
Shanghai Modern: Reflections on Urban Culture in China in the 1930s

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By 1930, Shanghai had become a bustling cosmopolitan metropolis, the fifth largest city in the world, and China's largest harbor and treaty-port—a city that was already an international legend (“the Paris of Asia”) and a world of splendors of modernity set apart from the still tradition-bound countryside that was China.¹ Much has been written about Shanghai in Western languages, and the corpus of “popular literature” that contributed to its legendary image bequeaths a dubious legacy. For aside from perpetuating the city's glamour and mystery, it also succeeded in turning the name of the city into a debased verb in the English vocabulary: To “shanghai” is to “render insensible, as by drugs [read opium], and ship on a vessel wanting hands” or to “bring about the performance of an action by deception or force,” according to *Webster's Living Dictionary*.² At the same time, the negative side of this popular portrait has been in a sense confirmed by Chinese leftist writers and latter-day communist scholars who likewise saw the city as a bastion of evil, of wanton debauchery and rampant imperialism marked by foreign extraterritoriality—a city of shame for all native patriots. It would not be too hard to transform this narrative into another discourse of Western imperialism and colonialism by focusing on the inhuman exploitation of the urban underclasses by the rich and powerful, both native and foreign.

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Although I am naturally drawn to the “political correctness” of such a line of interpretation, I am somewhat suspicious of its totalizing intent. Mao Dun, the avowed leftist writer and an early member of the Chinese Communist Party, inscribes a “contradictory” message even on the very first page of his first novel, *Midnight* [Ziye], subtitled, *A Romance of China, 1930*. Whereas Shanghai under foreign capitalism has a monstrous appearance, the hustle and bustle of the harbor—as I think his rather purple prose seeks to convey—also exudes a boundless energy, as summed up by three words on a neon sign: LIGHT, HEAT, POWER!³ These three words, together with the word NEON, were written originally in English in the Chinese text of *Midnight*, which obviously connotes another kind of “historical truth,” the arrival of Western modernity whose consuming power soon frightens the protagonist’s father, a member of traditional Chinese gentry from the country, to death. In the first two chapters of the novel, in fact, Mao Dun gives prominent display of a large number of material emblems of this advancing modernity: cars (“three 1930-model Citroens”), electric lights and fans, radios, “foreign-style” mansions (*yang-fang*), sofas, guns (a Browning), cigars, perfume, high-heeled shoes, beauty parlors (in English), jai alai courts, “Grafton gauze,” flannel suits, 1930 Parisian summer dresses, Japanese and Swedish matches, silver ashtrays, beer and soda bottles, as well as all forms of entertainment—dancing (fox-trot and tango), “roulette, bordellos, greyhound racing, romantic Turkish baths, dancing girls, film stars.”⁴ Such modern conveniences and commodities of comfort and consumption were not fantasy items from a writer’s imagination; on the contrary, they were part of a new reality which Mao Dun wanted to portray and understand by inscribing it onto his fictional landscape. They are, in short, emblems of China’s passage to modernity to which Mao Dun

1. H. J. Lethbridge, introduction to *All about Shanghai: A Standard Guidebook* (1934–35; reprint, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1983), x.

2. An old version of the dictionary was translated and published in Shanghai around this time by the Commercial Press. A representative account of the Shanghai legend for Western tourists can be found in the following: “In the twenties and thirties Shanghai became a legend. No world cruise was complete without a stop in the city. Its name evoked mystery, adventure and licence of every form. In ships sailing to the Far East, residents enthralled passengers with stories of the ‘Whore of the Orient.’ They described Chinese gangsters, nightclubs that never closed and hotels which supplied heroin on room service. They talked familiarly of warlords, spy rings, international arms dealers and the peculiar delights on offer in Shanghai’s brothels. Long before landing, wives dreamed of the fabulous shops; husbands of half an hour in the exquisite grip of a Eurasian girl.” Harriet Sargeant, *Shanghai* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), 3.

3. Mao Dun [Dun], *Midnight: A Romance of China, 1930*, trans. Sidney Schapiro 2d ed. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1979), 1.

4. Mao Dun, *Ziye* (reprint, Hong Kong: Nanguo, 1973), 1–66.

and other urban writers of his generation reacted with a great deal of ambivalence and anxiety. After all, the English word “modern” (and the French “moderne”) received its first Chinese transliteration in Shanghai itself: In popular parlance, the Chinese word *modeng* has the meaning of being “novel and/or fashionable,” according to the authoritative Chinese dictionary, *Cihai*. Thus in the Chinese popular imagination, Shanghai and “modern” are natural equivalents. So the beginning point of my inquiry will have to be: What makes Shanghai modern? What made for its modern qualities in a matrix of meaning constructed by both Western and Chinese cultures?

Politically, for a century (from 1843 to 1943) Shanghai was a treaty-port of divided territories. The Chinese sections in the southern part of the city (a walled city) and in the far north (Chapei district) were cut off by the foreign concessions—the International Settlement (British and American) and the adjacent French Concession—which did not come to an end until 1943 during the Second World War, when the allied nations formally ended the concession system by agreement with China. In these “extraterritorial” zones, Chinese and foreigners lived “in mixed company” (*huayang zachu*) but led essentially separate lives. The two worlds were also bound together by bridges, tram and trolley routes, and other public streets and roads built by the Western powers that extended beyond the concession boundaries. The buildings in the concessions clearly marked the Western hegemonic presence: banks, hotels, churches, cinemas, coffeehouses, restaurants, deluxe apartments, and a racecourse. They served as public markers in a geographical sense, but they were also the concrete manifestations of Western material civilization in which were embedded the checkered history of almost a century of Sino-Western contact.⁵ As a result of Western presence, many of the modern facilities of Shanghai’s urban life were introduced to the concessions starting in the mid-nineteenth century: These included banks (first introduced in 1848), Western-style streets (1856), gaslight (1865), electricity (1882), telephones (1881), running water (1884), automobiles (1901), and streetcars (1908).⁶ Thus by the beginning of the twentieth century the Shanghai concessions already had the “infrastructure” of a modern city even by

5. For studies of the concessions histories, see Shanghai Shi Ziliao Congkan, ed., *Shanghai gong-gong zujie shigao* [History of Shanghai’s International Settlement] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1980); Louis des Courtils, *La concession française de Changhai* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1934); and Ch. B.-Maybon and Jean Fredet, *Histoire de la concession française de Changhai* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1929).

6. Fredet, *Histoire de la concession française*, 13. See also Tang Zhenchang, ed., *Jindai Shanghai fanhua lu* [The splendor of modern Shanghai] (Hong Kong: Shangwu Yinshu Guan, 1993), 240. The first automobile was imported by a Hungarian named Lainz.

Western standards. By the 1930s, Shanghai was on a par with the largest cities of the world.

What made Shanghai into a cosmopolitan metropolis in cultural terms is difficult to define, for it has to do with both “substance” and “appearance”—with a whole fabric of life and style that serves to define its “modern” quality. While obviously determined by economic forces, urban culture is itself the result of a process of both production and consumption. In Shanghai’s case, the process involves the growth of both socioeconomic institutions and new forms of cultural activity and expression made possible by the appearance of new public structures and spaces for urban cultural production and consumption. Aspects of the former have been studied by many scholars,⁷ but the latter remains to be fully explored. I believe that a cultural map of Shanghai must be drawn on the basis of these new public structures and spaces, together with their implications for the everyday lives of Shanghai residents, both foreign and Chinese. In this essay, I would like first to give a somewhat descriptive narrative so that I can map out what I consider to be significant public structures and places of leisure and entertainment. This will serve as the “material” background for further interpretations of Shanghai’s urban culture and of Chinese modernity.

Urban Space and Cultural Consumption

Architecture and Urban Space “There is no city in the world today with such a variety of architectural offerings, buildings which stand out in welcome contrast to their modern counterparts.”⁸ This statement implies that Shanghai itself offered a contrast of old and new, Chinese and Western. However, it does not mean that the Chinese occupied only the old sections of the city and the Westerners only the modern. The notorious regulation that barred Chinese and dogs from Western parks was finally abolished in 1928, and the parks were opened to

7. See Wen-hsin Yeh, “Shanghai Modernity: Commerce and Culture in a Republican City” (unpublished manuscript). I am most grateful to Professor Yeh for her criticism and advice in my writing of this chapter. Another useful guide is Frederic Wakeman and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds., *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1992). See also Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner, eds., *The Chinese City between Two Worlds* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974); Marie-Claire Bergere, *The Golden Age of the Shanghai Bourgeoisie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Christian Heriot, *Shanghai, 1927–1937: Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1933).

