope, and so on—in short, if one were to take in the endless, streaming crowds and the forest of structures in the densely clotted urban setting that was Shanghai, one might well be struck by the similarity between the street scenes in this treaty-port city and those in a traditional Chinese city, such as the one meticulously portrayed in the famous Song painting *Qingming Festival on the River.* Gazing at this painting and recalling life in modern Shanghai, one may feel a certain poignancy, as if urban life in twelfth-century Kaifeng may have been recreated in twentieth-century Shanghai. In walking through the streets of modern Shanghai, one might also get the impression that Shanghai's lilong neighborhoods were not unlike "urban villages" and the residents, "urban villagers."[32]

## *The West*

Customs or habits accumulated in daily life are perhaps the last stronghold to be conquered by change. A Shanghai resident might have participated in new realms of political or social life but at the same time might have kept his or her old habits in everyday life. A person might have been a modern union activist or a Communist intellectual or a Christian church-goer, and at the same time might have remained a loyal customer of small neighborhood stores and enjoyed chatting with neighbors while sitting beside a tiger stove or munching snacks in a sesame cake store. Indeed, hot water stores in Shanghai's working-class neighborhoods were often a favorite place for social gatherings and, during labor disputes, for organizing strikes.[33] A woman worker might have joined the YWCA, while her daily life at home (symbolized, say, by the lighting of her coal stove in the morning) remained unchanged.[34] Continuities of traditional ways in people's

daily lives did not necessarily contradict (at least not immediately) changes in other dimensions of their lives.

Obviously, the tenacity of tradition in daily life was partly the result of a lack of modern amenities. The widespread availability of refrigerators or a gas supply, for instance, might have dramatically changed people's shopping behavior and made small stores irrelevant. But the dynamic of the persistence of tradition was essentially not material but cultural. Chinese institutions thus should not be measured against standards based on the "Western-derived model of urbanization" and judged backward or inferior.[35] Indeed, there is reason to believe that in industrialized societies people miss the "pastoral" style of neighborhood life. That is why, as Bestor tells us, public baths (*sentō*) in Tokyo are "still well patronized, serving as social centers for local residents, including many who could bathe at home but prefer the congenial atmosphere of public bathing." After a bath, patrons often stop "on their way back to do a bit of shopping, to chat with friends, or to have a bowl of noodles in a restaurant."[36] That is also why the anthropologist E. N. Anderson is justified in worrying about "the worst thing that could happen" to Chinese food in the new, affluent world of the future—that is, the disappearance of the great variety of so-called poverty food served in traditional fashion in "street stalls and tiny hole-in-the-wall restaurants."[37]

In spite of the overwhelming evidence that in some important respects Shanghai was home to a strong and vibrant current of traditionalism, a traditionalism that can be equated with continuity or persistence of things indigenous to the Chinese, the city has been almost invariably perceived—in the Chinese mind as well as that of the foreigner—only in its guise as a treaty port. Shanghai has long been stereotyped by Chinese of virtually all political convictions as the prime "bridgehead" for foreign encroachment on China. In the West, the city has been frequently portrayed as an alien island in the vast indigenous Chinese sea. Even rigorous scholarly work refers to the city simply as "the other China," "in China but not of it," "a foreign city even in its own country," and so on.[38]

Consistent with this image of the city as something alien to the "true" China, modern Shanghainese have been stereotyped as a people who somehow differ from their fellow citizens. Like most generalizations about a particular city's people (such as, say, New Yorkers), the image or stereotype of the "Shanghai person," or Shanghainese (Shanghairen), was well conceived and widely known but seldom articulated. Also, like virtually all generalizations about a group of people, the stereotype of the "Shanghai person" runs the risk of being biased, leading to strained interpretations



or oversimplification of complexities. With this in mind, let us look more closely at the perception of the Shanghai person, a somewhat peculiar but nevertheless important subject in twentieth-century Chinese social history.

