

Effects on shanghai essay

[Business](#), [Industries](#)



The great periods of Chinese history are normally considered to be those times when powerful consolidating empires brought widespread peace, some prosperity, Confucianist (or, later, Maoist) standards of conduct, artistic grandeur, and systematic rule to a society that nonetheless intermittently plunged into chaotic and disruptive warlordism. As a rule, when the imperial power was challenged the consequence was unfortunate and often unwanted disruption (the nineteenth-century Taiping rebellion in China provides an example). In the late 1850s the rebel troops of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace (the Taipings), which ravaged eighteen provinces in fourteen years (1850-1864). A large number of gentrymen fled to Shanghai, they brought their wealth and cultural tastes with them. Movements of this sort, along with the changing patterns of trade and transportation after the opening of the treaty ports, were largely responsible for the long-term shifts in Jiangnan's regional geography. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Shanghai had emerged to become the leading metropolis of the lower Yangzi Valley. Traditional Jiangnan cities lost their preeminence as traders went elsewhere, artisans emigrated, and the gentry were attracted to the new cosmopolitanism of Shanghai.

'[Shanghai is]...the chief seat of commerce, the home of progress, in short the nerve-centre of China, whose influence reaches out to the remotest corners of the land'(Gamewell 1916: 19). In a text written in 1606 to honor the restoration of the Confucian shrine at the county school, a local elder recalls a time when Shanghai was characterized by a higher level of distrust, gang justice, and fraud than any other county in the region. He asserts that the zealous administration of local officials in recent years has helped greatly

to inspire popular trust in the gentry, who in turn have stabilized local society (Cochran 1999: 467-468). In the seventeenth century, the sphere of public commercial organization in the city of Shanghai developed rapidly, leading to a marked growth in formal trade and native-place organizations in the eighteenth. This growth not only continued but increased after Shanghai's designation as a treaty port in 1842, resulting in a productive mix of Chinese- and Western-style association building through the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Because of its treaty-port status, Shanghai has been singled out as an exception to Chinese patterns of urban development, largely because of the transformation foreigners view as having been brought about by them.

Prior to their arrival, foreigners considered Shanghai an insignificant town where the “ feudalistic, seclusionist, and anti-commercial” character of China was faithfully reproduced (Barnett 1941: 11). Shanghai was formally opened to foreign trade on November 17, 1843. When the first party of English traders arrived, they saw the future International Settlement — a strip of land to the north of the Chinese city bordering the riverine area where Suzhou Creek ran into the Huangpu before entering the sea — “ in the shape of sundry reed-beds, swamps, ponds and other malarious constituents”(Esherick 2000: 122). These Englishmen were soon joined by an ever increasing number of Western traders and missionaries, of whom many were French and American. After the turn of the century other foreign sojourners arrived: Japanese, White Russians, Indians, Vietnamese, Prussians, Portuguese, Italians, Spanish, Poles, Greeks, and so forth. Shanghai's foreign community in its heyday was said to represent no fewer

than fifty-eight nationalities. But the size of this foreign community never seemed to have exceeded a total of 150, 000 people (Bickers 2003: 68). In fact, there were three towns in Shanghai: International Settlement, the French Concession and Chinese part – Nanshi.

I had anticipated that Nanshi would be regarded in this way, since it is the site of the old city. Earlier Western visitors considered this ‘ the real Shanghai’ (Gamewell 1916: 140), replete with ‘ enough...foul-smelling alleys, streets of gay shops, beggars and crowds, to satisfy most lovers of the haunting allurements of the Orient’ (ibid. : 142).

Between 1855 and 1865, the population of the International Settlement swelled from approximately 20, 000 to 90, 000. The French Concession at the same time gained about 40, 000. The foreign consuls and residents viewed this influx of Chinese with alarm and set up the first Municipal Council of the international Settlement on July 22, 1854, in part to deal with the emergency (Meng Yue 2006: 37).

Commerce expanded and light industry developed in Shanghai at the turn of the twentieth century. In the early stage of modern urban development many firms on Nanjing Road and the cotton mills along Yangshupu were financed mainly with foreign capital. The spectacular growth of population and wealth that Shanghai experienced between 1842 and 1949 resulted in a city of extreme complexity, which was often divided along cultural, national, and class lines. The concessions, ever growing and expanding, nearly displaced the former Chinese magistrate’s seat (referred to as the “ native city” in Settlement English) as a metropolitan center.