8. Tess Johnston, *A Last Look: Western Architecture in Old Shanghai* (Hong Kong: Old China Hand Press, 1993), 9.

all residents.⁹ In fact, the population in the foreign concessions was largely Chinese: more than 1,492,896 in 1933 in a total city population of 3,133,782, of which only about 70,000 were foreigners.¹⁰ But the contrast nevertheless existed in their rituals of life and leisure, which were governed by the ways in which they organized their daily lives. For the Chinese, the foreign concessions represented not so much “forbidden zones” as the “other” world—an “exotic” world of glitter and vice dominated by Western capitalism, as summed up in the familiar phrase *shili yangchang* (literally, “ten-mile-long foreign zone”), which likewise had entered into the modern Chinese vocabulary.¹¹

The central place of the *shili yangchang* is the Bund, a strip of embankment facing the Whampoo River at the entrance of the harbor. It is not only the entrance point from the sea but also, without doubt, the window of British colonial power. The harbor skyline was dotted with edifices of largely British colonial institutions,¹² prominent among which were the British Consulate, the Shanghai Club (featuring “the longest bar in the world”), the Sassoon House (with its Cathay Hotel), the Customs House, and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank.¹³ The imposing pomposity of these buildings represent perfectly British colonial power. Most of these British edifices on the Bund were built or rebuilt in the neoclassical style prevalent in England beginning in the late-nineteenth century, which replaced the earlier Victorian Gothic and “free style” arts and crafts building and was essentially the same style that the British imposed on its colonial capitals in India and South Africa. As the dominant style in England’s own administrative buildings, neoclassical style consciously affirms its ties to imperial Rome and ancient Greece. As Thomas Metcalf has stated, “the use of classical forms to

9. See Robert A. Bickers and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “Shanghai’s ‘Dogs and Chinese Not Admitted’ Sign: Legend, History and Contemporary Symbol,” *China Quarterly*, 142 (1995): 443–66.

10. Lethbridge, *All about Shanghai*, 33–34. The Chinese population in the International Settlement alone grew from 345,000 to 1,120,000 between 1900 and 1935; see Frederic Wakeman, “Licensing Leisure: The Chinese Nationalist Regulation of Shanghai, 1927–1949,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 54 (1995): 22, n. 1.

11. *Yangchang* is defined in one recent Chinese-English dictionary as a “metropolis infested with foreign adventurers (usu. referring to preliberation Shanghai)”; the same book defines *yangchang e’shao* as a “rich young bully in a metropolis (in old China).” See Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, *The Pinyin Chinese-English Dictionary*, ed. Wu Jingron (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1979), 800.

12. See Jon Huebner’s two articles, “Architecture on the Shanghai Bund,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 39 (1989): 128–63; and “Architecture and History in Shanghai’s Central District,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 26 (1988): 209–69.

13. See Lai Delin, “Cong Shanghai gonggong zujie kan Zhongguo jindai jianzhu zhidu” [The institutions of modern Chinese architecture as seen from Shanghai’s International Settlement], *Kongjian* [Space magazine], nos. 41–43 (1993).

express the spirit of empire was, for the late-Victorian Englishman, at once obvious and appropriate, for classical style, with their reminders of Greece and Rome, were the architectural medium through which Europeans always apprehended Empire."¹⁴ However, by the 1930s, the era of Victorian glory was over: England was no longer the unchallenged master of world commerce. A new power, the United States of America, began its imperial expansion into the Pacific region, following its conquest of the Philippines. The merger of the British and U.S. concessions into one International Settlement had occurred earlier, when U.S. power had been dwarfed by the might of British imperialism. But by the 1930s, Shanghai's International Settlement was the site of competing architectural styles: Whereas British neoclassical buildings still dominated the skyline on the Bund, new constructions in a more modern style that exemplified the new U.S. industrial power had also appeared.

Since the late 1920s, some thirty multistoried buildings taller than the colonial edifices on the Bund had already begun to emerge as a result of the invention of modern construction materials and techniques in America.¹⁵ These were mainly bank buildings, hotels, apartment houses, and department stores—the tallest being the twenty-four-story Park Hotel designed by the famous Czech-Hungarian architect Ladislaus Hudec, who was associated with the American architectural firm of R. A. Curry before he opened his own offices in 1925.¹⁶ Hudec's "innovative and elegant style added a real flair to Shanghai's architecture," as evidenced by the many buildings he designed: in addition to the Park Hotel, the twenty-two-story building of the Joint Savings Society, the Moore Memorial Church, several hospitals and public buildings, and three movie theaters, including the renovated Grand Theater.¹⁷ The exteriors and interiors of some of these modern buildings—the Park Hotel, the Cathay Hotel/Sassoon House, and new cinemas such as the Grand Theater, the Paramount Ballroom and Theater, the Majestic Theater, and many apartment houses—were done in the prevalent Art Deco style. According to Tess Johnston, "Shanghai has the largest

14. Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 177–78.

15. See Muramatsu Shin, *Shanghai toshi to kenchiku 1842–1949 nen* [The metropolitan architecture of Shanghai] (Tokyo: Parco, 1991), esp. chap. 3, on skyscrapers.

16. See Johnston, *Last Look*, 86. See also *Men of Shanghai and North China* (Shanghai: University Press, 1935), 269. The Park Hotel remained the tallest building in East Asia for some thirty years. See *Jinadai Shanghai jianzhu shihua* [Historical accounts of modern Shanghai architecture] (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenhua Chubanshe, 1991), 91–99.

17. Johnston, *Last Look*, 86. "Wudake jiangzhushi xiaozhuan" [Brief biography of Hudec, the architect], *Jianzhu zazhi* [Architecture magazine], 1 (1933), 13.

array of Art Deco edifices of any city in the world.”¹⁸ The combination of the high-rise skyscraper and the Art Deco interior design style thus inscribed another new architectural imprint—that of New York City, with which Shanghai can be compared.¹⁹

New York remained in many ways the prototypical metropolis for both the skyscraper skyline and the Art Deco style. Its tallest buildings—those of Rockefeller Center, the Chrysler Building, and, above all, the Empire State Building—were all constructed only a few years before Shanghai’s new high-rise buildings. Although dwarfed in height, the Shanghai skyscrapers bear a visible resemblance to those in New York. This U.S. connection was made possible by the physical presence of U.S. architects and firms. Another likely source of American input is Hollywood movies, especially musicals and comedies, in which silhouettes of skyscrapers and Art Deco interiors almost became hallmarks of stage design.²⁰ The Art Deco style may be said to be the characteristic architectural style of the interwar period in Europe and America; it was an architecture of “ornament, geometry, energy, retrospection, optimism, color, texture, light and at times even symbolism.” When transplanted into the American cities—New York in particular—Art Deco had become an essential part of “an architecture of soaring skyscrapers—the cathedrals of the modern age.”²¹ The marriage between the two synthesizes a peculiar aesthetic exuberance that was associated with urban modernity and which embodied the spirit of “something new and different, something exciting and unorthodox, something characterized by a

18. Johnston, *Last Look*, 70; see also the photos of the cinemas, 88–89. Photos of the old and renovated Grand Theater and the Majestic Theater can also be found in Chen Congzhou and Zhang Ming, eds., *Shanghai jindai jianzhu shigao* [Draft history of modern Shanghai architecture] (Shanghai: Sanlian, 1988), 207–9.

19. For New York skyscraper architecture and Art Deco, see Robert Stern et al., *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987); Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Bletter, *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Don Vlack, *Art Deco Architecture in New York, 1920–1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); and Robert Messler, *The Art Deco Skyscraper in New York* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986). For a recent, ingenious analysis, see Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “Comparing the ‘Incomparable’ Cities: Post-modern Los Angeles and Old Shanghai,” *Contention: Debates in Society, Culture, and Science*, 5 (1996): 69–90.

20. For examples, the musical *Broadway Melody* (1938) with Eleanor Powell and the comedy, *The Magnificent Flirt* (1928), in which Loretta Young “bedded down in Art Deco comfort.” See Richard Striner, *Art Deco* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 9, 72. At the same time, the Art Deco style is supposed to evoke the fantasy and charm of the movies, rather than real life. See Robinson and Bletter, *Skyscraper Style*, 40.

21. Patricia Bayer, *Art Deco Architecture: Design, Decoration and Detail from the Twenties and Thirties* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 8.

sense of *joie de vivre* that manifested itself in terms of color, height, decoration and sometimes all three.”²²

When “translated” into Shanghai’s Western culture, the lavish ornamentality of the Art Deco style becomes, in one sense, a new “mediation” between the neoclassicism of British imperial power, with its manifest stylistic ties to the (Roman) past, and the ebullient new spirit of American capitalism. In addition to—or increasingly in place of—colonial power, it signifies money and wealth. At the same time, the Art Deco artifice also conveys a “simulacrum” of the new urban lifestyle, a modeng fantasy of men and women living in a glittering world of fashionable clothes and fancy furniture. It is, for Chinese eyes, alluring and exotic precisely because it is so unreal. The American magazine *Vanity Fair*, perhaps the best representation of this image in print, was available in Shanghai’s Western bookstores and became a favorite reading matter among Shanghai’s modernist writers. One need only glance through a few issues of the magazine to discover how some of its visual styles (Art Deco, in particular) crept into the cover designs of the Chinese magazines in Shanghai, even reworked in the design of the Chinese characters themselves.

