

Journal  
OF THE  
Royal Asiatic Society  
China



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# Journal OF THE Royal Asiatic Society China

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Vol. 80 No. 1, 2020

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EDITOR  
Tracey Willard

DEPUTY EDITOR  
Dr Kate Munro

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## CONTRIBUTIONS

The Editor of the Journal invites submission of original unpublished scholarly articles, essays and book reviews on the religion and philosophy, art and architecture, archaeology, anthropology, environment, and current affairs of China and Greater Asia. Books sent for review will be donated to the Royal Asiatic Society China Library. Contributors will receive copies of the Journal.

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Copies and back issues of the Journal are available at the Royal Asiatic Society library. The library is available to members.

[www.royalasiaticsociety.org.cn](http://www.royalasiaticsociety.org.cn)



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# PREFACE

## A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

IN AN ADDRESS to the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (NCBRAS) on its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October 1927 Isaac Mason, Vice-President, remarked that ‘happily our Journals and other records have preserved a good deal for us, and these have been consulted, with the result that this chronicle of our history has been made’, which he hoped would ‘be found useful to future chroniclers who may assist at the Centennial and other celebrations of this Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society’.

As a future chronicler I first began consulting copies of the Journal held at SOAS in London in the early 1980s and again found access to them in the Shanghai Library in 1991. At that time the library was housed in the former Shanghai Race Club Building on People’s Square, though copies of the Journal and of other historical English language material had to be ordered and dutifully delivered, often by bicycle, from a repository in Xujiahui in the west of Shanghai. Many of the journals, newspapers and books I had the privilege to read bore the stamp of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

Despite reports of its loss or destruction, it became apparent in 2003 that the majority of the NCBRAS library holdings, numbering some 40,000 volumes, had survived when that repository, the ‘Bibliotheca Zikawei’ opened to scholars. I spent many, many joyous, stimulating, productive days there over the subsequent decade furthering my understanding, appreciation and affection for Shanghai’s remarkable journey to its present glory. When Dr. Judith Kolbas, Vice-President of the RAS Great Britain and Ireland, approached me to renew a path for the RAS in the city in 2007, I was grateful for the knowledge I had gained in recognising the palpable physical presence that the Society still possessed in the city. Apart from its incomparable library, including a complete set of Journals, which served a small, but ever-increasing band of researchers and an inquisitive public, stood an assemblage of former NCBRAS Museum exhibits – stuffed animals, bears, pandas and birds among many other artefacts that delighted innumerable visitors to the Shanghai Natural History Museum. The former NCBRAS building, which once housed its museum and library

still stood proud and was awaiting a renewed career as an arts/cultural hub. Propitious times, I thought, for the revival of the Society.

Yet there were questions – important ones. Primarily, how would the authorities see the emergence of a foreign society with such a visible legacy and what would be the best way forward? Assisted by the British Chamber of Commerce with an introduction to the relevant city authorities I was informed that they were ‘pleased to see us back’. With a small team of wonderful, dynamic and talented people around me so much was achieved in a short space of time.

From the outset I wanted to remain true to the Society’s fundamental principles and objectives outlined in 1857 involving the investigation of subjects concerned with China and surrounding nations (that was usually communicated to its membership in a talk or lecture), the publication of papers in a journal and the formation of a library and museum. Leaving aside the establishment of a museum as perhaps a long-term objective, a new library had begun to evolve and a lively series of events followed my inaugural lecture on October 15, 2007 (precisely 150 years and one day after the first meeting of the founding Society).

Whilst Isaac Mason’s vision for those historic Society’s journals to prove their value 100 years on was stalled by the Society’s closure in 1952, a display of the NCBRAS Journals highlighting the Society’s heritage figured large at our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. They took place on May 15, 2008 – 150 years and two days after the NCBRAS had been formally recognised by RAS in London.

At that time preparations were underway for the revival of our journal with the lead taken by Dr. Lindsay Shen, accompanied by Janet Roberts. ‘Seeing how much energy and scholarship was present in this society 150 years ago has been incredibly inspiring,’ Lindsay commented in a local publication. The last NCBRAS Journal, volume 73, was published in 1948 – an impressive 90 years after its inception. Partly following the protocol established in 1857 where papers read to the Society were published for wider public appreciation, a call was made to those who had contributed to the Society in the 2007/2008 season for papers related to their talks. Many graciously obliged and along with a number of book reviews and poetic interludes the new Society journal was published in April 2010, with the generous assistance of Earnshaw Books. We decided to keep the original NCBRAS artwork on the cover and bridged that historical hiatus by

continuing the Journal series with volume 74.

Over the years I was witness to various digitisation projects involving former NCBRAS library holdings, including the North-China Daily News, at the Bibliotheca Zikawei. The NCBRAS Journal was of special interest and a paper reprint of the entire series was recently produced as part of the Shanghai Library's Twelfth Five-Year National Key Publishing Planning Project'. High praise indeed.

This year not only marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our new Journal, but also marks over 100 years in the span of the publication bearing the Society's name. That is cause for celebration.

*Peter Hibbard, Honorary President of RAS, China  
2007-2011*

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

WE ARE DELIGHTED to introduce you to a wonderful selection of essays, articles and book reviews, in this anniversary year of the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society China (JRAS China)'s publication.

Much has been written about 2020, the Year of the Metal Rat, as the impacts of Covid-19 have been felt in every country and in every community. In April as China brought the virus under control at home, the borders were closed to inbound traffic, allowing only returning Chinese citizens to enter China. The expatriate community was split: a large number of foreign passport holders already in China continued to live and work in China's cities and towns, but many were unable to get back in before the border closures.

For those of us marooned outside, the vibrant series of online events put together by the program managers of both branches of RAS in China provided a cultural lifeline in a dark period. This created opportunities for new speakers from all over the world, who might not ordinarily been able to come to China, to present their work to the RAS community. This format also attracted a new audience, encouraging those who are not currently in China to join the RAS community. Some of the speakers and attendees at these online events are contributing to the journal this year for the first time.

As well as celebrating new writing about China and Greater Asia, this edition marks an important milestone: the RAS Journal, in its 21<sup>st</sup> century incarnation, has been produced for a decade: 2010–2020. After a sixty-year break, the Journal restarted in 2010, thanks to the hard work of that first RAS Council, under the editorship of Dr Lindsay Shen and Janet Roberts. As Peter Hibbard points out, if this ten-year period is added to the first 90 years of the Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (NCBRAS) production (1858–1948), we have achieved a centenary of publication! We do indeed have much to celebrate.

In the last ten years, we have seen a prodigious amount of talent on display in the pages of this Journal. RAS China is very fortunate to have among our friends and contributors a number of well-known and successful authors, including Katya Knyazeva, Paul French, Bill Savadove, Liliane Willens, Andrew Fields, Tess Johnson, John Man, Duncan Hewitt, Anne Witchard, John Van Fleet, Simon Drakeford,

and many more. Over the last decade, and indeed in previous centuries, many of our journal articles have consisted of material presented at RAS lectures and talks in China. But in our more fluid international milieu, many more articles these days come from scholars working all over the world, who wish to present their work in the accessible – and enduring – medium of JRAS China. Happily it flows both ways: successful contributors to the journal are likely to be asked to give talks at RAS if they are passing through China, or, as has been the case more recently, on our online platforms.

While such accomplished writers as those mentioned above ensure that our standards are kept to a high level, the Journal has also been a place for less experienced contributors, including young scholars, academics, essayists and writers of family biographies, all of whom contribute greatly to what is described in the preface as ‘this chronicle of our history’. These accounts are constructed from personal experience, original study and family archives, creating a record like no other in the world today.

In our articles this year, there is a definite nod to the North – very far north, in some cases! We have articles about Mongolia, Manchuria, Korea and Japan, as well as northwest Yunnan and Shanxi. Long-term RAS friends and regular contributors, Katya Knyazeva and Paul French, circle around Russia, in their elegant and well researched articles – discussing Russian architects in Shanghai, and a little known cooperation between the Soviets and China, which led to a lifeline during World War Two. The prolific author John Man also gives us a tale about Russia, but a very different Russia to that of the Soviets: from the time of China’s first treaty with a European power during the 1600s. John Van Fleet’s playful examination of Japanese foundation myths describes a voyage undertaken more than 2000 years ago, with thousands of virginal boys and girls. William Lindesay, in the spirit of RAS explorers of a century ago, takes us on expeditions into southern and eastern Mongolia, to examine ancient wall structures. His findings are surprising.

In section 2, we find articles less concerned about place, and more about people. We have some wonderful essays, examining the lives and interactions of, among others, a Jewish Buddhist monk supported by Nazis, a Chinese sculptor who changed the life of the creator of Tintin, a mysterious group of artists in 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, American teachers who taught boys in rural China how to master the jumpshot,

and “farmerpreneurs” who can read their future in goats’ scapulas.

Finally, we have book recommendations from the convenor of the RAS Non-Fiction book club, and some in-depth reviews about recent books concerning greater Asia.

All editions of the Royal Asiatic Society Journal are available on the RAS website, and our library holds not only the journals from the last ten years, but also the NCBRAS Journals going back to 1857.