On one hand, the criteria for being categorized as Shanghainese were vague and equivocal. Being a Shanghainese was not determined by birth, nor by language—although both factors are of vital importance in defining local identity in China (perhaps also elsewhere in the world). As noted, the majority of Shanghainese were not born in Shanghai, and they spoke the Shanghai local dialect with various accents. On the other hand, the notion of "Shanghainese" could be so distinct and definite that few would mistake what it meant. To this day, many Shanghainese believe, apparently with some degree of exaggeration but also certainly with some justification, that a non-Shanghainese can be easily identified in Shanghai's streets, stores, or bus stops simply by his or her manner and mien. By the same token, a Shanghainese—even if that person had left the city for years and lived in a place thousands of miles from Shanghai—can still be readily identified and/or would self-identify as Shanghainese.[39]

Such a social phenomenon—what one might call the personified Shanghai identity—has great potential to generate studies whose significance goes beyond Shanghai. Such studies may require one to call upon historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and even psychologists to engage in interdisciplinary research to connect the Shanghai identity with other important themes in Chinese studies. For our purposes, and also to address an essential aspect of the Shanghai identity, we shall look at the role that the West played in the formation of this rich and imaginative yet concrete identity.

In an effort to answer the question "Who are the Shanghainese?" and to explicate the notion of the "Shanghai person" in a scholarly context, the historian Xiong Yuezhi wrote that one criterion for qualifying as a "Shanghai person" was "being experienced and knowledgeable. Those who raised their head to enjoy looking at a tall building, or joined a throng to gawk at foreigners on the street, or gazed at a store window with an expression of astonishment, were mostly not Shanghainese—the skyline, foreigners and foreign goods were simply all-too-familiar sights for the people of Shanghai."[40] In a well-received essay on the "Shanghai person," the writer Yu Qiuyu points out that the formation of the shared characteristics of the "Shanghai person" must be traced back into history: "Older generation rickshaw pullers were all able to speak a few English words; people as low class as they dared to take a stand against the foreigners in

the agitation of the May 30th Incident [of 1925]. There were many foreigners who lived in Shanghai's alleyway-house neighborhoods; having been neighbors with each other for years, they adjusted their relations [with the Chinese residents] so that they became quite ordinary. Shanghai's shop assistants did not have much regard for foreign customers. They would often estimate the customer's budget and make suggestions about what to buy."[41] In her essay titled "After All, This Is the Shanghainese," written in 1943, the writer Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang), who has been praised as "the author who best catches the feeling of old Shanghai," points out the subtleness and extraordinary sense of balance with which Shanghainese conducted themselves in society.[42] This meant, among other things, that Shanghainese had no blind faith in any "perfect model," which included the model of the West. As for the notion of perfection, as Zhang describes it, the Shanghainese would say, "Go back to children's stories!" Perfection can only find a place for herself in the fairy tales "Snow White" and "Glass Slippers" [Cinderella]![43]

This maturity was also reflected in the attitude of the people of Shanghai toward foreigners or, more specifically, Westerners. Shanghai was known as a hotbed of a number of major anti-imperialism movements in twentieth-century China, and, ironically, at the same time it was condemned for its tendency to "worship things foreign" (*chongyang*), which stemmed largely from its status as China's number one treaty port. Both images are in some way misleading. The manner that the Shanghai people adopted toward Westerners was a more calm, balanced, and sophisticated one than either image can convey. Having lived in a city where safety and prosperity were brought by uninvited foreign powers, and caught in the dilemma of nursing a wounded national pride and at the same time admiring the West, the people of Shanghai somehow managed to find a comfortable, balanced point on which to stand. It was, so to speak, the Daoist "let nature take its own course" philosophy mixed with a sense of humor that usually characterized the Shanghainese.

Indeed, Shanghai in its heyday, from after the May 30th Incident in 1925 to the end of the war in 1945, had extraordinarily few outbreaks of xenophobia against the West. This had to do with a number of factors, including the increasing encroachment of Japan during these two decades, something that shaped Chinese nationalism primarily into a resist-the-Japanese movement. But a high degree of familiarity with, and decades of living together with, foreigners must have played some role. It would be naive to say that Chinese and Westerners in this cosmopolitan city achieved perfectly harmonious relations, but at least people of different



ethnic and cultural backgrounds were a familiar, everyday sight, and they adjusted to circumstances and generally lived in peace with each other.