Whereas this gilded decadent style may be a fitting representation of the “Jazz Age” of the “Roaring Twenties” in urban America, it remained something of a mirage for Chinese readers and filmgoers—a world of fantasy that cast a mixed spell of wonder and oppression. The Chinese term for skyscrapers is *motian dalou*—literally, the “magical big buildings that reach the skies.” As a visible sign of the rise of industrial capitalism, these skyscrapers could also be regarded as the most intrusive addition to the Shanghai landscape, as they not only tower over the regular residential buildings in the old section of the city (mostly two- or three-story-high constructions) but offer a sharp contrast to the general principles of Chinese architecture in which height was never a crucial factor, especially in the case of houses for everyday living. No wonder that it elicited responses of heightened emotion: In cartoons, sketches, and films, the skyscraper is portrayed as showcasing socioeconomic inequality—the high and the low, the rich and the poor. A cartoon of the period, titled “Heaven and Hell,” shows a skyscraper towering over the clouds, on top of which are two figures apparently looking down on a beggar-like figure seated next to a small thatched house.²³ A book of aphorisms about Shanghai has the following comment: “The neurotic thinks that in fifty years Shanghai will sink beneath the horizon under the weight of these big, tall foreign

22. Bayer, *Art Deco Architecture*, 12.

23. Xiao Jianqing, *Manhua Shanghai* [Shanghai in cartoons] (Shanghai: Jingwei Shuju, 1936).

buildings.”²⁴ These reactions offered a sharp contrast to the general pride and euphoria accorded to New Yorkers, as described in Ann Douglas’s recent book.²⁵

To the average Chinese, most of these high-rise buildings are, both literally and figuratively, beyond their reach. The big hotels largely catered to the rich and famous, and mostly foreigners. A Chinese guidebook of the time stated: “These places have no deep relationship to us Chinese . . . and besides, the upper-class atmosphere in these Western hotels is very solemn; every move and gesture seems completely regulated. So if you don’t know Western etiquette, even if you have enough money to make a fool of yourself it’s not worthwhile.”²⁶ This comment reveals at once a clear sense of alienation as it marks an implied boundary, drawn on class lines, between the urban spaces possessed by Westerners and Chinese. The upper-class solemnity of the Western hotels and dwellings may be disconcerting, but it does not prevent the author of the guidebook, Wang Dingjiu, from talking ecstatically about the modern cinemas and dance halls and, in its section on “buying,” about shopping for new clothes, foreign shoes, European and American cosmetics, and expensive furs in the newly constructed department stores. It seems as if he were greeting a rising popular demand for consumer goods by advising his readers on how to reap the maximum benefit and derive the greatest pleasure.

Department Stores Whereas the deluxe Western hotels catered mainly to a Western clientele (although a Chinese crowd of thousands greeted the opening of the Park Hotel), a number of multistoried department stores in the International Settlement—in particular the “Big Four” of Xianshi (Sincere), Yong’an (Wing On), Xinxin (Sun Sun), and Daxin (Sun Company), all built with investment from overseas Chinese businessmen—had become great attractions for the Chinese. With their escalators leading to variegated merchandise on different floors—together with dance halls and rooftop bars, coffeehouses, restaurants, hotels, and playgrounds for diverse performances—these edifices of commerce combined the functions of consumerism with entertainment.

That all these department stores were located on or near Nanking Road, the main thoroughfare of the International Settlement, was no surprise. If the Bund

24. Xiao Jianqing, *Xianhua Shanghai* [Random talks about Shanghai] (Shanghai: Jingwei Shuju, 1936), 2, 8.

25. Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1995), 434–36.

26. Wang Dingjiu, *Shanghai menjing* [Keys to Shanghai] (Shanghai: Zhongyang Shudian, 1932), chap. on living [*zhu de menjing*], 11–12.

was the seat of colonial power and finance, Nanking Road, which stretched westward from the Bund, was its commercial extension: “Nanking Road was Shanghai’s Oxford Street, its Fifth Avenue.”²⁷ The natives still called it *Damalu*—the Number One Street (with a premodern reference to its days of horse-drawn carriages, or *malu*)—in honor of its privileged status. Since the late 1910s, its eastern portion had already become the most prosperous commercial area. The street’s legendary reputation could only be further enhanced by the addition of the new department stores. For the out-of-towners visiting Shanghai, shopping for modern luxury items at the department stores on Nanking Road had become a necessary and desirable ritual.

An index to the role of material consumption in Shanghai’s modern life can be found in the omnipresent advertisements that appeared as signs lit up with neon lights, as written posters in front of street stores, and, above all, as printed words and pictures in newspapers and journals. They add up to what may be called a “semiotics” of material culture. For instance, an advertisement for Wing On Department Store in a page of the *Liangyou* [The young companion] pictorial presents a mosaic of the following items: Conklin fountain pen, various kinds of cotton cloth, Swan brand silk stockings and cotton socks, Pilsner Art Export Beer, and a copy of *Liangyou*. From this we can easily compile a list of daily necessities and luxuries for the modern urban household, as gathered from the ubiquitous ads in the *Liangyou* magazine: sundry food products (Quaker Oats, Momilk), laundry detergent (Fab), medicine and health products (“Dr. Williams’ Pink Pills for Pale People”), electric cooking pots and automatic gas burners (the ad noted that “recently Chinese people have largely replaced coal burners with gas burners” which is especially suitable for Chinese houses in winter for the sake of “hygiene for the whole family”), medicine, perfume, cigarettes, cameras, gramophones and records (Pathe, RCA), and many more. Needless to add, advertisements for automobiles are everywhere,²⁸ since the number of privately owned automobiles between 1922 and 1931 had increased from 1,986 to 4,951.²⁹ Such a picture of modern consumption set in urban Shanghai must

27. Nicholas R. Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s* (Hanover, N.H.: Middlebury College Press published by University Press of New England, 1991), 61.

28. A special “automobile Edition” of *Shen Bao* (August 1923), features photos of such cars as the British Steyr and Austin, and three Ford models: the Hudson, Essex, and Ford Car, the last being advertised as the cheapest car in which one could “drive all over the world”—the slogan is still used for Fords in Taiwan.

29. Tang Weikang and Du Li, eds., *Zujie yibainian* [One hundred years of the treaty concessions] (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 1991), 128.

have struck any Chinese of the time who lived in the rural hinterland as nothing short of a “wonderland”—a brave new world stuffed with foreign goods and foreign names.

Consumption is also linked with leisure and entertainment. And the institutions of the latter equally deserve our equal attention: in particular, cinemas, coffeehouses, theaters, dance halls, parks, and the racecourse. Whereas Western-style hotels were beyond the pale of Chinese life, cinemas, cafes, and dance halls were an entirely different matter. In a way, they provided an alternative to the traditional places of leisure and entertainment for native residents: local opera theaters, restaurants, and teahouses in the old city, as well as houses of prostitution, which continued to hold sway in the Chinese sections of the city. Together, these places of leisure and entertainment that sprang from the foreign concessions had become the central sites of Shanghai's urban culture.

Coffeehouses and Dance Halls As a public place fraught with political and cultural significance in Europe, especially France, the coffeehouse proved likewise extremely popular in 1930s Shanghai. Like the cinema, it became one of the most popular leisure spots—decidedly Western, to be sure—a prerequisite site for men and women sporting a modern lifestyle, particularly writers and artists. Habits and styles generally grew out of Shanghai's French Concession. While the British-dominated International Settlement was the site for skyscrapers and deluxe mansions and department stores, the scenery underwent a sudden transformation in the French Concession. The farther one followed the tram route into the concession along its main street, Avenue Joffre (named after the French general who stemmed the German invasion during the First World War), the more serene and atmospheric the place became. Trees imported from France (the Chinese called them French “wutong”) flanked both sides of the street, fronting fine “suburban” residences built in various styles. As one local aficionado observed, on Avenue Joffre “there are no skyscrapers, no specially large constructions” but “every night there are the intoxicating sounds of jazz music coming from the cafes and bars that line both sides. This is to tell you that there are women and wine inside, to comfort you from the fatigue of a day's toil.”³⁰

The special allure of French culture was perpetuated by a number of Chinese Francophile writers, notably the Zengs, father and son—Zeng Pu and Zeng Xubai. Although Zeng Pu, author of the famous late Qing novel *Niehai hua* [A flower in

30. Zhongguo tushu bianyi guan, ed., *Shanghai chunqiu* [Shanghai annals] vol. 2 (Hong Kong: Nantian Shuye Gongsì, 1968), 88.

a sea of retribution] (1905), had never set foot on French soil, he lost no time in creating his own French world at his bookstore residence at 115 rue Massenet, in the heart of the French Concession. Zeng Pu intended to make his bookstore—called “Truth, Beauty, and Goodness” (Zhen-mei-shan)—a library of French literature and a cultural salon in which he would gather his guests and disciples around him and discuss his favorite French authors: Victor Hugo, Anatole France, Leconte de Lisle, George Sand, and Pierre Loti.³¹ The guests and friends at Zeng’s bookstore/salon had all become Francophiles themselves.

Although it is doubtful that the Chinese Francophiles succeeded in turning their literary salon into something approaching Jürgen Habermas’s notion of “public sphere,” there is no denying that Shanghai writers indeed used the coffeehouse as a place for friendly gatherings. From both contemporary accounts of the time and latter-day memoirs, this French institution was combined with the British custom of the afternoon tea to become a highlight of their daily rituals. The choice of the hour for “high tea” was often necessitated by economic considerations, since some of the cafes most frequented by impoverished writers and artists were housed in restaurants that offered a cheaper afternoon price for coffee, tea, and snacks. Zhang Ruogu, an avid Francophile, named several as his favorite spots: Sun Ya (Xinya) on Nanking East Road across from the Xinxin department store, for tea and snacks; Sullivan’s, a justly famous chocolate shop; Federal, a German-style cafe at Bubbling Well Road; Constantine’s, a Russian cafe; Little Man (Xiao nanren), across the street from the Cathay Theater (where “the decor is splendid and the waitresses young and pretty”); D. D.’s Cafe; and Cafe Renaissance on Avenue Joffre.³² But his real favorite was the Balkan Milk Store, another Russian-run cafe in the French Concession that offered coffee at cheaper prices and where he and his friends could spend long hours undisturbed by the waiters.