This journal would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our editorial committee, Dr Kate Munro, and Ted Willard, and, as always, the patient guidance of our publisher, Graham Earnshaw. We welcome contributions for future issues of JRAS China, from scholars, writers, biographers and anyone with a story to tell. Our editorial committee would be pleased to work with you to help bring your stories to life.

We hope you will enjoy these essays and articles as much as we did. If you have any feedback, including suggestions, requests, comments, please drop us a line at [editor@royalasiaticsociety.org.cn](mailto:editor@royalasiaticsociety.org.cn).

*Tracey Willard*  
*Editor*

# **RAS CHINA COUNCIL 2019-2020**

## **Hon. President**

Chris Wood – British Consul – General Shanghai

## **Hon. Vice Presidents For Life**

Carma Elliot CMG, OBE

Peter Hibbard MBE

Liu Wei

Tess Johnston

## **Vice President (also Membership Director)**

Parul Rewal

## **Secretary**

John Van Fleet

## **Treasurer**

Helen Yang

## **Programme Director**

Rachel Rapaport

## **IT Director**

Johan Uusitalo

## **Journal Editor**

Tracey Willard

## **Librarian**

Sven Serrano

**Council Members**

Julie Chun (Art Focus)

Peter Hagan (Book Club – Non-Fiction)

Dagmar Borchard (Book Club – Fiction)

Katherine Song (Film Club)

Gabor Holch/Wang Dong (History Club)

Robert Martin (Stories of Things)

Parul Rewal (RAS Beyond City Series)



## RAS CHINA REPORT FOR 2019-2020

THIS YEAR HAS been a turbulent one the world over, to say the least, yet being in Shanghai during this time has felt especially significant. Not just for being in close proximity to the source of the outbreak of the global pandemic, but for witnessing a people dealing with the situation at hand with responsibility and fortitude, with great regard for the various safeguard and tracking measures put into place. This has allowed us to return to a fair degree of normality in a relatively short span of time.

The operations of RAS China in Shanghai have demonstrated a similar resilience through this period, the term “resilience” being key through it all. Not allowing ourselves to be forced into a complete lull of activities for too long, we bounced back within eight weeks, switching to online formats such as Zoom for our talks, to bide us by the period when most people were tethered at home. This platform brought its own advantages, allowing us to not only access speakers from outside of China, and to reach our members who were stuck in various parts of the world, but also gave us the wonderful opportunity to collaborate with our sister organisations in Beijing, Hong Kong and Korea. Geographical boundaries being happily rendered inconsequential through this medium, this resulted in a wide sharing of online events and resources between the various RAS branches – quite a positive outcome to have come out of an otherwise crisis situation (yes, this conjured up the words attributed to Winston Churchill several times in our minds too).

The global travel restrictions that have been in place for most of this year meant that a number of the RAS Council members continued to conduct their roles while still stuck overseas in their home countries. History club was run by Gabor Holch in Budapest and Dr Dong Wang in Zanten, along the lower Rhine in Germany, Tracey Willard continued journal editing in Adelaide, Peter Hagan ran book club online from Portland, Oregon, and Rachel Rapaport ran the programs calendar and facilitated sharing of online events whilst in the woods of Pennsylvania. The same went for our membership base, with several of our longstanding members who were unable to return to China showing their commitment to the society by renewing their memberships in the Overseas Individuals category.

I would be remiss in not mentioning our dedicated Council members who remained in Shanghai and deserve accolades for holding the fort here. Julie Chun and Katherine Song restarted Art Focus and the Film club respectively in May, initially in small groups of 15-20 as museums and other venues gradually opened up, taking care to keep within the social distancing regulations. Art Focus diversified into *Creative Ensembles*, a themed series of curated talks and panel forums to consider perspectives on non-traditional and expanded forms of art that are making their presence felt in China. The Film club drew enthusiastic audiences and new membership, reflecting both how eager and ready people were to be out and about by the time the possibility presented itself, and highlighted Katherine's skilful curation across film genres (from Chinese detective noir to documentaries). The new focus group that I had planned to start on Architecture and Urbanism at the beginning of the year finally took off in June, under the title of RAS Beyond City. This was envisaged as a talk series that aimed to shift focus from an obsession with the past, when it comes to architecture in Shanghai, to looking at the issues that seem critical to shaping the future of urbanism as a whole. This seems especially relevant now in the post-pandemic world as we rethink what we value in our cities. A new gastronomy club that was in the offing with RAS member and food editor Lilly Chow, had to sadly be put on hold due to her return to the US, but we look forward to its revival in the coming year. The much loved Stories of Things focus group which Robert Martin graciously convenes in his lovely *lilong* home will resume in November and is eagerly awaited.

Another wonderful development for RAS China was the creation of a new Reading Room in the West Bund Art District through the generosity of Harmony Space's Steven Lin, facilitated by former RAS Council member John Villar. RAS Librarian Sven Serrano took to this project like a fish to water and has been busy setting it up with a vision of shaping this lovely space into a scholars' research space, and to reflect the nature of our collection thematically.

We had a very welcome new addition to the RAS Council in the form of Helen Yang, who has very capably stepped into the role of Treasurer. This position had been vacant for some time now, and had been managed by RAS Secretary John Van Fleet in addition to his other work in the interim. Helen immediately set to work to study and streamline our expense framework, shaping guidelines with

advice from convenors to make procedures consistent across all of our operations. Her position will be ratified at the AGM in November.

John Van Fleet who has rendered invaluable service in his role as Secretary for the last three years is stepping down from RAS Council this year due to his work commitments. We thank him sincerely for his work with RAS, and the energy and direction with which he drove the RAS Council meetings.

Last but certainly not least, a special mention of our IT Director, Johan Uusitalo, whose support was instrumental during our transition to online events, as some of us less tech savvy people initially grappled with Zoom. Shared events with other RAS branches meant setting up systems to allow their members to join our online events as guests – all this was ably managed by Johan, through our event management platform (which incidentally rebranded itself from Eventbank to Glue Up). Johan got married to his lovely wife Monica in August and we wish them both a long and happy married life.

**Membership** – While membership slumped at the beginning of the year, as was to be expected, it again began to steadily rise from June onwards. While overall membership is still down by 10% compared to the end of last year, the overseas membership component went up from 6% at the end of last year to almost 20% of our total membership this year. We expect growing overseas memberships to continue to be the trend for a while, even though more of our members are beginning to get back to China gradually.

This year the Council took the collective decision to confer Fellowship of RAS China to Lynn Pan, which bestows lifetime membership to her. This award recognises her contributions to the study of Chinese diaspora, authorship of her many books on a range of related topics, and her staunch support and patronage of RAS China for over a decade.

I came across the membership figures for RAS China 100 years ago, as I flipped through the old North China Branch RAS Journal for 1920 in the library. (Needless to say I use “flipped” purely as a figure of speech, for librarian Sven Serrano has us handling the old NCBRAS journals with gloves on!). It turns out that our recent peak of membership at the beginning of 2020 (pre-COVID), was no match for the numbers in 1920: RAS had well over 500 members at that time. In 1920 RAS had been operating in China for more than 60 years, and the international community of Shanghai was in its heyday. The current

iteration of RAS in Shanghai began in 2007, so we may need a few more years to build up to those numbers. With a strong community of dedicated members and convenors and a vibrant program of events and activities, we believe we will continue to grow.

**Finances** – Though we started strongly in January in terms of revenues generated primarily from memberships and events, we experienced several months of low revenue from February to May as our activities were reduced significantly due to the pandemic. However, having resumed our normal level of activities in June, monthly revenues have increased accordingly.

As in past years, our major expenses for the year were those related to the publication of the Journal and the annual fees for Glue Up (formerly known as EventBank). A small amount of our funds goes toward the Annual General Meeting in November.

Here onwards, we expect revenues from memberships and events to remain at normal levels, commensurate with the activities that are planned, and to end the year in a healthy financial position once again. Early next year, we will draw up a long term strategy for RAS China to manage and utilise our reserve funds for the enhancement of the society.

So to sum up, RAS China is emerging from 2020 with a fair amount of productivity, despite the many challenges thrown up by the pandemic. The enthusiasm for live events when they restarted here in Shanghai was pleasing, as perhaps the whole world has been suffering from online webinar fatigue. However, since many are still hunkered down and unable to travel as freely as we did just twelve months ago, we intend to continue to provide an online platform for speakers outside of China, as part of our general program, for the benefit of our overseas members as well as our local community. We will continue to offer a rich and diverse program of events for the coming year, hoping for a year of healing and recovery for the world, so we may carry on with our cultural endeavours with renewed positivity and aplomb.