Often, Shanghainese of Chinese origin used humor in dealing with the "Shanghainese" of foreign origin.[44] A few local expressions created with wry amusement illustrate this phenomenon. Chinese servants in foreign firms or houses were called by their bosses "boy"; the Shanghainese transformed this derogatory form of address into a somewhat comical name: 1309 (because, at least to some eyes, the handwritten English word "Boy" looks like the handwritten number 1309). Being kicked by foreigners (many a rickshaw puller was booted by foreign policemen) was known as "eating foreign ham." The term "foreign tray" (*yangpan*) means "fool," and originated from terminology used in the Shanghai Stock Exchange.[45] *Lasan,* derived from "lassie," refers to loose and frivolous girls. *Xianshuimei* ("saltwater sister"), a transliteration of "handsome maid," referred to Chinese prostitutes who specialized in entertaining foreign clients. Since "saltwater" implies the ocean and the ocean implies foreigners, the term makes a good pun. "Gamen," an adjective in the Shanghai dialect derived from the word "German," means "indifferent and reluctant," reflecting a general impression among Shanghai's Chinese of the Germans as reserved and unexcitable. While Westerners were more or less regarded as superior, the people of Subei, whose inferior social status in Shanghai has become known in the West through Emily Honig's work, were called "the French."[46]

Local expressions like these, numerous as they are, were only drops in a deep reservoir of social attitudes toward the West. Zhang Ailing once said that because of age-old political and social controversies the people of Shanghai adopted "a laissez-faire attitude that stemmed from weariness. It is a smile on a sweating face—a characteristic of the typical Chinese sense of humor."[47] This was something widely known among the populace, deeply ingrained in its mentality, yet hardly visible in political events and seldom reflected in the literature on the city.

In any case, the balance between xenophobia and blind faith in or obsequiousness toward foreigners revealed a certain level of sophistication. To the people of the hinterland who were, by the time of the Republic, still in awe of or resentful of things foreign, it was this kind of sophistication that somehow made the Shanghainese alien. Therefore, there were two layers of elements that distanced the Shanghainese from the hinterlander: in addition to the usual type of grudge or dislike that rural or small-town people harbor for cosmopolites, it was, in whatever form, the Shanghai people's experience with and adoption of things Western that made them different.

In other words, "Shanghainese" was a dual structure: it was not just *urban* but also to some degree *Western*. The term *waidiren* (lit., an outsider, that is, a person from parts of the country other than the place from which one hails) in Shanghai implied *xiangxiaren* (country folk), regardless of whether the "country folk" might in fact come from a major city.[48] The historian Chen Xulu (1918–94) described a common notion about the magical power of Shanghai: "Having been in Shanghai for a while, the most foolish person can be smart, the most honest person can be cunning; the most odd person can be handsome. Only a few days after being in Shanghai, a slovenly girl with a running nose can become a beauty with curly hair, a woman with single eyelids and a flat nose can become a lady of dignified bearing."[49] Here, "single eyelids and a flat nose" were taken as a mark of uncouthness and reflected a general social judgment in favor of the "double eyelids and the high nose" of Westerners; "curly hair" had the same connotation. With the city's Western "ingredients," urban superiority became sublimed into the "superiority of Shanghai."

We encounter an obvious paradox: if in various ways the people of Shanghai maintained a traditional lifestyle not unlike that of the rest of China, why was the image of the city and its people so persistently different from that of other parts of the country? If in the eyes of other Chinese, modern Shanghainese were in some degree marked as "Western," then what was the essence of that imprint?

To elaborate on the subject would, as I indicated earlier, require extensive new research. However, from what we already know about the daily life of ordinary people, we may already have at least part of the answer: the extraordinary commercial character of the city, with its overwhelming Western component, contributed to the perception that the Shanghainese were fundamentally "different." Modern Shanghainese have been stereotyped as astute, resourceful, calculating, quick-witted, adaptive, and flexible (always ready to compromise but not budging an inch unless absolutely necessary). All of these are characteristics associated with commerce.