Zhang concluded that there were three kinds of pleasures that could be derived from going to the coffeehouse: first, the stimulus of the coffee itself, with an effect “not inferior to that of opium and wine”; second, the space provided by the coffeehouse for long talks among friends, “the most pleasurable thing in life”; and, last but not least, the charming presence of the coffeehouse waitress—a literary figure first introduced to Chinese writers by Yu Dafu’s translation of a story by

31. Heinrich Fruehauf, “Urban Exoticism in Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature,” in *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-century China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 145.

32. Zhang Ruogu, “Cha, kafei, maijiu” [Tea, coffee, ale], *Furen huabao* [Women’s pictorial] (1935): 9–11.

George Moore³³ and made more famous by their knowledge of Japanese waitresses in Tokyo bars and coffeehouses before the 1923 earthquake.³⁴ Zhang considered the coffeehouse to be one of the crucial symbols of modernity, together with the cinema and the automobile; and more than the latter two, it had an enormous impact on modern literature. He proudly mentioned some of his favorite French writers—Jean Moreas, Theophile Gautier, Maxime Rudé, and Henri de Regnier—as diehard cafe addicts.

At the time of Zhang Ruogu's writing (1929), literary Shanghai seemed to be caught in a "coffeehouse craze"—celebrated not only in Zhang's essays and Yu Dufu's translations but also in Tian Han's play *One Night in a Cafe* [*Kafei guan de yiye*] and numerous fictional works. Tian Han also advertised for a new bookstore run by his Nanguo (Southern China) dramatic society with a coffeehouse attached where "waitresses trained in literature will make the customer enjoy the pleasure of good books and good conversation over drinks." All this occidental "exotica" naturally converged on a Bohemian self-image. Visiting the painter and poet Ni Yide in his small attic room, Zhang Ruogu jokingly remarked: "This room has the atmosphere of the painter Rodolfo's room, but regrettably you don't have a Mimi to be your companion."³⁵ Tian Han went so far as to incorporate the characters of *La Boheme* into the first part of a film he scripted, *Fengyun ernü* [Valiant heroes and heroines], which ends with a call to war accompanied by the film's theme song, "The March of the Volunteers," which eventually became the national anthem of the People's Republic.

Another public institution, somewhat lower in cultural prestige than the coffeehouse, is the ballroom/cabaret and dance hall (*wuting* or *wuchang*): The ballroom/cabaret had a more deluxe decor and often featured cabaret performances, patronized mostly by foreigners, whereas the dance hall had only a small band and "taxi dancers" or dance hostesses. By 1936, there were over three hundred cabarets and casinos in Shanghai.³⁶ The foreigners and the wealthy Chinese patronized the leading high-class ballrooms and cabarets (with shows and perfor-

33. Zhang Ruogu, "Xiandai duhui shenghuo xiangzeng" [The symbol of modern urban life], in *Kafei zuotan* [Cafe forum] (Shanghai: Zhenmeishan Shudian, 1929), 3–11.

34. The coffeehouse was, of course, very popular in Taisho, Japan, and "among the symbols of Taisho high life." As Edward Seidensticker describes, the cafe was "the forerunner of the expensive Ginza bar. Elegant and alluring female company came with the price of one's coffee, or whatever. The Plantain was the first of them, founded in 1911." See his *Low City, High City: Tokyo from Edo to the Earthquake* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 104, 201.

35. Zhang, *Kafei zuotan*, 8, 24.

36. Frederic Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 108.

mances)—the Tower atop of the Cathay Hotel, the Sky Terrace at the Park Hotel, the Paramount Theater and Ballroom, Del Monte's, Ciro's, Roxy's, the Venus Cafe, the Vienna Garden Ballroom, and the Little Club. The very foreignness of these names seems to evoke an alienating effect similar to that of high-class Western hotels and serves as a pronounced reminder of their colonial-metropolitan origins: New York, London, Vienna. Still, the Chinese clientele managed to domesticate them to some extent by translating the exotic names into Chinese equivalents with native allure: Thus Ciro's became Xianluosi (Fairy land of pleasures), and Paramount became Bailuomen (Gate of a hundred pleasures); the legendary fame of the latter, in particular, has left an enduring mark on the Chinese literary imagination.³⁷ Although social dancing, like horse racing, was decidedly a Western custom which was first introduced by Shanghai's foreigners in the mid-nineteenth century, it did not stop the Chinese from embracing it as a vogue. Shanghai natives reportedly flocked to the first dance halls in droves as soon as they were opened in the early 1920s.³⁸

By the 1930s, dance halls had become another famous—or infamous—hallmark of Shanghai's urban milieu. The popular women's magazine *Ling Long* [Petite], in addition to showcasing movies and movie stars in every issue, also introduced social dancing through a three-part series of articles. One article described dancing as a social activity and as a serious subject of study, pointing to the large number of schools and teachers devoted to dancing in Shanghai, as well as abroad. A short description of the various popular dances was also included, ranging from the quick step, the slow fox-trot, the waltz, and the tango to the new Charleston and the rhumba. But the article also describes dance as a “natural act” that “enlivens the forces within the body,” as well as a “civic” activity that may also be “an effective way to attract a mate.”³⁹ However, as Frederic Wakeman has observed, “the line between attached couples learning how to dance together and solitary males seeking part-time companions via the dance

37. See Pai Hsien-yung, *Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream: Tales of Taipei Characters*, trans. Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin, ed. George Kao (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 51.

38. Tu Shimin, *Shanghai shi daguan* [Panorama of Shanghai], 56–57. This source also indicates that in 1946 when dance hostesses were required to register with the city police thirty-three hundred of them did.

39. Quoted in Andrew D. Field, “Selling Souls in Sin City: Shanghai Singing and Dancing Girls in Print, Film, and Politics, 1920–1949” (unpublished manuscript), 14. I am most grateful to Andrew Field, a Ph. D. candidate at Columbia University, for permission to use this article and for other forms of research assistance.

hall was not altogether distinct, but the latter pursuit proved to be overwhelming—no doubt because of the disproportionate ratio of the genders in Shanghai in 1930: 135 men for every 100 women in the Chinese municipality, 156:100 in the International Settlement, and 164:100 in the French Concession.⁴⁰

In terms of the number of customers, the popularity of dance halls in Shanghai definitely surpassed that of the coffeehouses. Whereas coffeehouses remained a place for upper-class Chinese and foreigners and for writers and artists, the dance hall reached out to people of all classes and became a fixture in the popular imagination. This is evidenced in the numerous reports, articles, cartoons, drawings, and photographs in the daily newspapers (especially the mosquito presses) and popular magazines. In fact, some of the leading Shanghai artists—Ye Qianyu, Zhang Yingchao, and Zhang Loping—used the dance hall and dance waitresses as subjects of their cartoons. Their typical portrait consists of variations of a man and a woman dancing (except for one with two women dancing): The man can be young or old, wearing a Chinese long gown or a Western suit, but the woman is invariably dressed in a *qipao*. The portrait unwittingly conveys a gendered differentiation of the woman as a fixed object for the desires of men of various classes, her *qipao* revealing the contours of her body. In other words, these variations of the dancing couple are all drawn from the model of the dance hostess and her different clients. These visual portraits are reinforced by the accompanying articles in which the authors describe and comment on the dance hostess and the allure of female flesh as a commodity. Most articles focus on the small, lower-class dance halls that outnumbered the large, renowned cabaret-clubs.

If we compare the descriptions by modern Chinese writers, it would seem that while the coffeehouse waitress was celebrated by the Francophile writers as a romantic figure within an idealized vision of a Bohemian life, the dance hall hostess was denigrated as a miserable, though still alluring, creature. There was no attempt to construct a literary pedigree for hostesses in small dance halls (whereas the Western cabaret hostesses came to be romanticized in films—for example, Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*). In this regard, some of the fictional portraits of dance hostess do serve more than a purely literary purpose. The dance hostesses in Mu Shiyong's and Liu Na'ou's stories are often portrayed as larger than life, and they take a more active, even dominant, role over men; as objects of male desire they also defiantly return the erotic gaze at men. Such portraiture of the emerging femme fatale in the world of the cafe/ballroom/

40. Wakeman, "Licensing Leisure," 27.

racecourse may be interpreted as a fictional projection of the author's male fantasy or as an embodiment of urban material glamour, hence further reinforcing the inevitable process of commodification.

I would like to argue a slightly different thesis, however: The popularity of the dance halls in Shanghai's urban life serves ironically as the necessary, albeit still negative, backdrop for the emergence of a new public persona for women. Combining the descriptions of dance hostesses with earlier portraits of courtesans and movie stars and reading them symbolically as marking different facets in a cultural genealogy, we see them within a long tradition of literary tropes that, in varying ways, center on women figures in the public arena. Before leftist critics in the 1930s began to imagine all women as oppressed and downtrodden, some Shanghai writers—particularly those of the Neo-Sensualist school (*Xin ganjue pai*)—had chosen to “modernize” such a long-standing trope in traditional Chinese popular literature by making these women figures, even as embodiments of urban material culture, more dynamic and ironically more confident in their own subjectivity as women—to the extent that they can play with men and make fools of them in such public places of leisure as the dance hall, the coffeehouse, and the racecourse.⁴¹ In a hilarious fantasy story by Mu Shiying titled “Camel, Nietzscheist, and Woman,” the male protagonist—himself a satirical characterization of the urban *flâneur* qua philosopher—takes his nocturnal strolls through a jai alai court, a dance hall, a gambling joint, a bar with a bewitching air of “beauté exotique,” and a coffeehouse, all the while puffing his favorite Lucky brand cigarettes and quoting Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Finally, at a place called Café Napoli, he encounters a mysterious woman with painted “Garbo-like eyebrows, dark eyes as soft as velvet, and red, ripe lips” who drinks coffee with five helpings of sugar and smokes a Camel cigarette.⁴² In the ensuing match of wits over dinner, she proceeds to “enlighten” him about 373 brands of cigarettes, 28 kinds of coffee, and 5,000 kinds of drinks together with their mixing formulas!