*Parul Rewal, Vice President, RAS China*

## **RAS China Events 1 Dec 2019 – 30 Nov 2020**

*(no activity from 20th Jan to 25th March)*

- Art Focus (Julie Chun)	9
- Beyond City Series (Parul Rewal)	6
- Book Club, Fiction & Non Fiction (Dagmar Borchard, Peter Hagan)	9
- Film Club (Katherine Song)	7
- General Program (Rachel Rapaport)	3
- History Club (Dong Wang, Gabor Holch)	9
- Special Events	4
- Story of Things (Robert Martin)	1
- Additional RASBJ online lectures shared with members	16
- Joint lectures with China Crossroads	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b>

## **RAS China Membership 2020**

**Honorary Members & Fellows** **9**

### **Paying Members**

- Individual	67	43.5%
- Joint/ Family	32	20.8%
- Overseas Members	30	19.5%
- Young professionals/ Pensioners	16	10.4%
- Student	9	5.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>100%</b>

**RAS Friends (Donors)** **31**

**RAS China Membership 1920 (from the Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, New Series No. L1 (Vol 51), 1920)**

**TOTALS:**

Classified as:	
- Honorary Members	15
- Corresponding Members	7
- Life Members	65
- Ordinary Members	430
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>517</b>
- Residing at Shanghai	255
- Residing elsewhere in China	181
- Residing in other countries	81
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>517</b>

## RAS BEIJING REPORT FOR 2019-2020

DESPITE THE coronavirus crisis, RASBJ's Zoom series became the "talk of the town".

In early 2020, as the pandemic progressed across the globe, the Royal Asiatic Society Beijing (RASBJ) felt its world had suddenly become very small. Normally, the non-profit society holds walks and talks and unique excursions devoted to Chinese history and culture, in and around Beijing. But COVID-19 halted all in-person gatherings. Members were scattered across the globe. In a February Council meeting over Zoom, officers lamented the multiple calamities bedevilling China and other nations. Yet RASBJ should not have been totally surprised, noted Events Officer James Nobles. According to the Chinese zodiac, once every 60 years the new lunar year is traditionally seen as a "year of living dangerously", he explained. 'Terrible things always happen in the Year of the Metal Rat.'

It sounded like a perfect RASBJ talk in normal times and – suddenly – Council members realized it was equally perfect in an era of Zoom. Anticipating that COVID-19 wouldn't be disappearing anytime soon, the Council resolved to shift its events strategy online – grabbing the opportunity to reach beyond Beijing for speakers, members and inspiration. The result has been a hugely successful series of online talks – nearly three dozen since March 9 – with Nobles' unique presentation on 'China's Year of the Metal Rat' as one of the many crowd-pleasers.

Online events are the latest vehicle for the Royal Asiatic Society Beijing's brand of intellectual exploration to 'enrich people's understanding of the past, present and future of China and its role in the world,' says RASBJ President Alan Babington-Smith. 'The pandemic gave us an opportunity to "go global" while still maintaining high standards. For all events, we carefully curate the topic, the tone, and the personalities.'

Founded in 2013 by Alan Babington-Smith and Melinda Liu as a chapter of the Royal Asiatic Society China, the RASBJ five years later became an independent branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (founded in 1823, received its Royal Charter in 1824). The society's aim has always been to help bring China and the rest of the world closer together through cultural exchange. Until early

2020, the organisation focused on in-person talks, tours to historical and cultural sites in and near Beijing, and unusual excursions, such as spending the night in a Buddhist monastery to learn about the lives of resident monks.

But little of that prior experience prepared the RASBJ for the popularity of its Zoom series. Attendees joined the online talks in numbers double or triple the pre-COVID rate of attendance. Membership surged, totalling more than 200 by late September. At RASBJ's invitation, prominent speakers were persuaded to try their hand at Zoom. Many – including renowned Professor Robert Bickers who recounted the Swire story and author Paul French who introduced his book *Murders of Old China* – took part in their first Zoom talks under RASBJ's banner.

Today, it sounds quaint to recall a time before COVID-19 drove talks and conferences online. In February, however, many Beijing-based organisations were anticipating a swift return to “normal”, and as a result were reluctant to spend time learning to Zoom.

The RASBJ was among the first of its peers to jump online and reap the benefits of going global. Based in the U.K., Professor Peter Frankopan provoked lively debate in his online seminar ‘Why Study History?’ From Shanghai, Dr Michael Humphries explained China's history of epidemic response. Beijing experts Jeremiah Jenne and Lars Ulrik Thom revealed fresh insights into the Chinese capital's layers of history. On the anniversary of Japan's official WWII surrender, Professor Rana Mitter introduced his new book *China's Good War*, sparking a lively discussion.

RASBJ's online discussions also seek to feature new angles on familiar topics, or unique perspectives such as ‘What Qing Emperors Learned from their Celebrity Chefs’ and ‘Southeast Asian Wars through China-watchers' Eyes.’ In her first Zoom talk ever, Sinologist Frances Wood evoked the lives of U.K.-based Chinese intellectuals during the 1930s and 1940s. After talking about China-Japan relations Professor Ezra Vogel – aged 90, and one of the world's top East Asian scholars – said he felt the RASBJ's Zoom event ‘helped bring out the best in me.’

The search for this type of intellectual engagement has always been intense in Beijing. It's not only the epicentre of Chinese officialdom and policy-making but also a dynamic hub of diplomacy, academia, cinema, NGOs, architecture, art, music, even bird-watching. Its residents, both expatriate and Chinese, are inquisitive, professionally



varied, and open to learning something new. RASBJ events represent an intellectual space ‘for people who never want to stop being fascinated,’ says Council member Katrin Buchholz, who herself organised a fascinating Zoom talk on Puccini’s Turandot.

The Society has also resumed in-person events with a Wild Wall weekend outing, led by William Lindesay OBE. In October, Ambassador Nicolas Chapuis, head of the E.U. Delegation to China and a translator of Tang poetry, held an unforgettable talk on poet Du Fu’s depictions of “barbarians” and how they resonate in Chinese society today; about 80 people attended on Zoom and another three dozen took part in person.

To share the content of its Zoom series, RASBJ has invited members of the Royal Asiatic Societies based in London, Shanghai, Seoul and Hong Kong to attend its online events for free, a collaboration that has enhanced intra-RAS liaison worldwide. These RAS partners generously reciprocated by inviting our members to their online talks, which has been much appreciated. Thanks partly to technology, interaction between chapters and individuals within the global RAS community has blossomed. To sustain its expanding activities and membership, RASBJ has surveyed its members to gather feedback, created a new interim website, and scheduled a strategic planning meeting for November.

To be sure, the Year of the Metal Rat has seen a tragic degree of disease, death and disruption. This challenging year however has also allowed RASBJ to cut through some of the gloom by bringing together intellectually curious participants with top-drawer speakers and unique content. The RASBJ’s world still feels small in one specific way – but it’s a good way -- because the society now reaches people all over the globe.

#### **OFFICERS**

In 2020 the Royal Asiatic Society Beijing Advisory Group includes Peter Batey OBE, Paul Haenle, Victor Lang and Joerg Wuttke. The legal advisor is Michael Fosh.

The following have been nominated for confirmation as Council Members at the Dec. 3, 2020 RASBJ Annual General Meeting:

- |                              |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| (1) President                | Alan Babington-Smith |
| (2) Vice-President           | Melinda Liu          |
| (3) Treasurer                | John Olbrich         |
| (4) Events                   | James Nobles         |
| (5) Membership               | Tario Perez Vila     |
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# Section 1

**‘Born with their destiny  
determined by heaven and earth’**

*– Stories of Exploration*



## FOUND IN THE MYTHS OF TIME

BY JOHN DARWIN VAN FLEET

‘The trouble with the Japanese who believe in myths is that they do not know how and when to stop until something catastrophic happens to them.’

*Lee Khoon Choy, former Singaporean Ambassador to Japan, 1995.<sup>1</sup>*

‘I, on my part, feel a certain kinship with Korea, given the fact that it is recorded in the Chronicles of Japan that the mother of Emperor Kammu [737 – 806] was of the line of King Muryong of Paekche.’

*Akihito, former emperor of Japan, in a speech commemorating his 68<sup>th</sup> birthday, 23 December 2001.<sup>2</sup>*

*The myth that the Japanese imperial line, and hence the Japanese people, descend from a sun goddess, Amaterasu, is by far the better known of Japan’s two foundation stories. The other concerns Xu Fu, a Qin Dynasty (221 – 206 BCE) sorcerer from China who captained a fleet with a manifest that included thousands of virginal boys and girls, seeking Penglai, the island of immortals. Instead he may have found Japan (he believed Mount Fuji to be Mount Penglai, according to some accounts). The legend of Xu Fu, though far less well known than the Amaterasu foundation myth, has the feature of aligning with history, a history Akihito referred to on his 68<sup>th</sup> birthday. Though the Xu Fu legend has become somewhat overlooked, the fact that the myth that is obviously the fanciful creation of a juvenile and insecure culture thrives, has not gone unchallenged. Leaders on both sides of the East China Sea – Akihito as mentioned above, joined by Deng Xiaoping and others – have tried to revive the former, for its power and promise in addressing today’s tensions in the region.*

*The legend of Xu Fu has its origins in the geography of tens of thousands of years ago...*

### A LONG TIME AGO ON SOME ISLANDS NOT SO FAR AWAY

One of the shortest boat rides between China and Japan connects Shanghai with Nagasaki, crossing about 800 kilometres of the East China Sea, roughly the same as the distance between London and Berlin, or Washington D.C. and Boston. Far closer are two cities that face each other across the Korea Strait: South Korea's Busan and Japan's Fukuoka, about 200 kilometres apart, a distance navigable by even the ancients, and a sea route with a convenient rest stop at Japan's Tsushima Island, about halfway along the way.