Shanghai was arguably the epitome of modern China's commercial culture, in which commerce served as the primary motor of society. It seems legitimate to name such a culture after the city, hence the term Haipai (the Shanghai school or the Shanghai type), in contrast to the supposedly rigid, tradition-bound, and orthodox Jingpai (the Beijing school or the Beijing type).[50] The Shanghai type, even in its original meaning as a school of painting and drama, was part of a broadly defined commercial culture: as



Lu Xun pointed out, "Haipai is just the helper of commerce," whereas "Jingpai is the hack of officialdom."[51]

Commerce and commerce-related social phenomena were of course not brought by Westerners. Commercialization in late imperial China, especially in the lower Yangzi delta region, predated the arrival of the West, something that has been well researched and convincingly demonstrated. But the so-called incipient capitalism (or "sprouts of capitalism") of late imperial China apparently was no match for the vigor of modern Shanghai, in which commerce was so widespread among people of all walks of life, so vital to the fate of the city, and so pervasive in every aspect of society. The role the Western powers played in the city's development in the modern era naturally marked this commercial culture with the brand of the West. The term "Hai" was not just an abbreviation of "Shanghai" but, from its literal meaning—"ocean" or "sea"—a figure of speech indicating that the culture of Shanghai was, like an ocean, boundless, all-embracing, and all-powerful.[52]

Shanghai's landscape can be seen as a powerful manifestation of the city's commercial culture. Major traditional Chinese cities, including the so-called commercial capital of Kaifeng, had been built around political or state edifices (such as imperial palaces or yamen) or religious structures.[53] Shanghai became the first major city in Chinese history that had as its paramount landmark a few blocks of commercial establishments. Nanking Road, the commercial center of the city, together with its adjacent riverside, the Bund, the site of imposing, multistory office buildings, has long been seen as a symbol of the city, in much the same way that the Manhattan skyline symbolizes New York. Nanking Road and the Bund—as the places where foreigners exercised their economic power and enjoyed special privileges, and as the places from which emanated modern, Western cultural influences—were particularly powerful symbols of the Western commercial intrusion in China.

In the vast shikumen neighborhoods beyond the Bund, the story of the daily life of ordinary people reveals the deep penetration of commercialization. It is here, in the lives of the ordinary people of Shanghai, that we can find part of the roots of Shanghai's extraordinary commercial culture. Shanghai—specifically the houses built in the city's core along Nanking Road—was the birthplace of China's first modern real estate market. In many alleyway-house neighborhoods, tenants became a type of merchant by subletting space to others. Thus, Shanghai's commercial culture was not restricted to the big enterprises in the foreign concessions where "mer-

chants were abundant"[54] but was also found in, for instance, the so-called second-landlord practice, where a business primarily grew out of what might be called one's living arrangement. The common second-landlord/third-tenant phenomenon was a way in which people coped with life in the city, in search of either success or merely survival.[55]

It was also a showcase of Shanghai as a land of opportunity. Not all of the hundreds of thousands of poor rural immigrants made a living by begging, pulling a rickshaw, or doing other backbreaking labor; many made a living—or by certain standards, even a fortune—by simply renting out part of their dwelling. People who could not afford or were unwilling to pay the "takeover fee" could rent any size room in any type of house and thus sojourn in this "golden land" (*cunjindi*) in search of the "Shanghai dream." Out of these living arrangements welled a deep sense of commerce destined to shape the mind-set of the people of Shanghai. Such a mind-set was further "commercialized" by the coexistence of commerce and residence in the city's alleyways. Millions of shikumen residents lived with businesses operating literally under their very noses. These establishments—stores, workshops, factories, banks, pawnshops, opium dens, brothels, teahouses, bathhouses, inns, schools, offices, temples, and so on—were located right inside the alley, side by side with residences. In addition, peddlers of all sorts were ever present in the city, serving millions of residents in the neighborhoods as well as making a living by selling. The influence of commerce on the people of Shanghai was thus intimate, enveloping, and certain.

In a nation where commerce had long been despised, such influence was deemed to be corrupting. As early as 1861, Wang Tao (1828–97), who came to Shanghai in 1849 and worked as a translator for a British-run press for twelve years, wrote in his diary, "Shanghai is a place of corrupted social values, and the corruption is indeed due to the search for profits [*lisou*]."[56] Wang, one of the few reform-minded intellectuals of his time, was regarded as a pioneer in introducing Western culture to modern China, yet in private he did not hold Shanghai and commerce in high regard; we can imagine how still more unfavorable was the opinion of Shanghai and its commercial culture among the conservatives. In spite of the commerce-based prosperity of the city in modern times, business continued to be criticized as the cause of social deterioration. "In Shanghai, people only care about the value of gold and silver and do not know the origin of elegance and vulgarity." "The general social mood is so bad that everybody places great value on profit and takes personal reputation lightly. Commerce and the market are the place where the will of the people is worked out." Comments like these were frequently encountered in local newspapers and other publications, and presumably they were common in people's daily conversations.[57] By orthodox, Confucian standards, then, the city's commercial culture was corrupt and so were its people.