Chinese political authority and police power were, until 1942, kept out of the concessions by the treaty rights of extraterritoriality (Meng Yue 2006: 89). The very notion of a civic center itself was taken from the West; and the city hall, the court house, the auditorium, the library, the square, the museum, the hospital, the athletic stadium, and other public buildings were all admittedly inspired by Western examples. The very model of a modern municipal government, as opposed to the old district magistrate's yamen, was taken from the English example (Esherick 2000: 123). Young men and women from peasant families who had at least an elementary education (95 percent of the men and 35 percent of the women could read). For them, the move to Shanghai to work at companies like Meiya with its generous wages, free clinic and library, night school, and recreation club was upwardly mobile. They soon "converted" to a new, modern, urban life style, adopting Western clothing, leather shoes, movie going, and foreign food.

Even before this, Mary Gamewell described how '[y]oung men back from years of study in America or Europe, and there are many of them in Shanghai, wear foreign clothes and look well in them' (1916: 160). The leading members of this bourgeoisie, the Rong brothers, for example, opened a total of nine textile mills and twelve flour mills between 1902 and 1932 and accumulated no less than 2, 913, 000 silver dollars' worth of capital. Socially and economically, a small number of financiers and entrepreneurs, foreign as well as Chinese, controlled a disproportionately large share of resources and led a life that contrasted sharply with that led by those who lived in the urban slums. Shanghai's "identity" was both the foreign city with its movie theaters, street lights, and "civilized" (wenming)

creature comforts such as running water and heat, and the native city inhabited by “ shed people” (penghu), with the homeless sleeping in coffins or begging on the streets. Foreigners had little direct contact with Chinese beyond their servants until the late 1920s.

But foreign cultural influence penetrated deeply, inciting nationalistic self-awareness among Chinese. Because of the foreign presence, any political organization that arose to represent Chinese interests quickly took on the hue of national representation. Criminal elements thus could wrap themselves in the cloak of patriotism. A good example of this ploy was the French Concession Chinese Ratepayers’ Association, which after 1927 was dominated by Du Yuesheng and the other Green Gang bosses, who became legitimate spokesmen for the French Concession’s 300, 000 Chinese residents. Japanese aggression aroused nationalistic passions among Shanghai’s citizens even more.

As conflict with Japan intensified, Shanghai’s keenly status-conscious “ petty urbanites” were quick to identify their own self-esteem with national self-esteem. Emily Hahn remarked on the fact that everyone asked her only about three things in China: Communists, guerrillas and industrial co-operatives. Miss Hahn wrote in 1944: The average American is full of hooey through no fault of his own. He thinks guerrillas are the only soldiers who do any fighting at all in China. He thinks the woods are full of them. Actually, the great burden of resistance has rested on the regular army. The situation is due to the peculiarity of most American newspapermen in China, who are nearly all of them inclined to be Leftist, out of a frustrated sense of guilt, a

superior viewpoint of things as they are, and a tendency to follow the crowd—of newspapermen. Most newspapermen don't know any more about the Communists in China than you do.

They hear rumors . . . but the chances of seeing what goes on among the Chinese Communists are even less than those of seeing the inside of Russia. If you live in Chungking, you can always interview Chou En-lai. That is what he is there for.

But if you think he is going to give you all the answers you are as innocent as an American newspaperman (Hahn 1988: 254). The military domination of Europe by Nazi Germany during this period and its pact with Japan in September 1940 compelled the Western powers in Shanghai to make “gradual surrenders” to the occupying forces there. The foreign areas authorities were steadily losing political autonomy and administrative control over their precincts. Since late 1939 the Japanese army had mounted an economic blockade of the city that deprived it of rice and other important resources normally obtained from the hinterland and overseas, and inflation spiraled upward. At the same time, the Japanese escalated their terrorist offensive in order further to disrupt the political situation in Shanghai (Barnet 1941: 58). One of the effects was a nine-year boycott against British shipping in that important tung oil-exporting treaty port.

The lesson of Wanhsien was that, in an age of mass nationalism, gunboat intervention creates rather than solves problems. The short answer about a gunboat policy,' explained Sir John Pratt, one of the Foreign Office's most perceptive China experts, a few years later, ' is that gunboats are very

convenient aids to policy so long as you are not driven to using them, but the moment you are then the spell is broken ... '(Pratt 1938: 54).

21 Shanghai was regarded as unique because it was built with the help of yang guizi (foreign devils). The colorfulness of Annamese constables, of baton-wielding blue-eyed Scottish police, of White Russian prostitutes was both an attraction and a matter of national shame. All of that changed after the Communist victory in 1949. It took some time, but the creation of an urban residential registration system by the new authorities restricted legal sojourning in the city.

The foreign “Shanghailanders” departed of their own accord or were forced to leave later. The criminal gangs were curtailed. Even the prostitutes were finally taken off the streets.

The era of ambivalent sojourning was over, and the exotic, disturbing, polymorphous quality of the semicolonial city was lost. Cosmopolitan Shanghai had become securely Chinese. References¹.

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