Parks and Race Club It only remains for me to discuss briefly the two public sites that are clearly derived from the British colonial legacy: public parks and the Shanghai Race Club (Paomating).

A most humiliating reminder of Western imperialist presence was, of course,

41. For an illuminating discussion of this trope, see Shumei Shih, “Gender, Race, and Semicolonialism: Liu Na'ou's Urban Shanghai Landscape,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55 (1996) 934–958.

42. Mu Shiying, “Luoto, Nicaizhuyizhe yu nuren” [Camel, Nietzscheist, and woman], included in *Xin ganjue pai xiaoshuo xuan* [Selected stories from the Neo-Sensualist school], ed. Li Ou-fan (Taipei: Yunchen Wenhua, 1988), 191–97.

the notorious sign of exclusion that was reportedly hung at the gate of the Public Gardens in the International Settlement: "No Chinese or Dogs Allowed." The real sign did not exactly read this way, though it was no less humiliating to the Chinese: It was a bulletin that listed the five regulations first decreed in 1916. The second regulation stipulated that "dogs and bicycles are not admitted," which was followed by the third: "Chinese are not admitted" except "in the case of native servants accompanying their white employers." The fourth and fifth regulations, respectively, excluded Indians (except for those in dignified attire) and Japanese (except for those wearing Western clothing).⁴³ These posted regulations finally came down as the Nationalist forces under Chiang Kai-shek assumed control of Shanghai in 1927. Although there was still an admission charge, "the people of Shanghai responded to this opening of facilities with great enthusiasm. Admittance figures kept by municipal authorities show an impressive number of visitors to the public parks"—from 1,625,511 in June–December 1928 to 2,092,432 in 1930.⁴⁴ Aside from the half dozen parks in the International Settlement, of course, there were parks and gardens in the French Concession and in the Old City. A guidebook of the period listed nearly forty public and private parks and gardens.⁴⁵ Of these, a particular favorite for writers was the new amusement park, Rio Rita's, which became a literary legend with the publication of Mao Dun's novel *Midnight*. Thus for the Chinese, parks and gardens served the purpose not only of relaxation—taking a leisurely stroll on Sundays or holidays (when a British band would play in one of the parks), as the foreigners would do—but also of pleasure-seeking "recreation" and rendezvous for romantic trysts. In the films of the 1930s, such as *Crossroads* [*Shizu jietou*], romantic rendezvous or chance encounters in the park almost became a plot convention.

The history of horse racing has been fully documented in a recent book by Austin Coates, *China Races* (1983), which was commissioned, appropriately enough, by the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club to mark its centenary in 1984. Hong Kong held its first race-meeting in 1845, possibly a year or so earlier than any in Shanghai. In 1862, the Shanghai Race Club was established, overtaking Hong Kong as the leader in East Asia. The Shanghai racecourse was rebuilt at least three times. This British sport became immediately popular with the Chi-

43. Pan Ling, *In Search of Old Shanghai* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1982), 36; Wu Guifang, *Songgu mantan* [Random talks on old legends about Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1991), 193. See also Bickers and Wasserstrom, "Shanghai's 'Dogs and Chinese Not Admitted' Sign," 446.

44. Betty Pehi-t'i Wei, *Old Shanghai* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993), 232.

45. *Shanghai zhinan* [Shanghai guide] (Shanghai: Guoguang Shudian, n.d.), 10–16.

nese, who participated eagerly from the very beginning and even began to form their own race clubs. In Coates's succinct words, "Chinese always claimed they went to the races for the sheer enjoyment of it, which means they were betting." Even in the late nineteenth century, "Chinese, in fact, were infiltrating the proceedings. Respectable Chinese, as they were called, had always been allowed into the enclosure on payment . . . and there were two incredible Stands, known as the 'Grand' and the 'Little Grand,' the perilous edifices crammed with Chinese—crazy-looking erections which somehow never fell down."⁴⁶ Despite sharing the stands as spectators during race days, however, the Chinese were not allowed into the club grounds or to become formal members of the Shanghai Race Club.⁴⁷ The club building itself, constructed in 1933, was a "massive six-story building with an imposing clock tower twice as high" that became "one of the landmarks of downtown Shanghai."⁴⁸ The club grounds "covered sixty-six acres of the choicest property in the city" and "constituted an extravagant spatial intervention of Western culture in the Chinese city space."⁴⁹ While it brought an English-style countryside idyll into the modern metropolis, one would also find that "the city encroached on this countryside idyll" and that "the vast lawn could not conceal the proximity of the city" with its crowded streets and the high-rise buildings of the British concession. This jarring cityscape, "suspended between countryside scenery and urban construction," provided a fantastic setting, a visual spectacle, for Liu Na'ou's story, "Two People Impervious to Time" ["Liangge shijian de buganzheng zhe"], in which the heroine plays an elaborate game of seducing the hero right from the grandstand. Gambling—betting on the horses—becomes a fitting incentive in the "economy" of "exchanging one currency of desire for another."⁵⁰

46. Austin Coates, *China Races* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1983), 26, 34, 121.

47. Ma Xuexin et al., *Shanghai wenhua yuanliu cidian* [Dictionary of Shanghai's cultural sources] (Shanghai: Shenghai Shehuikexueyuan Chubanshe, 1992), 50. See also Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai*, 99.

48. Yomi Braester, "Shanghai's Economy of the Spectacle: The Shanghai Race Club in Liu Na'ou's and Mu Shiying's Stories," *Modern Chinese Literature* 9 (1995): 41–42. According to another Chinese source, it was four stories high, but the tower was ten stories high. See, Ma, *Shanghai wenhua yuanliu cidian*, 639.

49. See Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai*, 98; Braester, "Shanghai's Economy," 41.

50. Braester, "Shanghai's Economy," 42, 49.

As the Shanghai racecourse illustrates, the contrast between East and West in Shanghai's urban space cannot be greater. It is a contrast in both space and style: The Western buildings flanking the Bund and along the major thoroughfares in the concessions clearly dominate Shanghai's landscape and visibly mark the hegemonic presence of the foreign powers. We can see a clear colonial imprint in the concession areas, on which are inscribed elements of Paris, London, and New York. Thus the mixture of architectural styles, while lending a cosmopolitan flavor to the city, also betrays the ignoble origins of Western intrusion into China. How did the Chinese residents cope with such an urban environment? Does it mean that the hegemonic Western presence effectively turned Shanghai into a Western colony?

With materials presented in the previous section I have suggested that the public spaces in the foreign concessions were appropriated and reappropriated by Chinese writers through their actual or imaginary acts of "transgression," to the extent that they, in turn, became the background for constructing a cultural imaginary of Chinese modernity. The Shanghai writers seem to have taken full advantage of the foreign concessions together with Western material culture. While they shunned the more expensive restaurants and cabarets in the big hotels, the relatively inexpensive cafes run by exiled Russians became their favorite gathering places. Cinemas showing first-run Hollywood movies were another popular site, as were dance halls. Even Shanghai's racecourse and jai alai courts were not beyond their reach: Liu Na'ou, Mu Shiying, and Hei Ying used them as settings to introduce the most outlandish and adventurous of their fictional heroines.

This process of appropriation is not one of material possession, but it nevertheless extends the "imaginary" boundaries of Chinese residents' lives. Not only did the Chinese feel they had every right to share such an urban space with Shanghai's foreign residents, but their imaginary occupation of it, in turn, formed a link with an even larger world. As Zeng Pu walked along Rue de Massnet or Rue de Corneille in the French Concession, he was "literarily" transported to the world of French culture. Other writers, such as Zhang Ruogu, had similar experiences at Shanghai's coffeehouses. Both Shi Zhecun and Xu Chi told me during interviews that their most exciting experience while cruising Shanghai's foreign quarters was to buy books, new or used, in a number of Western bookstores. In his reminiscences, Ye Lingfeng recounted his elation at spotting a copy of Joyce's *Ulysses* published by the Shakespeare Bookstore in Paris (retailing at U.S. \$10)

for the unbelievable price of seventy cents.⁵¹ Clearly, the treaty-port concessions made it possible for writers like Ye and others to partake of the goods—and to participate in an imagined community—of world literature. It is through such imaginary acts that they felt they were connected to the city and to the world at large.

Of course, writers and artists do not belong in either the wealthy upper class or the great mass of the urban poor. They may seem as Westernized as the Chinese “compradors” who work in Western firms, but perhaps more so in their intellectual predilections than in their lifestyle (although, as mentioned earlier, they adopted certain public sites as their favorites). They bought and read foreign books and journals, from which they extracted materials for translation. In their works they were obviously engaged constantly in an imaginary dialogue with their favorite Western authors. Even their writings were “dialogically” engaged in a kind of intertextual transaction in which the Western textual sources were conspicuously foregrounded in their own texts. Thus in discussing the writer’s creative relationship with the city, it may be relevant to turn to another “model.”