During the last glacial period, which ended about 12,000 years ago, one needed not even a boat, at least not much of one, to get from the Asian mainland to what is now the Japanese archipelago. At that time of dramatically lower sea levels, all four of the major Japanese islands were one, modern-day Hokkaido was connected to today's Sakhalin Peninsula by a land bridge, and one could perhaps skip a stone from what is now Korea to what is now Japan.



**Figure 1:** During the Last Glacial Maximum, around 21,000 years ago, when sea levels were about 125 meters (410 feet) below the present. Note that Taiwan isn't yet an island, that the Korean peninsula isn't yet so, and that the Sea of Japan/East Sea is rather an exceptionally large lake.<sup>3</sup>

Mitochondrial DNA indicates that all living humans descend from one maternal source—christened Mitochondrial Eve—who lived in Africa between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago. Similarly, the Y chromosome shows that all men have a common ancestor, Y-chromosome Adam, who lived at the same time. (Actually, both analyses indicate that modern humans descend from a small founding population of about 5,000 men and an equal number of women.)<sup>4</sup>

Mitochondrial DNA evidence reveals that the various Adam and Eve-style myths of cultures around the planet echo fact – that the descendants of these Adams and Eves walked, over thousands of generations, to the farthest corners of the world, first reaching what is now the Middle East, with one branch turning northwest toward Europe, and another east toward Eurasia and Oceania.

‘Where did the peoples of East Asia, Polynesia and the Americas originate? Teeth tell the story.’ With these two sentences, one C.G. Turner begins a 1989 paper in *Scientific American*.<sup>5</sup> It’s geographically intuitive that the distant ancestors of the East Asian peoples, coming from Africa, reached first what is now China, arriving probably more than 40,000 years ago.<sup>6</sup> And just as the first humans in North America walked from what is now Siberia, over the then-available Bering Sea land bridge, the earliest arrivals on the Japanese land mass walked or paddled there from the continent. In a 2009 edition of the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, Japanese researchers used evidence from teeth – incisors, to be precise – to reinforce what C.G. Turner had already suggested: that the Japanese are genetic descendants of their mainland cousins.<sup>7</sup>

These perambulating pioneers formed Japan’s Jōmon (縄文) culture, which dates back about 14,000 years. About 2,500 years ago, a second wave of immigrants crossed the Tsushima Strait between Japan and Korea, as well as coming from points further south on the continent, becoming Japan’s Yayoi (弥生) culture, which overwhelmed the Jōmon.<sup>8</sup> The passage required better boats, as the sea level had risen substantially by then. Those who became the Yayoi had good reason to put the mainland to their back – the “warring states” periods in both China and Korea, compared with a relatively peaceful, more lightly populated and primitive Jōmon-era Japan, created incentive.



Figures 2 & 3: An incense burner and a clay figurine from Japan's Jōmon era, c. 1,000 BCE.<sup>9 10</sup>

### SHIPS FULL OF YOUTHS SEEK THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

During the time that the Yayoi migrants were crowding out and/or subsuming the previous Jōmon tenants of the Japanese archipelago, the Qin emperor was completing the violent first unification of what was to become China. China's version of the Fountain of Youth legend stems from the obsession Qin Shihuang (秦始皇, a name he awarded himself, meaning 'first emperor') had with immortality, or failing that, long life. The legend, first recorded by Sima Qian in the Records of The Grand Historian, states that Qin dispatched court sorcerer Xu Fu (徐福) on an ocean expedition in search of a magic elixir conferring eternal youth, which was to be found on the mythical Mt Penglai (蓬莱仙岛), far out to sea off the coast of eastern China's Shandong Province, in the direction of Japan. He returned nine years later, with no magic potion but plenty of excuses about why he had failed, primarily because a giant sea creature had apparently blocked the way. Qin ordered Xu to sea again, this time equipped to combat the sea creature, and with a crew of thousands of virginal boys and girls, but from this voyage Xu never returned.

Believing that mercury promoted longevity, Emperor Qin dosed himself with the element, not aware that it would have the opposite effect – he died at age 49.

But the legend of Mt Penglai and Xu Fu lived on. A large statue of Xu looks out and eastward, in the direction of his legendary voyages, from the Chinese port city of Weihai, formerly Weihaiwei (威海卫, 'mighty ocean sentinel'), a name suited to its location. The statue and the city grace the far eastern promontory of Shandong, jutting into





**Figure 4:** An early 18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese rendition of the legendary Mt Penglai.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 5:** The statue of Xu Fu in Weihai.<sup>12</sup>

the Bohai Bay towards Korea. And the locals have a sound reason to promote the legend of Xu and Mt Penglai – the statue and the view, and the museums and *de rigeur* gift shops, attract no small amount of visitors, and their disposable income.

In Japanese, Xu Fu is pronounced Jofuku, and the legend has long been part of Japanese folklore. The Japanese versions credit Jofuku with landing in Japan and conferring a host of technological and cultural advancements on the Jōmon Japanese.



**Figure 6:** Famed Japanese woodcut artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi's image of the Penglai expedition ships, with the youngsters crowding the main decks, and Jofuku precariously perched on the bow of the lead ship, pointing toward Mt Fuji in the far left background.<sup>13</sup>

Variations have Mt Fuji as Penglai (Hōrai in Japanese) and Jofuku as the god of farming and/or silk. Some tellings have Jofuku as ancestor to the Japanese royal line. A 2019 South China Morning Post essay outlines the various versions, but also asserts

These legends are latter-day ascriptions that are as unreliable as the authenticity of the multiple Xu Fu tombs in Japan. [...] However, like many historical legends, there are flashes of truth that penetrate the foggy details.<sup>14</sup>

As the SCMP essay indicates, monuments to Jofuku dot Japan – if you happen to be in western Japan’s Wakayama Prefecture (和歌山県), you may drop into the quaint little town of Shingū (新宮, pop. about 30,000), which boasts Jofuku Memorial Park (and gift shops). A gravestone in the park, installed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by one of the *shogun*, marks Jofuku’s supposed place of death. A former Singaporean ambassador to Japan, Lee Khoon Choy, reports that he ‘visited Shingu in 1987 because I was interested in seeing the place where Xu Fu had landed [...] I met the Mayor of Shingu, who also took a personal interest in Xu Fu.’ Ambassador Lee might just as well have substituted the word ‘commercial’ for ‘personal’<sup>a</sup>.



**Figure 7:** The entrance to Jofuku Park, in Shingū, Japan, of course in Chinese style.

a He might also have been better advised to leave cultural history to those who use evidence as the basis of their assertions. Lee’s book is full of historical howlers but is nonetheless valuable as a window into how some people with influence viewed Japan.



Figure 8: Visit Jofuku Park and you too can acquire some delicious and healthful Jofuku tea! At reasonable prices of course.<sup>15</sup>

#### LEGEND IMITATES LIFE

Given the generational and geographical advantages that the mainlanders had over their more easterly brethren (tens of thousands more years to develop, vastly larger landmass for cultivation and experimentation), it was natural for Chinese advances to flow from west to east, starting millennia ago. And so they did. The laundry list of elements of civilisation that flowed east from the mighty Yangtze and Yellow River valleys and deltas, cradles of Asian civilisation analogous to the Fertile Crescent, first to Korea and then to Japan, is profound: wet rice cultivation, metallurgy, chopsticks, the Chinese writing system (neither Korea nor Japan had developed their own before



Figure 9: The Yayoi dōtaku (銅鐸 – bronze hand bell), was common throughout the era, to the 3rd century CE – the date of this one, which sits in a museum in Paris. At the time, such advanced metalworking would have seemed like out-of-this-world technology to Japan's Jōmon inhabitants.<sup>16</sup>

adopting the Chinese script, the *hanzi/kanji* (漢字), Buddhism, tea, attire, industry, water and land transportation modes, governmental structures, military hardware and strategy. The list goes on and on, and includes the Four Great Inventions, a phrase Joseph Needham made popular via his monumental *Science and Civilization in China*: gunpowder, the compass, printing and papermaking.



**Figure 10:** The Yayoi gift that keeps on giving – two millennia on, wet rice farming remains a staple of Japanese civilisation.

The Yayoi immigrants – the Jōmon might have said invaders – brought the first wave of technological advancement with them, but the flow continued for nearly a thousand years. Japan's first real capital city, Nara, and the thousand-year imperial capital, Kyoto, were designed and laid out in the late 700s in homage to the Tang Dynasty capital of Chang'An, now Xi'An. By that time, according to East Asian scholar G.B. Sansom

Politically China was at this moment perhaps the most powerful, the most advanced, and the best administered country in the world. Certainly in every material aspect of the life of a state she was overwhelmingly superior to Japan. The frontiers of her empire stretched to the borders of Persia, to the Caspian Sea, to the Altai mountains. She was in relations with the peoples of Annam, Cochin China, Tibet, the Tarim basin, and India; with the Turks, the Persians and the Arabs. Men of many nations appeared at

the court of China, bringing tribute and merchandise and new ideas that influenced her thought and her art...