In condemning commerce as corrosive and degenerative, radicals and conservatives stood, ironically but not surprisingly, shoulder to shoulder. One of the founding fathers of the Chinese Communist Party, Chen Duxiu, was among the harshest critics of Shanghai; his attacks on the city bear striking similarities to those from the conservative Confucian camp. Chen, writing during the May 4th Movement, of which he was unquestionably the leading figure advocating "Down with Confucianism" and promoting "Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy" in China, proclaimed: "All these recently popularized expressions—consciousness, patriotism, devotion to the public, the Republic, Liberation, strengthening our country, hygiene, reform, freedom, the trend of new thought, new culture—once they land in Shanghai can only serve as a sharp weapon for [the advertisements of] cigarette companies, pharmacies, book dealers, and lotteries. Alas, what a society Shanghai is!" To him, "Everywhere [in the city] is the sound of the abacus and the stink of copper coins."[58]

### *The Communists*

Chen Duxiu was later purged by his fellow Communists, but they remained firm "comrades" in denouncing Shanghai's commercial culture. The Maoist version of Communism saw Shanghai as a part of, to use Bergère's words, "the model of development inspired by the West[,] of which the city had become the symbol."[59] While the Communists were certainly right in relating Shanghai's commercialization to the West, in so doing they obviously, on purpose or not, underrated the Chinese initiative in the process. Western innovation and influence frequently provided the impetus, but later developments and innovations were almost entirely Chinese.

No doubt the revolution of 1949 brought unprecedented change to the city and to the life of its people; to use a Chinese proverb favored by the Communists in describing their revolution, it "turned heaven and earth upside down" (*tianfan difu*).[60] Yet many practices and customs in daily life deeply rooted in tradition have proved to be more durable than the sweeping changes introduced by the revolution. This study does not intend to extend its focus to the postrevolutionary era, but a few examples related to the subjects treated in this book can be brought in here to suggest that as

far as daily life is concerned, the changes brought by "Liberation" may not be as thorough and fundamental as people have previously thought.

In the neighborhoods, the Communists had to cope with the existing residential patterns and housing structures in establishing their neighborhood organizations. In most cases the core of the neighborhood organizations, that is, the residents' committee, was put in charge of a few adjacent alleyway-house compounds. Each committee was named after one or another of the major alleyway-house compounds in its domain. For instance, the Zhengming Li Residents' Committee, established in 1954, had within its jurisdiction three adjacent alleyway-house compounds in Changde Road (from north to south): Jiahe Li, Zhengming Li, and Fude Fang (Alley of Fortune and Virtue). Sometimes an alleyway-house compound was big enough to warrant its own, single residents' committee; and sometimes a particularly large compound, such as Jianye Li, was too big for a single residents' committee and so was divided among a few committees. In all cases, the domains of residents' committees were carefully drawn to follow the type of housing; in other words, they were aligned with the pre-Liberation residential pattern.[61]

One should note that the city did not lack small subareas where shacks, shikumen, and new-type alleyway houses were located close enough to each other that they could have been gathered into a single residents' committee. But this seldom happened. The Street (*jiedao*), which occupied the top of the three-layered hierarchy of urban neighborhood organizations, may have included a variety of neighborhoods (or housing types) in its domain, but it usually acknowledged the existing differences by establishing residents' committees based on the type of neighborhood. For example, the Huashan Street committee administered over half a dozen residents' committees (the exact number varied with changes in the district's boundaries through the years), whose neighborhoods were diverse: the Zhengming Li Residents' Committee represented an essentially shikumen neighborhood; the Laojie Residents' Committee, an area with mostly shacks; and the rest, neighborhoods with either new-type alleyway houses or yangfang (Western-style houses). The result of this approach was that the city's residents' committees came in a wide range of sizes; even the "average" size committee ranged from 100 to 600 households.[62]