The City and the Flaneur Walter Benjamin’s unfinished but incomparable cultural commentary, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, has been a source of inspiration for many scholars. Benjamin’s genius lies in defining a critical role and an allegorical space for the writer in the city. “With Baudelaire, Paris for the first time became the subject of lyrical poetry. This poetry is no local folklore; the allegorist’s gaze which falls upon the city is rather the gaze of alienated man. It is the gaze of the *flaneur*.” A man of leisure, the flaneur moved along the Parisian streets and arcades and interacted with the city crowd in an unending and curiously ambivalent relationship. “The *flaneur* still stood at the margin, of the great city as of the bourgeois class. Neither of them had yet overwhelmed him. In neither of them was he at home. He sought his asylum in the crowd. The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the *flaneur*.”⁵²

It was with Benjamin’s text in mind that I first tried to “remap” Shanghai from a literary angle. However, in the attempt to conceptualize Shanghai along a Benjaminian trail, several problems immediately arose as I tried to cross the cultural boundaries between Paris and Shanghai. The discrepancies between the two

51. Ye Lingfeng, *Dushu suibi* [Random notes on reading] vol. 1 (Beijing: Sanlian, 1988), 115.

52. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1983), 170.

cities are obvious: Although Shanghai was often called the “Paris of the Orient,” due in part to its French Concession, there was no Chinese concession in Paris. Thus in a sense, the Paris of Baudelaire’s time was less diversified and less cosmopolitan than Shanghai, and far more monolithic and imperial in its architectural style—in fact, this French metropolitan capital had itself become the model for French colonial cities.⁵³ By contrast, with its mixture of Western and Chinese urban spaces Shanghai presented a more “vernacular” landscape. Paris also had a much longer history than Shanghai, and by Baudelaire’s time it had reached a high point of capitalist development—such that French writers and artists began to take on a critical attitude toward the city’s increasingly philistine bourgeois crowd. By comparison, Shanghai developed into a modern metropolis in only a few decades in the early twentieth century, and its material splendor seems to have so dazzled its writers that they had yet to develop a highly reflective and ambivalent mentality characteristic of the Parisian flaneur.

In Benjamin’s study, the most significant urban space that defines the ambivalent relationship between the flaneur and the city is the arcade—and by extension, the department store. Benjamin’s celebrated views on the Parisian “arcades” are now well known.⁵⁴ The arcades, a new invention of “industrial luxury” in nineteenth-century Paris, “are glass-covered, marble-paneled passageways,” and “both sides of these passageways, which are lighted from above, are lined with the most elegant shops, so that such an arcade is a city, even a world, in miniature.”⁵⁵ It is in this world that the flaneur is at home. But there were no such arcades in Shanghai. The traditional amusement halls like the “Great World” (Da shijie) or the modern department stores were certainly no substitutes for the arcades for leisurely loitering. They may be fitting spaces for the Shanghai middle class, but not necessarily the world where a Chinese flaneur would feel at home.

As the Baudelairean prototype implies, the flaneur’s relationship to the city is both engaged and detached: He cannot live without the city, as he surrenders himself to the intoxication of its commodity world; at the same time, he is marginalized by the city to which he is condemned to live. Thus he keeps himself at a distance from the crowd, and it is from his distanced gaze that the city is allegorized. His *leisurely* walk is both a posture and a protest “against the division of

53. See Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

54. See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectic of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

55. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, 36–37.

labor which makes people into specialists. It is also a protest against their industriousness. Around 1840 it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades. The *flâneurs* liked to have the turtles set the pace for them.”⁵⁶ Thus it has been pointed out that the flâneur embodied a paradox, a modern artist who rebels against the very circumstances which has made his existence possible—in other words, an embellishment of Baudelaire’s famous characterization in “A Painter of Modern Life.”⁵⁷ Such a paradoxical reaction against modernity is not shared by the avowedly modern writers of Shanghai who were much too enamored with the light, heat, and power of the new metropolis to have any detached reflection.

Benjamin has barely mentioned the more degrading female counterpart of the male flâneur—the woman who walked the streets, the prostitute. In fact, this familiar sight was equally characteristic of nineteenth-century Paris as of early-twentieth-century Shanghai, where streetwalkers were called, derogatorily, *yeji* or “wild chicks.”⁵⁸ The phenomenon is an ironic reminder of another exalted posture of the male flâneur—the freedom and flair of his *walking* on the streets. In fact, this “street-walking” tradition has been further theorized by Michel de Certeau as a specific form of spatial practice in the modern city—a social and “enunciative” process of appropriating the urban space.⁵⁹ It can be said that Shanghai writers and residents certainly traversed the various urban spaces in the practice of their everyday lives. But this does not mean that they had made an art of urban walking.

To be sure, there is no shortage of literary references to walking (*sanbu*) itself in Chinese poetry and fiction, both traditional and modern. But such literary walks often take place against or amidst a pastoral landscape. The modern writer Yu Dafu was much influenced by Rousseau’s *Reveries du promeneur solitaire* and cast several of his stories in a similar vein of a solitary traveler.⁶⁰ But his fictional alter egos, though sufficiently sensitive and pensive, are not *urban* strollers in the flâneur mode. Other Shanghai writers, especially the Francophiles, consciously flaunted a habit of frequenting coffeehouses—but only so that they could meet and chat with friends instead of sitting alone and gazing at the crowd. A seem-

56. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, 54.

57. See Bruce Mazlich, “The *Flâneur*: From Spectator to Representation,” in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994), 49.

58. Wakeman described “yeji” as “streetwalkers who wore gaudy clothes and were thought to go here and there like wild birds” in Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai*, 112.

59. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 97–98.

60. For a brief discussion, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 280–81.

ingly aimless stroll is reserved only for a romantic rendezvous in the public parks which, as mentioned earlier, by this time were mostly open to the Chinese. In these situations, the act of walking is seldom done alone and does not necessarily contribute to the lofty image of *flânerie*. Perhaps only in some of the tree-lined streets in the French Concession, such as Rue Massenet, do we find an occasional stroller like Zeng Pu (who also lived there) who could “conjure up the images of an aesthetically saturated French life.”⁶¹ Surprisingly, even for this most enthusiastic member of Chinese Francophiles there is no mention of either Baudelaire or the flâneur.

In his recent study of *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*, Yingjin Zhang has demonstrated that indeed the flâneur figure can be sighted in several creative works, both fiction and poetry. Zhang seems to have given this flâneur figure an erotic charge by emphasizing his voyeuristic gaze and his “acting out” of the roles of dandy and reluctant detective. In another article Zhang has cited a story by He Ying to show that the protagonist, by walking on Shanghai’s streets, “acquires his knowledge of the city” and is able to “select for his aesthetic appreciation a number of urban images and icons that provide new ways of perceiving the urban metropolis.” However, unlike Benjamin’s flâneur, he is not a loner in the urban crowd; rather, he “prefers to be known” and enjoys the various spots of the urban spectacle in the company of a city girl called Suzie who is most likely a prostitute.⁶² Obviously, He Ying’s narrator-hero, like that in the fiction of Liu Na’ou and Mu Shiying, is too enamored of the city and too immersed in the excitements it provides to obtain an attitude of ambivalence and ironic detachment.

Is it possible for Chinese writers to accomplish a similar feat of aesthetic reflection in a different urban cultural context? In Benjamin’s view of Baudelaire, the “allegorist’s gaze” that turns the city into “the subject of lyrical poetry” is an aesthetic act that, by “taking stock” of all the sights and sounds and commodities that the city can offer, transforms them into art. In this sense the flâneur can only be a modern artist who cannot exist without the city and whose object of inquiry, as Susan Buck-Morss reminds us, is modernity itself.⁶³ In what ways, then, can we expect Shanghai writers to fulfill a comparable mission when Chinese modernity itself was being constructed as a cultural imaginary? What did modernity mean to modern Chinese writers and intellectuals?

61. Fruehauf, “Urban Exoticism,” 144.

62. Yingjin Zhang, “The Texture of the Metropolis: Modernist Inscriptions of Shanghai in the 1930s,” *Modern Chinese Literature* 9 (1995): 19–20.

63. Buck-Morss, *Dialectic of Seeing*, 304.

Modernity and Nationhood Modernity in China, as I have argued elsewhere, was closely associated with a new linear consciousness of time and history which was itself derived from the Chinese reception of a Social Darwinian concept of evolution made popular by the translations of Yen Fu and Liang Qichao at the turn of the century. In this new temporal scheme, present (*jin*) and past (*gu*) were polarized as contrasting values, and a new emphasis was placed on the present moment “as the pivotal point marking a rupture with the past and forming a progressive continuum toward a glorious future.”⁶⁴ This new mode of time consciousness was, of course, a “derivative” discourse stemming from the Western post-Enlightenment tradition of modernity—the intellectual package now criticized by postmodern theorists for the positivistic and inherently “monological” tendencies embedded in its faith in human reason and progress. One could further argue that the very same post-Enlightenment legacy has infused the expansionist projects of the colonial empires, particularly England, and that one of its political by-products was the modern nation-state. However, once transplanted into China, such a legacy served to add a new dimension to Chinese semantics: In fact, the very word “new” (*xin*) became the crucial component of a cluster of new word compounds denoting a qualitative change in all spheres of life: from the late Qing reform movement (*weixin yundong*) with its institutional designations like “new policies” (*xinzheng*) and “new schools” (*xinxue*) to Liang Qichao’s celebrated notion of “new people” (*xinmin*) and May Fourth slogans like “new culture” (*xin wenhua*) and “new literature” (*xin wenxue*). Two terms that gained wide popularity in the 1920s were *shidai* (time or epoch) and *xin shidai* (new epoch), based on the Japanese word *jidai*. This sense of living in a new epoch, as advocated by the May Fourth leaders such as Chen Duxiu, was what defined the ethos of modernity. By the 1900s, another Japanese term was adopted: *wenming* (*bunmei*), or “civilization,”⁶⁵ which came to be used with words like *dongfang* (east) and *xifang* (west) to form the common May Fourth dichotomy of “Eastern” and “Western” civilizations as contrasting categories. The underlying assumption was that Western civilization was marked by dynamic progress made possible by the manifestation of what Benjamin Schwartz has called the “Faustian-

64. Leo Ou-fan Lee, “In Search of Modernity: Reflections on a New Mode of Consciousness in Modern Chinese Literature and Thought,” in *Ideas across Cultures: Essays in Honor of Benjamin Schwartz*, ed. Paul A. Cohen and Merle Goldman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1990), 110–11.