Along the streets of Chang-an there passed in those days Buddhist monks from India, envoys from Kashgar, Samarkand, Persia, Annam, Tonking, Constantinople, chieftains of nomadic tribes from the Siberian plains, officials and students from Korea and, in now increasing numbers, from Japan. It is easy to imagine the effect upon the eyes and the minds of these last of a capital so rich in interest and excitement, their despair at the sight of such profusion, their proud resolve to rival it, if industry and courage and restless ambition could eke out their country's material shortcomings. No doubt with that tireless curiosity and patient attention to detail which characterized their study of other alien civilisations with which they later came into contact – those of Portugal, of Holland, and later of the industrialized Occident of the nineteenth century – the Japanese set themselves to observe and report on every aspect of Chinese life, and to consider what features they might profitably adopt in their own country.<sup>17</sup>

One can readily see the resonance between the Xu Fu/Jofuku legend and the Yayoi fact – the legend has Jofuku's thousands bringing with them something like what the Yayoi-era settlers from the (Chinese) West actually brought with them, just as the story of Noah and the flood, predated by a similar tale in the Gilgamesh epic and other flood myths of the Mesopotamian region cultures, are likely to have sprung from historical events such as the post-glacial rapid filling of what is now the Persian Gulf, the Black Sea Deluge<sup>18</sup> or the impact object that created the Indian Ocean's Burckle Crater.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE MYTH MORE TRAVELLED BY

'Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less travelled by, . . .'

Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*, 1916

The more famous of Japan's foundation myths, that of sun goddess Amaterasu (天照) and company, is the troubled one, although the



succeeding dynasties of Japan's past two millennia have generally favoured this flight of fancy to the not-so-far-from-fact Jofuku version. An unsurprising choice – is there any human culture that hasn't ginned up some such myth of divine origin? The planet is pock-marked with royal houses that they and their subjects suggest have divine imprimatur.



Figure 11: A radiant Amaterasu by woodblock artist Shunsai Toshimasa (春齐年昌), c. 1887.<sup>20</sup>

The Amaterasu myth has her as great grandmother to the also mythical first emperor of Japan, Jimmu (神武天皇, literally ‘war god emperor’, accession attested at 660 BCE). Proponents of the Jofuku legend sometimes suggest that Jimmu is a mythical representation of Jofuku. A foundation myth of divine origin would be more appealing than one of ‘everything we are was brought here from a vastly older and more sophisticated civilisation, just over there’. Sansom’s citation of Japan’s ‘despair at the sight of such [Chinese] profusion, their proud resolve to rival it’ would also easily become zeal to adopt a counterfactual narrative that was more soothing to what was demonstrably a culture-wide inferiority complex.

Amaterasu has a lot to answer for, but Japanese adherence to a myth of divine origin shares a feature with similar cultural delusions worldwide and throughout time. Over the centuries, the Shinto Amaterasu myth gave expansionist Japanese an excuse to insist that their neighbours also acknowledge the divinity of the Japanese royal line, and therefore become willing subjects in such things as *Hakko ichiu* (八紘一宇, loosely, ‘all the world under one roof’) and The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (大東亞共榮圈). Both were officially promulgated at ceremonies in early 1940, which the Japanese military



**Figure 12:** Schoolchildren marching in colonial Taipei in early 1940, “celebrating” the 2,600 year anniversary of Japan’s Chrysanthemum Throne, as the sign on the building behind the children indicates.<sup>21</sup>

government ‘encouraged’ their own citizens and colonial subjects to celebrate as the 2,600-year anniversary of Jimmu’s ascension. In the eyes of the Japanese true believers, not only was Japan’s aggression reasonable, it was divinely ordained (by a war god), and those who were disinclined to accept this version of religion, whether Japanese citizens or the colonised peoples, were more than just recalcitrant – they were heretics.

Japan’s militarism of the 1930s and 1940s had a long pedigree, largely tied to the myth of Amaterasu. Daimyo Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s (豊臣秀吉) attempted conquest of the Korean peninsula in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century was his intended first step toward the domination of all China, and Imperial divinity was a foundational belief underpinning the invasion. Japan’s aggression towards Korea leading up to the first Sino-Japanese War (1894 – 1895) was similarly justified.

#### AMATERASU V ARCHAEOLOGY

‘If only the geologists would leave me alone, I could do very well, but those dreadful hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses.’

*John Ruskin, letter to a friend, 24 May 1851*



Figure 13: The front page of Korea's Chosun Ilbo, 1 January 1940, 35 years into the Japanese occupation. The black-border white characters at top left promote the 2,600-year anniversary, while the pictures are of Emperor Hirohito and his wife.<sup>22</sup>

Ruskin's hammers refer to the geologists of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, who were slowly but surely proving the earth to be far older than the several thousands of years that a literal reading of Genesis indicated. In our day, faith in the divinity of the Japanese imperial line, and by extension the uniqueness of the Japanese themselves, is also steadily more difficult, in the face of an increasing volume of evidence to the contrary, whether from tooth shape, linguistic studies, genetic



evidence, or even ear wax<sup>23</sup>, of the Japanese people's descent both culturally and genetically from the mainland. Often via Korea, which helps explain the Oedipal rage the Japanese have occasionally visited upon their peninsular neighbour over the centuries.

One expression of this point of tension is the, er, turf war waged over access to the tombs of royal ancestors from the Yamato (250 – 710 CE) era. Archaeological exploration at the sites of the tombs (*kofun*, 古墳) has been a contested issue for decades, with Japan's Imperial Household Agency (IHA) forbidding many proposed archeological excursions, stating that such digs might damage the ancient structures, and that such projects are desecration of the graves of direct ancestors of the current imperial family. The IHA permitted scholarly access to Gosashi (五社神古墳) the supposed *kofun* of legendary Empress Jingū (神功皇后, early 3d century attested) to a non-IHA group archaeological team from the Japan Archaeological Association in 2008, three decades after the Association requested the access.<sup>24</sup>

Jingū's purported tomb is a particularly sensitive location, as she may not have existed at all, and certainly didn't bear that name, but she is mythically credited with leading an invasion of Korea, a myth that the early Meiji (明治, 1868 – 1912) leadership were eager to press into service as proof that Japan had ancestral claims on the peninsula.



**Figure 14:** Japan's 1881 one-yen note, with Jingū's supposed image.<sup>25</sup> You may be excused for thinking that Jingū has a bit of a Western cast to her features. The then famous Italian engraver Edoardo Chiossone, invited by the Meiji government to design the country's first banknotes, had no likeness of Jingū to work with (none exists, nor could one really), so he used a female employee at the government's Paper Currency Bureau as a model, and his own Western imagination, to create the image.

Those leaders directed that Jingū's image be on the first-ever stamps in Japan to bear a female likeness, and the first currency in the country to bear any human likeness at all.

There is nothing like a bit of perceived secrecy to foment conspiracy theories – the IHA's obduracy has led many to speculate that the IHA knows excavation would reveal the Korean ancestry of the Japanese imperial line. A scholar at Tenri University, Professor Walter Edwards, dismisses that argument. 'Blood links between Korea and the Japanese imperial family are documented from the eighth century. Even the current emperor has said that he has Korean ancestry.'<sup>26</sup> And Sansom asserts, 'Indeed, by the end of the seventh century, according to the Shojiroku, a peerage of that time, over one-third of the noble families of Japan claimed Chinese or Korean descent.'<sup>27</sup>

Professor Edwards refers to the statement by Akihito that opens this essay. But his explanation somewhat misses the point: while ancient texts ('Well, there's no way to be conclusive about those sorts of things') and statements of sitting emperors ('Well, he's just being polite') may be explained away; tangible archaeological facts are less dismissable. Akihito's confirmation of his Korean ancestry was ignored by all the major Japanese newspapers at the time, except (predictably) the Asahi Shinbun. You may correctly surmise that the emperor's statement gained a bit more attention in the Korean newspapers.

#### **XU FU'S ELIXIR FINALLY DISCOVERED – 2,200 YEARS ON**

The foundation myth less travelled by, about Jofuku and his thousands arriving from the continent with wondrous technology, waits patiently, and sometimes gains a PR boost, as with Akihito's assertion. In 1978, China's then leader, Deng Xiaoping, visited Japan, the first Chinese head of state to do so while in office, and the first ever to meet a Japanese emperor. The doyen of China-Japan scholars, Prof Ezra Vogel, describes Deng's mission:

On arriving in Japan, Deng announced that he had come for three reasons: to exchange the formal Treaty of Peace and Friendship documents, to thank Japanese friends who had worked to improve relations between the two countries, and to find the "magic drug" that Xu Fu had been looking for. [...] Deng explained that the magic drug he was looking for was the secret for how to modernize.<sup>28</sup>

Deng knew that he needn't explain Xu Fu/Jofuku to his Japanese counterparts. And his request was exquisitely well-designed, in that it suggested that China was seeking the magic drug of modernisation as a benefit that Japan could bestow, but also reminded his hosts of the origins of vast swaths of Japanese civilisation. How could the Japanese say No?