Needless to say, neighborhoods and housing patterns were based on the social and economic status of the residents. It is ironic that a revolution that claimed as its goal the eradication of social classes was actually sensitive to keeping aligned with the status quo. But this sensitivity in establishing neighborhood organizations reveals that the Communists had the sense to



understand the local situation and the wisdom to compromise with it. Accepting the status quo contributed to the quick, comprehensive, efficient, and smooth establishment of neighborhood organizations in Shanghai in the early 1950s. Since the residents' committee was the basic functioning unit of the system, its old-neighborhood basis reduced the psychological impact often attendant on the imposition of a new system, and increased the effectiveness of Communist rule.

If we move on to look at commerce in the neighborhoods, again we see evidence of both change and continuity. After 1949, street peddlers were greatly reduced in number but were not completely banished, even during the Cultural Revolution. All existing food markets continued to operate in the same location and indeed became more important in daily life. Few new markets were opened after Liberation, which means people went to the same market for food as they did before the revolution. The frequent shortages of "side foods" (*fushipin*) in the sixties and seventies made the markets a morning battlefield where people vied with each other in endless lines to purchase food. Up to the recent reform that has diversified sources of food supplies—mainly by allowing farmers to enter the city to sell their products—the food market was virtually the sole source of fresh vegetables, meat, and fish. Furthermore, small neighborhood stores underwent some changes but maintained their important role in the life of local residents. Local stores and shops continued to handle the same commodities at the same locations and to serve the same customers. And, to some extent, the management too remained much the same as before the revolution.

However, most family-run small businesses did not escape the 1956 Socialist Transformation Movement, which aimed to transfer urban private enterprises to state or collective ownership. Rice stores and coal stores were all collectivized. Store owners were classified in the category "national bourgeoisie" (*minzu zichan jieji*). Some who had rather a small amount of capital and did not hire shop assistants (or more accurately, did not employ nonfamily members) were classified as "small business owners" (*xiaoyezhu*). The rice stores were turned over to the Grains and Oils Corporation, and the coal stores to the Coal and Petroleum Corporation, both of which were under the jurisdiction of the Second Bureau of Commerce of the Shanghai municipal government.[63]

Collectivization brought some dramatic changes to these stores. Down came the shop signs bearing elegant names that the owners had deliberately chosen to bless their businesses. Up went signs with the new, rather dull names consisting of a number and the relevant administrative jurisdiction, such as the "Number Six Rice Store of Jing'an District," or the



1955 imposition of rationing as another wave of restric-
ommodity, something they could and would cope with,
vith the rest of the increasing Communist manipulation
revolution.[69] In any event, there was considerable iner-
ping behavior. The rationing system allowed residents
different stores close to home, in consideration of pro-
lection. Most residents, however, stuck to a single rice
where they bought rice before rationing.[70]
vital importance of the rice stores, state intervention af-
nost serious. For stores that sold goods of less impor-
y, changes were minimal. Tobacco and paper stores are
oint. These stores, so convenient to local residents, re-
untouched by the nationwide socialist collectivization
he stores continued to be run by their owners in the
re the revolution, and they remained one of the very
e business in urban China after 1956. Tobacco and pa-
vived the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), when the
e out all traces of private enterprise in the country.
e of the "Gang of Four," who was at that time head of
in Shanghai, declared his intention to "cut off the tail
en zhuyi weiba).[71] In urban areas, this policy aimed
y businesses that had survived the mid-1950s social-
npaign. But tobacco and paper stores in Shanghai sur-
o's campaign.[72]
tributed to their endurance. One was that the conve-
ese stores could hardly be maintained by nonfamily
e stores were part of the owners' home and any adult
could help run the business, the stores were able to
very day, usually from 6 A.M. to 10 P.M. Indeed, they
nese New Year's Day. Even after a store closed for the
eded something urgently they could knock at the
and get what they wanted. Had the stores been col-
ve been difficult, if not impossible, to arrange shifts
mbers of employees to maintain the traditionally

tivization would have meant that the owners of
me employees of state (or cooperative) enterprises,
ne cooperative) would have borne the responsibility
mainly stable salaries, free medical care, and retire-
hese small stores were not profitable enough to al-