65. This term is included in appendix D, “Return Graphic Loans: Kanji Terms Derived from Classical Chinese,” in Lydia Liu’s recent book, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 308.

Promethean" strain that resulted in the achievement of wealth and power by the Western countries.⁶⁶

Schwartz's pioneering study of Yan Fu has not covered the rapid spread of these new categories of value and thought in the Chinese popular press. In newspapers like *Shenbao* [Shanghai news] and magazines like *Dongfang zazhi* [Eastern miscellany] published by the Commercial Press, such new vocabularies became a regular feature of most articles. Thus by the 1920s, it came to be generally acknowledged that "modernity" was equated with the new "Western civilization" in all its spiritual and material manifestations. Whereas conservative or moderate commentators in the *Dongfang zazhi* and other journals voiced concerns over the possible bankruptcy of Western civilization signaled by the First World War, all intellectuals of a radical persuasion continued to be firm believers in this idea of modernity. The center of cultural production of such ideas of modernity was indisputably Shanghai, where most newspapers and publishing houses were located, congregated in one small area around Fuzhou Road. It is also worth noting that the earliest use of the Western calendar was found in *Shenbao*, a newspaper started by a Westerner, Ernest Major, and which began to place both Chinese and Western calendar dates side by side on its front page in 1872. But it was not until Liang Qichao proclaimed his own use of the Western calendar in an 1899 diary of his voyage to America that a paradigmatic change in "time-consciousness" was effected.⁶⁷ By the 1920s, if not earlier, the commercial calendar poster had become a popular advertisement item for Shanghai's tobacco companies and a fixture in urban daily life.

It was against such a "timely" background that a Chinese nationhood came to be "imagined." Benedict Anderson's widely cited book suggests that before it becomes a political reality a "nation" is first an "imagined community." This "community" is itself based on a conception of simultaneity "marked by temporal coincidence and measured by clock and calendar." The technical means for representing this "imagined community," according to Anderson, were the two forms of print culture—newspapers and the novel—that first flowered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe.⁶⁸ However, Anderson does not fully flesh out the complicated process by which these two forms were used to imagine the nation. Another theorist, Jürgen Habermas, has likewise pointed to the close con-

66. Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 238–39.

67. Rengong (Liang Qichao), "Hanman lu," *Qingyi bao* 35 (1899), 2275–78.

68. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

nection between periodicals and salons that contributed to the rise of the “public sphere” in England and France.⁶⁹ But neither Anderson nor Habermas has seen fit to connect the two phenomena of nationhood and the public sphere. In my view, this was precisely what constituted the intellectual “problematic” for China at the turn of the century, when intellectuals and writers sought to imagine a new “community” (*chun*) of the nation (*minzu* or *guojia* but not yet *minzuguojia*) as they endeavored to define a new reading public. They attempted to draw the broad contours of a new vision of China and disseminate such a vision to their audience, the newly emergent public of largely newspaper and periodical readers and students in the new schools and colleges. But such a vision remained a “vision”—an imagined, often visually based, evocation of a “new world” of China—not a cogent intellectual discourse or political system. In other words, this visionary imagination preceded the efforts of nation-building and institutionalization. In China, modernity, for all its amorphousness, became the guiding ethos of such a vision, yet without the critical awareness of what the workings of “instrumental rationality” would inevitably entail.

The nation as an imagined community in China was made possible not only by elite intellectuals like Liang Qichao, who proclaimed new concepts and values, but also and more importantly by the popular press. It is interesting to note that the rise of commercial publishing—particularly the large companies such as the Commercial Press (*Shangwu yinshu guan*, literally, “the shop that printed books for commercial purposes”) and China Bookstore (*Zhonghua shuju*)—also predated the establishment of the Republican nation-state in 1912. They made fortunes principally by compiling and printing new textbooks whenever the political wind blew. The Commercial Press even published a volume of photos and accounts of the 1911 Revolution simultaneously for sale! After the founding of the Republic in 1912, it continued with publications of translations of Western literature, history, thought, and institutions, which were organized into gigantic repositories. In this regard we might give Homi Bhabha’s terminological coinage about nationalism another twist in meaning: “dissemiNation” indicated, thus more literally and less ironically, that the knowledge about the new nation must first be *disseminated*.⁷⁰

These commercial ventures in publishing were all in the name of introducing

69. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 40–41, 50–51.

70. Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990).

new knowledge (*xinzhi*), the textual sources of modernity, of which the general journals like the *Dongfang zazhi* [Eastern miscellany] and the *Xiaoshuo yuebao* [Short story monthly] served as showcases. In a way, they are comparable to the eighteenth-century French “business of Enlightenment” as described by Robert Darnton, in which the ideas of the “philosophes” were popularized and vigorously disseminated by a network of printers and booksellers.⁷¹ However, in the name of promoting new culture and education, the books in China were sold quite cheaply as study aids for students in new-style schools and other readers who were deprived of schooling. In short, from its beginning Chinese modernity was envisioned and produced as a cultural enterprise of “enlightenment”—“*qimeng*,” a term taken from the traditional educational practice in which a child received his first lesson from a teacher or tutor. That the term took on the new meaning of being “enlightened” with new knowledge in the national project of modernity should come as no surprise.

By the time the Nationalist government was formally established in 1928 in Nanjing, following more than a decade of warlord rule that made a mockery of the nominal Republic in Beijing, Shanghai had become *the* center of the cultural production and consumption of Chinese modernity. Despite its failures in other areas, the new Nationalist (Guomindang) government in the early 1930s took key steps in a nation-building project, from the actual design and construction of buildings in the new capital to diplomatic negotiations that gradually reestablished China’s sovereignty in the “family of nations” and led to the abolishment of the treaty-port concessions in the 1940s. By the early 1930s a strong sense of modern Chinese nationhood was already in place, and despite the existence of the concessions both the central government and Shanghai residents considered the city a *Chinese* metropolis. If colonialism remained a historical and legal factor, this legacy did not necessarily turn Shanghai into a colony.

The Colonial Condition The configurations of colonialism, modernity, and nationalism are surely the larger intellectual background against which all the literary figures and texts discussed here must be reexamined. These larger issues involve, first of all, a reexamination of postcolonial discourse itself in this particular historical context.

All postcolonial discourse, it seems to me, assumes a colonial structure of power in which the colonizers have the ultimate authority over the colonized,

71. Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopedia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

including its representation. It is a theoretical construct based on the situation of former British and French colonies in Africa and India. In such a discourse, the colonized “subjects” can only serve as the “object” or “other” to the real “subjects”—the colonial masters. In Shanghai, this “subject” situation was more complicated than in British-governed India. Western “colonial” authority was indeed legally recognized in the concession treaties, but it was also conveniently ignored by the Chinese residents in their daily lives—unless, of course, they got arrested in the concessions. But it is also well known that the concessions also provided a protective haven for both criminals and political dissidents, including writers. The Chinese Communist Party was founded in Shanghai in 1921, and its first congress was held in the French Concession.

Whether or not they lived in the foreign concessions, the writers I have discussed were well adjusted to living in this bifurcated world of China’s largest treaty-port. Though they had little personal contact with Westerners, they were also among the most “Westernized” in their lifestyle and intellectual predilection. Yet they never conceived of their role as colonized subjects or as the native other to a real or imagined Western colonial master. In fact, with few exceptions, Western “colonial masters” did not even appear as central characters in their fiction. Rather, it was the Chinese writers’ fervent espousal of a Western or occidental exoticism that had turned Western culture itself into an other in the process of constructing their own modern imaginary. This process of appropriation was crucial to their own quest for modernity—a quest conducted with full confidence in their own identity as Chinese nationalists; in fact, in their minds, modernity itself was in the service of nationalism.

This is evidently not the same situation as in colonial India, where nationalism was a direct product of colonial history. It should be obvious to all historians that, despite a series of defeats since the Opium War, China was victimized but never fully colonized by a Western power. The treaty-port system may be considered a “semi-colony”—not necessarily in the Maoist sense of double negativity (it is worse, as it is combined with “semi-feudalism”), but in the sense of a mixture of colonial and Chinese elements. One could argue, in a kind of post-colonial twist to Mao, that the situation in Shanghai was even worse than in a strict colony as the discrepancies between the privileged “colonial” status of the concessions and the rest of city could have levied a heavier psychological toll on all Chinese. The issue of “internal colonialization” may well be relevant here, but on the basis of my research I am not fully prepared to share this view.