In fact, they didn't. Japan was China's number one trading partner by 1975, and in 2009 a scholar from China's Liaoning University of Technology wrote that, 'Over the past 30 years Japan is the largest donor country to China, [...] Japan's official assistance to China stands for over 60% of all bilateral aid provided to China in all donor countries.'<sup>29</sup> While in Japan, Deng met the chairman of Matsushita/Panasonic, as well as Japan's industry leaders in steel and auto manufacturing. His visit inaugurated a rapid rise in China's capabilities in those and many other industrial sectors, supported by Japanese technology and investment.

The elixir had finally been found, and brought back to China, 2,200 years later. And within the legend of Xu Fu/Jofuku the two polities may find a path toward a better future. In discussions about his monumental recent work, *China and Japan: Facing History*, Vogel has related conversations he has had with leaders in both countries. He suggests that quite a few of those leaders in China remain convinced that Japan hasn't sufficiently said "We're sorry" for wartime aggression, while many leaders in Japan feel that China hasn't ever said "Thank you" for the massive economic and technological support Japan provided from the late 1970s.<sup>b</sup>

Ambassador Lee's quote beginning this essay, 'The trouble with the Japanese who believe in myths is that they do not know how and when to stop until something catastrophic happens to them' is often true regardless of which nation's people one substitutes for 'Japanese'. The United States, for example, could be said to be currently suffering a bout of this historical and global malady, there called 'American Exceptionalism'. Akihito, by most accounts an entirely decent man (something not often said of his father) probably went as far as he

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b Actually this was the second time in the century that Japan contributed enormously to China's modernisation, the first being from the 1900s through to the 1930s. For more details, see 'A Wildly Improbably Bookstore' in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, China*, Vol. 79, 2019

could have, as Emperor, in his 2001 birthday statement affirming the true ancestry of Japan's royal line. So what better way for Japan to begin making amends than to prove Lee wrong, by continuing on Akihito's path, jettisoning the Amaterasu myth, and elevating the legend of Xu Fu/Jofuku? Not only the Chinese, but all the world, would surely respect a civilisation that abandons a theological delusion that has led to repeated devastation throughout the region and of its own people. A civilisation that, instead, reveres a quaint, even touching story of a court sorcerer, along with thousands of virginal boys and girls, on a one-way voyage to a better life and land, where their real-life analogues established a culture that became Japan.

If Japan does so, China may find itself in a position of not wanting to say No – in China's case, to intoning a graceful 'thank you', following a direction Deng Xiaoping had already suggested – and the world will have a model for conflict resolution that will resonate for centuries. To borrow from Bonaparte and expand a bit, when East Asia so unites, it will shake the world.

*This essay has been adapted from an ongoing exploration of the history and relationship between China and Japan, entitled Quarrelling Cousins. Previous essays have appeared in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, China, Vol. 78, 2018 ('Fighting the Foreign') and Vol 79, 2019 ('A Wildly Improbable Bookshop') and elsewhere.*

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## CHINA'S FIRST FOREIGN TREATY?

BY JOHN MAN

### ABSTRACT

*In 1689, in the little-known town of Nerchinsk, two European priests helped negotiate what would become China's border with Russia. Jesuit missionaries from Portugal and France advised the Kangxi emperor and acted as intermediaries in sometimes tense discussions with representatives from the Russian court. These negotiations resulted in China's first modern treaty with a non-Asian nation, treating both parties as equals, and established the Amur/Heilongjiang River as the frontier between the two nations.*

Last summer I was researching a book on Hulunbuir, a part of Inner Mongolia in China's far northeast. On Hulunbuir's western and northern borders, Russia is a constant presence. It is a boat-ride away across the Erguna River, which runs along the border to join the Amu. You see tourist information in Russian, eat in Russian restaurants with pretty waitresses dressed up as Russians. In Manzhuli, the border town, much of the place is devoted to Russian tourism, with a wonderful hotel in the shape of a Russian doll, which looks as if it should have other hotels hidden inside. In Russian-style clubs, long-legged Russian gymnasts do extraordinary things on poles. Before the creation of modern China, Russian influence spread across the whole area. Russia wraps around northeast China like a fur hat.

In the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), China's northern border was several hundred kilometres further north. What had happened to make the Chinese lose such a large chunk of Siberia and Manchuria to the Russians? And why did the border between the two vast neighbours run along the Erguna River?

Here's the quick and simple answer. Russia had advanced across Siberia in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, an advance that eventually brought Russian traders, explorers and some extremely ruthless bandits up against local tribes and the Qing dynasty, the Manchus who had seized control of China in 1644. The result was a treaty, signed in the town of Nerchinsk in 1689.

Those are the bare facts, but why the treaty was negotiated in this



small, out of the way settlement is curious. Nerchinsk is deep in the heart of Asia. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with only horses and rough tracks and boats for transport, vast distances and weeks of travel separated this borderland from the two capitals, Moscow (over 4,000 kilometres) and Beijing (1,500 kilometres). Both sides were rivals for the same territory and distrusted the other, neither knew much about the other, no officials on either side spoke both Chinese and Russian, and neither side had much experience in international relations. Although the Manchus were dealing with the Mongols at the time, extending Manchu influence way beyond the Great Wall and reasserting claims to the Yuan Dynasty's borders, the Mongols were not exactly foreign. Their two cultures overlapped, Mongol troops were crucial in the expanding Manchu empire and their royal families intermarried. But the Mongols were notoriously fractious, and forever changing allegiances. The unmapped borderland between Russia and China was a tinderbox. How was it that these two unlikely contestants managed to make peace instead of war? I felt there had to be a hidden story here.

There was.

It is told by two Jesuit missionaries. One, Jean-François Gerbillon, was French. The other, Thomas Pereira, was from Portugal. Besides their own languages, the two were fluent in Chinese and Latin, the language used by all Christian clerics. As Latin-speakers, they could talk with educated Russians. The Emperor Kangxi<sup>a</sup> asked them to act as interpreters and as advisers to his officials. They proved to be much more: scholars, secretaries, diplomats and keen observers of both Chinese and Russian culture. Perhaps their greatest virtue was sheer purity of motive. They wanted the best for everybody – at least, that's how they presented themselves. Both priests kept diaries. Gerbillon's, in French, was published in 1736, but at 35 he was the junior. The diary of Pereira, ten years older, was discovered only in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and published in 1961. Meticulous and vivid, Pereira's diary is the main source for this essay.<sup>b</sup>

This is a very strange story. Here is how the translator of Pereira's diary, Joseph Sebes, puts it:

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a Kangxi is the 'reign period' name of Xuanye, the second emperor (Shengzu) of the Qing dynasty's reign in China. Scholars often call him 'the Kangxi emperor.' I will call him Kangxi to keep things simple.

b Joseph Sebes, *The Jesuits and the Sino-Russian Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689): The Diary of Thomas Pereira, SJ*, Bibliotheca Institutii Historici, Volume XVIII, Rome 1961.

It is rather extraordinary that a small group of Europeans, foreigners to both Russia and China, missionaries of a religion hardly tolerated, if not persecuted in both countries, should have played the role of intermediaries in highly important diplomatic matters between these two great Empires.

‘Rather extraordinary’ is an understatement. To ordinary Chinese, the priests were ‘western barbarians,’ living on the fringes of Chinese society. Traditionally, foreigners were seen as vassals who came to China to bring tribute. Yet Kangxi admired these two and talked to them in private. Russian scholars tend to blame them for the fact that Russia did not get everything they wanted in the treaty, but both sides admitted that there would probably have been no treaty without them, particularly without Pereira, the older one, who at a crucial moment of high drama saved the negotiations. Possibly, he prevented outright war. Pereira is proof that the right person acting at the right moment can define the course of history. Without him, there might be no border along the Erguna.

Just as extraordinary are the details in Pereira’s diary. He reveals the characters, emotions and prejudices of those involved, particularly those of his own team. They were sent to negotiate, but negotiation was a skill unknown to Manchu and Han mandarins. Several times their assumption of superiority threatened to overwhelm the political aims of the two empires. Several times, their destinies hung by threads. Pereira’s reactions – patience, exasperation, flashes of humour – give his account the immediacy of a film script.

Before I tell their story, you need to know the context, to explain how Russia and China first came face to face across the wilderness of Inner Asia.

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Russia had been pushing east for over a century. First came adventurers, the so-called Cossacks who were little more than robbers, eager for furs, principally sable, which they took by force from local tribes. In 1581, one of them asked the Tsar for help, backing his request with 2,400 sable furs. Sable – ‘Siberian gold’ that fetched high prices in Europe – inspired a myth that Siberia was a place of fabulous

wealth. The Tsar, Ivan IV, sent troops, and from then on expansion eastward became a state exercise in empire building. They seized river valleys, crushed tribes, and built forts, which became towns. This was not easy. Tribes fought back (the Buryat Mongols were the toughest). There were retreats, punitive raids, diplomatic approaches, alliances to set tribe against tribe, ‘tributes’ of furs demanded and received. A local base, Yakutsk, was founded on the Lena River in 1632. At last, in 1639 the Russians reached the Pacific coast, in the bay known as the Sea of Okhotsk. Here they heard that further south – along the upper Amur, or Heilongjiang as it is known in China – there were tribes of farmers who traded grain for sable.

Quite rapidly, Russian colonisation spread, leaping from river to river, making tracks through the forest. Unlike the Spanish in South America, they could not enslave communities nor were they driven by missionary zeal. This was a commercial enterprise, based on a tenuous network of forts, tracks, and river-traffic. By 1601, there was a postal service, with horses and post-stations and several hundred couriers. Churches and monasteries were built, encouraging the spread of Christian Orthodoxy.

In July 1643, a southward expedition, consisting of 132 men under Vasili Poyakov, set out from Yakutsk and discovered the Amur, with



Figure 1: The Amur River basin. (<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f/fa/Amurrivermap.png>)

its scattered communities of Tungusic Ewenki reindeer-herders and Daur farmers. After sailing downriver for 600 kilometres southeast and, following the great bend in the Amur, another 700 kilometres northeast, they reached the river's mouth. Then, rather than fight the current, they sailed north up the coast for 600 kilometres, and inland for another 600 kilometres to their base, Yakutsk. The trip had lasted a year. They had lost 50 men to famine and 25 were killed by the warlike Daur. It was this remarkable adventure that opened up the far east for Russia. Poyakov's report was the first the Russians knew of the Amur – the *lower* Amur. Still they had no idea about the upper part, or what lay to the south.

What they didn't know about the region they had sailed through was that the Manchu rulers of China considered this to be in their sphere of interest. They soon found out. Unlike the ejected Ming Dynasty, China's new rulers were ambitious and outward looking, eventually doubling the size of China's territory.

In 1650, a small force of 200 under the trader Yerofei Khabarov (after whom the city of Khabarovsk was named) returned to the Amur, and came across an impressive fortification manned by 50 Manchu horsemen who had been sent by the Emperor to collect tribute. The Russians attacked, took the fort, and sent out messengers to nearby chiefs telling them they should declare their submission to the Tsar. Continuing on down the Amur, they discovered two more tribes, with whom they proposed to spend the winter (1651-2). Appalled at this sudden influx, the tribes decided to claim protection from the Manchus. Horsemen galloped away, covering the 1,500 kilometres to Beijing in (I'm guessing) 15 days.

The Emperor, Shunzhi, authorised a counterattack. In March 1652, even before spring had unfrozen the Amur, 2,000 Manchu horsemen attacked, but were defeated. Guessing he was about to have more trouble, Khabarov headed back upstream, built a fort at Kumarsk (present day Huma in Heilongjiang), and sent for reinforcements.

By chance, Moscow's rulers, who had heard of Khabarov's brutalities, had already decided to take over, leading to increasing clashes and several fruitless attempts to establish links with the court in Beijing. An army of 3,000 arrived. Khabarov was sent back to Moscow. A four-man embassy to Beijing were killed by their Daur guides. In the spring of 1655, a Manchu army of 10,000 besieged Kumarsk, without success. Further Russian explorations followed, up and down the same

section of the Amur (now the eastern border of Heilongjiang). In 1658, the Russian force in Kumarsk was attacked by a Qing fleet of 40 boats. Most of the Russians were either killed or taken prisoner. Only a few survived, eking out a precarious existence in their fort. That was the end of the first Russian invasion of this section of the Amur.

Meanwhile, another expedition had been mounted from Yeneseisk, 2,000 kilometres to the west. The commander, Dmitri Pashkov, proposed to Moscow the founding of a town on the Shilka, which joins the Erguna at the northern tip of Hulunbuir to form the Amur. The Tsar approved, and made Pashkov commander of all forces on the Amur. With 560 men, their 2,000-kilometre march through the Siberian wilderness took two years (with several months spent in winter quarters). In 1656, having reached the Shilka, Pashkov turned up the Nercha River. A few kilometres upstream, he ordered his men to build a fort, the core of the new town of Nerchinsk, which will shortly become the focus of our attention.

Now secure, Pashkov sent 30 men down the Shilka and Amur to find the survivors of the Yakutsk expedition. Only 17 had survived. Without enough to maintain an effective force, Pashkov retreated, leaving only a small garrison in Nerchinsk.

In 1665, a new era opened. A Russian who had killed a local commander fled, with 84 other outlaws, to a Daur village on the Amur. It was run by a man named Albaza. Perhaps because the Russians were such a wild bunch, he allowed them to stay. The little colony thrived, and became known as Albazin<sup>c</sup> (also known by its Mongol name, Yagza). Peasants arrived to farm. The colony of outlaws begged Moscow for a pardon, which was granted. In 1671, Albazin was given a commanding officer. Other settlements arose, inspired by the possibility of trade with China.

The result was a brutal colonisation – a ‘wild east’ equivalent of America’s advance into its ‘wild west’. This region was a no-man’s-land of tribes, soldiers, deserters, runaway serfs and bandits. Local tribes were forced to pay tribute. The Russians, mainly young traders used to violence, seized local women for sex and slavery. Several tribes appealed to the Manchus for protection. But the Manchus, still busy imposing their rule on rebellious areas to the south, could only advise the tribesmen to use ‘scorched earth’ tactics, burning and abandoning their fields, depriving the Russians of supplies.

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c Literally ‘Albaza’s place’ in Mongolian (genitive case)

Traditionally, China had despised the ‘Northern Barbarians’, attempting to control them by excluding them with the Great Wall, by occasional invasion and by making allies of this or that tribe, ‘using barbarians to control barbarians,’ in the words of a stock phrase. But the Manchus were ‘barbarians’ themselves. They had a natural connection with the other main northern barbarian people, the Mongols. Once secure in the south, the Qing<sup>d</sup> – the Manchus’ dynastic name – could focus on the north with a new policy: occupy and protect. For a while, this was more theory than practice, because the Mongols were fighting among themselves and because in 1661 the first Manchu emperor ruling China, Shunzhi, died of smallpox. His successor, Kangxi, who was chosen because he had survived smallpox and would therefore be immune, was a boy of seven under the control of regents. Six years later, at the age of 13, he seized power for himself, and began one of the most illustrious eras in Chinese history.

In 1682, he turned his attention to the north with a two-pronged policy: a military campaign to bring the warring Mongols into line in the west while maintaining peace in the east by negotiating with the Russians. With civil war raging among the Mongols, some considered asking the Russians for help, some the Manchus. The whole of what was then Mongol land – Mongolia itself, Buryatia, Inner Mongolia and the far west (Dzungaria) – was in the balance. The Emperor needed a secure border, within which to assert his authority. For that he needed a peace treaty with Russia.

He did not have much to build on. The Russians had twice (1656 and 1658) tried to establish relations, and been rejected both times, because the envoys refused to comply with Chinese protocol by kowtowing to the emperor, which would have implied Russian inferiority. A third envoy managed to get a polite letter through to Kangxi.

Kangxi replied. Weeks later, his letter reached Moscow. The Tsar set up an official mission, which reached Beijing in May 1676. Again, protocol was the stumbling-block. The mission head, Nicholas Spathar, made a number of sensible requests, asking what languages to use, and suggesting exchanges of ambassadors, merchants, goods and maps. But then it all went wrong. An exchange of gifts was cancelled

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<sup>d</sup> The Manchus used ‘Qing’ and ‘China’ interchangeably in their official documents, to indicate that China was not just the land traditionally occupied by the Han Chinese, it was a multi-ethnic state including Manchus, Han, Mongols, Tibetans and the Turkic people of the Northwest

when Spathar refused to receive his gifts kneeling. Kangxi refused to answer the Tsar's letter because of Spathar's 'disobedience'. Manchu officials insisted Russia would have to admit inferiority, along with other unacceptable conditions. After three months, Sparthar left, empty-handed.

Kangxi lost faith in the idea of peace, and ordered preparations for military action. A dockyard was built on the Amur, over 10,000 sailors were made ready, forces were sent to raid Russian outposts. By 1683, the lower Amur was cleared of Russia bases, except Albazin, defended by 450 men. In 1685-6, Albazin was besieged by the Chinese, abandoned by the Russians, destroyed, re-occupied and besieged again. Several hundred Russians died in its defence.

Moscow at last got the message. Fighting for the Amur was not going to work. The Tsarist government sent envoys to prepare peace-talks. Arriving in September 1686, they asked Kanxi to lift the siege of Albazin. He did so, partially, promising a further reduction when the exotically titled Russian High Ambassador Plenipotentiary Theodore Golovin, arrived in Yakutsk. It took him two years, travelling overland, with much diplomacy taking up his time along the way. One of his stopovers was in Urga, where he failed to win over the Mongolian leader, who was wary of antagonising China.

Talks about talks continued, with slow-motion exchanges of letters across Eurasia. In Beijing, delegates were named, headed by two of the emperor's uncles, Songgotu, and a Han official turned Manchu Bannerman, Tong Guogang. For the first time in history, China was about to negotiate with a foreign power as an equal.<sup>e</sup> Remarkably Kangxi, one of the most brilliant of emperors, had the talent needed. In this many-sided war-game, with his empire as the prize, he understood what he was playing with – soldiers, weapons, tribes, missionaries, merchants, rivers, cities, trade goods. He had a feel for tactics, too. If you want to win *this*, then be prepared to lose *that*.