In a country in which Western colonialism was not a total system governing the entire nation, the situation might be different, even more complicated. Perhaps

one might find Bhabha's theory of colonial "mimicry"⁷² at work in the "compradorial" and commercial elite who had close personal and business relations with Westerners. Because of their jobs and their desire for total Westernization, they could be willing colonial "subjects" even if they still carried Chinese citizenship papers. Still, I would argue that the theory of mimicry does not necessarily apply to Shanghai natives in the field of literary and cultural production. When Chinese writers used compradors or bank clerks in their fiction, their attitude was often one of condescension—not by assuming the superior authority of their Western masters but from their assumed position of a new Chinese nationalism.

This new sense of Chinese nationalism was itself composed of diverse elements. However, unlike British India (at least in more Westernized Bombay), the colonizer's language did *not* assume a dominant status. Despite their knowledge of English or French, most Chinese writers continued to use Chinese as the *only* language in their writing. This obvious point nevertheless harks back to a long and deeply entrenched tradition of written Chinese unchallenged by any foreign language throughout Chinese history. Unlike some African writers who were forced by their colonial education to write in the language of their colonial masters, the Chinese never faced such a threat. Their works of poetry and fiction continued to be written in Chinese so that the syntactical structures of the modern vernacular are preserved and, in some cases, enriched (some would say adulterated) by translated terms and phrases. No one wrote fiction in English or French or experimented with the possibilities of bilingual writing. In the rare case of a story or novel involving a Western character, Chinese diction remains unchanged, and in no way are we led to believe that English is somehow implicated in the dialogue.

Thus I argue that for all their flaunted Westernism the Shanghai writers I have discussed never imagined themselves, nor were they regarded, to be so "foreign-

72. Bhabha has defined "mimicry" both subtly and opaquely. According to him, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite . . . a desire that, through the repetition of partial presence . . . articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial, and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority." Thus Bhabha's theory suggests that even the "partial representation" of the colonial object can be both submissive and subversive. Although the "mimic man" is created by a colonial education—"almost the same but not white"—his very "partial presence" and his "gaze of otherness" give the lie to the post-Enlightenment beliefs of British colonial policy-makers. Obviously, such a phenomenon is a product of a long history of *total* colonization. See Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in his *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 86–90.

ized” (*yanghua*) as to become slaves to foreigners (*yangnu*), because their sense of Chinese identity was never in question. In my view it was precisely their unquestioned confidence in their “Chineseness” that enabled these writers to openly embrace Western modernity without fear of colonization.

A Chinese Cosmopolitanism This conjunction of Westernism and nationalism—or more precisely, the intellectual interest in appropriating elements from foreign cultures in order to enrich a new national culture—gives the Shanghai case a somewhat different “take” from what can be summarized under the rubric of colonialism and postcolonialism. It seems to me that in this historical context Shanghai’s modern culture in the 1930s can be understood as a manifestation of cosmopolitanism.

The term *cosmopolitanism* is being resurrected by current theorists in cultural studies as perhaps another conceptualization of postmodern globalism in this era of late capitalism—of the circulation of commodities and migration of peoples that constantly cut across national boundaries. But the cosmopolitanism of Shanghai stemmed from an earlier and much different historical context in which the Chinese nation-state was still in the making. In this early stage of national formation, cosmopolitanism became a desirable attitude characterized by an abiding curiosity about other countries and an absorbing zeal toward other cultures. It grew out of a need on the part of the more “modern” segment of the population to look out—to seek new knowledge and inspiration from the outside. The task was made easier by Shanghai’s international position as the treaty-port par excellence and the largest metropolis in Asia, replacing Tokyo, which had not recovered from the damages wreaked by the earthquake in 1923.

Aside from being the world’s fifth largest city, Shanghai in the 1930s was also the center of a network of cities linked together by ship routes for purposes of marketing, transportation, and tourism. This can be seen in the thriving book trade: Kelly and Walsh, Shanghai’s largest foreign bookstore, had branch stores in seven Asian cities—Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tientsin, Yokohama, Singapore, New Delhi, and Bombay. While a British colonial imprint is clearly discernible in its distribution network, this chain of cities nevertheless formed a cosmopolitan cultural space in which Shanghai stood at the intersection between China and other parts of the world. In trying to find out how Chinese writers and translators were able to locate their Western sources, I was told again and again during interviews that foreign books and journals were easily available, some at secondhand bookstores at affordable prices, which in turn received their goods from Western tourists as they dumped their shipboard reading matters after landing in Shang-

hai. In books as in other commercial goods, Shanghai was at the center of traffic; its cosmopolitanism was a product of this culture of circulation. In this connection, Japan, more than England or France, was the crucial intermediary that both facilitated and complicated the picture of Shanghai cosmopolitanism.

Since around 1900, the North China Sea was traversed constantly by Chinese and Japanese intellectuals, writers, students, businessmen, and tourists. The de facto Japanese “concession” (though not legalized in the treaties) in the northern part of Shanghai was another enclave in which Chinese writers like Lu Xun lived together with a population of Japanese expatriates who outnumbered both the British and the French. As is well known, this “Japanese connection” provided a key to Chinese leftist literature, as most Chinese leftists including Lu Xun had been educated in Japan. But the Japanese impact was not limited to leftist literature and thought. Most of the seminal terms and concepts from Western literature came from Japanese translations which were adopted or retranslated into Chinese.⁷³ During the early 1930s, as the Japanese invasion of China became imminent, Chinese leftist writers denounced Japanese militarism in the name of nationalism as they continued to learn from Japanese leftists, translating their treatises and slogans and trying to figure out what had really transpired in Soviet Russia through Japanese sources, until the entire proletarian scene in Japanese literature came to an end with the massive “conversion” to Japanese imperial nationalism. By 1937, when war finally broke out, the nature of nationalism itself had changed in both China and Japan.

Thus, from a leftist point of view, cosmopolitanism prevailed in Shanghai almost by default, because the more conservative nationalism in both Japan and China had in fact facilitated the growth of a loose alliance of left-wing intellectuals against Japanese imperialism in Asia and fascism in Europe, which the urban wing of the underground Chinese Communist Party (CCP) exploited to its great advantage. Several international bodies, including the Comintern, sent their delegates to Shanghai to meet with Chinese followers and sympathizers in the concessions. Thus a kind of informal international brotherhood was forged. The French writer Henri Barbusse took a leading role in this movement. Unable to visit China himself, Barbusse sent his former classmate Paul Vaillant-Couturier, an editor of the French leftist newspaper *l'Humanité*, and published an article written especially for Chinese readers, “To the Chinese Intelligentsia,” in the journal edited by Shi Zhecun, *Xiandai* or *Les contemporains* (Vol. 4, No. 1, Nov. 1933). Vaillant-Couturier also attended an “antiwar congress” under the secret

73. See appendix D on Japanese terms incorporated in Chinese in Liu, *Translingual Practice*.

sponsorship of the CCP, “that was publicly announced and conspiratorially held right in the heart of the city.” Fifty Chinese delegates from all parts of the country, including those from the “Red Army districts” attended. Other foreign delegates included Lord Marley of the British Labor Party; a Belgian communist named Marteau; a French socialist named Poupy; and an American journalist, Harold Isaacs, editor of the English-language journal in Shanghai, *China Forum*, which duly reported the proceedings.⁷⁴ This brand of leftism seemed to fit the general ideological temper of the literary scene at the time—a leftism reinforced by the patriotic sentiment against Japanese aggression among writers in China combined with a vague feeling of internationalist alliance against fascism in Europe. Even after war was declared in 1937, clandestine anti-Japanese activities could still be conducted in Shanghai under the legal protection of the Western concessions.

Thus despite—or because of—all these special circumstances, Shanghai reached the pinnacle of its urban glory in the early 1930s. It continued during the “insulated island” period of 1937–41, when Shanghai was only partially occupied by Japan while the concessions still maintained legal autonomy, and even after the Japanese occupied the entire city in 1942. Shanghai under Japanese occupation was already on the wane, but it was not until the Sino-Japanese War was over in 1945, when the chaos caused by inflation and the civil war brought the city’s economy to shambles, that Shanghai’s urban glory came to an end. The triumph of the rural-based Communist Revolution further reduced the city to insignificance. For the next three decades in the new People’s Republic, Shanghai was dominated and dwarfed by the new national capital of Beijing, to which it had also to contribute more than 80 percent of its annual revenue. Moreover, despite its growing population, Shanghai was never allowed to transform its physical surroundings: The city remained largely the same as in the 1940s, and its buildings and streets inevitably decayed as a result of neglect and disrepair.

Under the stern gaze of an authoritarian government, the city had lost all its glitz and glamour, its dynamism and decadence. Mao Dun’s “midnight” world of “light, heat, and power” seemed to have vanished. Recently, however, as a result of Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms, the city has experienced spectacular rebirth. Ironically, in the midst of the current craze for new constructions, a nostalgia for Old Shanghai is becoming widespread in Shanghai’s commercial and popular

74. Harold Isaacs, *Re-Encounters in China: Notes from a Journey in a Time Capsule* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1985), 21.

culture. A new cosmopolitan spirit seems to be ascendant as it is widely reported, first by the Shanghainese themselves, that in the process of renovation at the old building of the Shanghai and Hong Kong Banking Corporation, a series of old wall murals have been discovered in which Shanghai was clearly placed as one of the eight international metropolises.⁷⁵

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75. See a long feature article, "Shanghairen weishenmo milian 30 niandai" [Why do Shanghai people become obsessed with the 1930s], *Xin zhouban* [New weekly] 22/23 (15 December 1997): 13–25.