His delegates felt themselves to be in a strong position, having defeated the Russians and aware that Kangxi was favoured by the Mongols (mainly because, as Buddhists, they saw Kanxi as pro- and the Russians as anti-Buddhist). They wrote a confident note to the

<sup>e</sup> This was the first treaty with a non-Asian state, with people who had never before been in close contact with China. The Chinese made at least 3 earlier treaties with neighbouring states – with the Tibetan Empire during the Tang Dynasty (821/23), with the Khitans during the Song Dynasty (1005), and with the Jurchens during the Southern Song Dynasty (1141). Most of the territory of these peoples had become part of China by the time of the Nerchinsk Treaty.

emperor stating their intentions. 'The territories occupied by the Russians are not theirs, nor is it a neutral zone... The Amur has strategic importance which must not be overlooked.' In other words, they aimed to keep or take over land far beyond the Amur. 'If we do not recover the entire region, our frontier people will never have peace.'

Unfortunately for them, the western Mongols of Dzungaria, a new and growing power under their leader Galdan, chose this moment to invade Khalkha, present-day Mongolia. Possibly, Galdan would seek help from the Russians, which, in the diplomatic game the Chinese were about to play, was not good news.

Kangxi saw the danger, and urged his ambassadors to be flexible. If you insist on keeping Nerchinsk, he wrote, you will leave the Russians with no place to shelter. What then? They will feel threatened, and could turn nasty. 'You should try to retain Nerchinsk. But if they beg for it, you may draw the boundary along the Erguna.' But there was a deeper problem. To continue the gaming metaphor, the Chinese had the advantage of playing on home ground, because the local population favoured China, but his true agenda – peace and a border that both sides respected – needed understanding on both sides. How was that to be achieved, given that neither spoke the other's language?

Kangxi had an answer. He often consulted the two Jesuit priests, Pereira and Gerbillon, a recent arrival in China. Pereira was the key, having been invited to court in 1672, 17 years before the treaty, because of his musical talent. Like Mozart, he could hear a tune once, write it down and play it. He became the emperor's music teacher, and the two played the dulcimer together (an instrument with strings struck with hammers). But he quickly revealed other talents. His Christian colleagues told Rome about 'his extreme dexterity in the handling of affairs... his moral virtues and prudence...his humility and love of poverty'.

Kangxi knew that both men spoke Latin, and so surely did Christians on the other side. The priests would have told him about how to conduct international negotiations, which in Europe were based on the so-called Law of Nations, a body of customary practices dating from Roman times. It was a first draft of what is now called international law. Behaviour at high-level conferences was supposed to reflect innate and universal social values: treating people as equals, allowing them the right of reply, setting aside past hostilities, recording proceedings, keeping promises. Anger, brow-beating, threats,



denigration, insults – all these had to be avoided, a difficult task for mandarins who considered themselves the pinnacle of civilisation. Kangxi had the wisdom to see that he could assure peace with Russia only if old attitudes changed. The two priests would be just the people to bridge the cultures, oversee fair negotiation and produce a Latin version of the treaty acceptable to both sides. This could best be achieved on China's edge, away from its traditional culture and prejudices. His deeply conservative officials would not approve, but so what? This was the emperor's decision. Discreetly, avoiding all publicity, he gave them clothing and gold-embroidered saddles, and urged his uncle, Songgotu, the top official ambassador, to look after them as he would the emperor himself.

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When it left on June 13, the expedition was more like a migration than an embassy. Nine top officials, the two priests and 1,400 others – troops, servants, cooks, grooms and more, with their horses (which with spare mounts made about 4,000), sheep, oxen and camels loaded with tents, two boats, nets for fishing and provisions for five months and a journey of 1,500 kilometres, one way.

Two weeks and 325 kilometres later, they were in Mongol territory, in midsummer, at the large freshwater lake known as Dalai Nur. Pereira noted that 'it contains such an incredible quantity of fish that it looks like a school of sardines,' or 'like ants on an anthill'. When some of them went fishing, using the nets and boats, they caught so many fish that they could not pull the nets into the boats and had to wrestle their catch to the shore.

Northwards, it got tougher. 'These regions are wastelands,' Pereira wrote, 'Almost completely covered in sand and without inhabitants. For 30 or more leagues at a time we saw only a few tents of shepherds tending their sheep, horses and cows, from whose milk they draw their poor subsistence.' Not entirely a wasteland, because they saw white-tailed gazelle by the thousand<sup>f</sup>. They organised a hunt, circling in to trap and shoot as many as possible with bows and arrows, but could get only a few of these athletic animals. Moving on at about 23 kilometres a day,<sup>g</sup> in mid-July they crossed the Kherlen river, flowing

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f There are still many in eastern Mongolia, but none in Hulunbuir.

g This was average for a procession if this size. Kublai Khan's overnight stations between Beijing and Shang Du were about this distance apart.

‘quietly and smoothly’ between its treeless banks south-west of Lake Hulun, the body of water that, with its smaller sister Lake Buir, gives it name to the region).

At this moment Pereira makes his first mention of the Erguna, which will play an important role in the coming negotiations with the Russians, but he makes a mistake. He says ‘After leaving the lake, the Kherlen River continues its course under the name of Argun (Erguna).’ This is not correct. The Erguna flows from the east, makes a sharp bend just 15 kilometres north of Hulun, and then heads away northeast. Pereira must be forgiven for this geographical error – it is hard to do geography on horseback, relying on reports of places you cannot see.

As they approached the edge of the grasslands, the going got worse. It rained. In a flooded river, horses trying to cross on a mat of willows became stuck in the mud and drowned. While the priests crossed in the boats, some of the entourage swam across naked. Others, preserving modesty, tried riding in their clothes, only to have them soaked or swept away. Provisions were lost, and horses panicked, throwing their riders to their deaths in the tumbling water. The mosquitoes were a plague. They drew blood from the animals, and ‘tormented us to such a degree that those who were able were forced to make thin silk gowns with visors or hoods, which covered the heads like a net... I would say that this region could very well be called the kingdom of mosquitoes.’

A week from their destination, messengers began to travel back and forth between the Russians and the Chinese. Teams of several hundred went ahead to cut back bushes and lay branches to make a decent surface over the mud. Now they were in the forested hills of southern Siberia. Pereira was impressed by the otters and the elks.<sup>h</sup>

Then, as they reached the turgid, fast-flowing, clay-coloured waters of the Shilka<sup>i</sup>, 90 boats appeared, manned by 1,000 soldiers and another 2,000 servants, and with canon mounted on their prows. These were assembled on the Amur as part of Kangxi’s military build-up, now hauled upriver against the current to bring his embassy new supplies. Numbering almost 4,000, with several thousand horses and camels, this immense throng camped on flat land opposite the mouth

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h He chose to use their Mongolian name, which he spells ‘Kam dar gan’. This a version of the modern Mongol ‘khandgai.’ Why did he bother? It has no significance in his narrative. The answer, I think, is that he loved such details. He was a natural ethnographer.

i Pereira calls it the Black River, assuming it is the upper Heilong (Black Dragon) or Amur. Today, it is the Shilka, which joins the Erguna some 400 kilometres northeast to form the Amur/ Heilongjiang.

of the crystal-clear Nercha – Nipchu as the Chinese called both town and river. They had been travelling for 49 days. The Russian fort overlooking the confluence of the two rivers had troops, but they were vastly outnumbered by the Chinese, a fact that underlay the Russians' nervousness over the next few weeks. That evening, the ambassadors and their senior officials dined on birds of prey caught earlier. Musicians in the boats celebrated a full moon, answered by Russian trumpeters in the fort – an idyllic start, apparently, to negotiations.

On the next day, August 1, 15 sheep and 10 cows arrived as gifts from the Russian governor. No word yet from the ambassador himself, Alexei Golovin, who had not yet arrived. On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, a mini-embassy came, headed by a 23-year-old. After being given a polite welcome, he asked icily if his hosts had come to make war, given the size of their force. He then suggested that both sides should be represented by the same number of officials and troops.

Pause for a moment. Until this point, despite the tough journey, there had been a sense of optimism. Neither side wanted to continue violence, both sides wanted a treaty, and whatever the differences, both sides must have surely thought that their shared objectives would lead to success. Little did they know. So in what follows look for these two themes: the collapse of trust, the regrowth of trust. It is a paradigm of international relations.

That bureaucratic request for equality of numbers lit a fuse. The Chinese representatives were puzzled. Why not just get on with it? Winter was coming, and there was a hint of impatience in their reactions. The Russians stated that they wanted to begin negotiations on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Ambassador Golovin was due to arrive at any time. The Chinese agreed to this but their anxiety was growing. Ten days? They would have already been there two weeks before the first meeting. Were the 'Moscovites' (as Pereira called them) to be trusted, uncouth barbarians that they were?

More gifts came from the governor – milk, cows, vegetables. In the Chinese camp, suspicion grew. Perhaps the gifts were poisoned. Pereira sighed, picked up a radish, sprinkled a little salt on it, and ate it. The rest watched and waited. The act, in Pereira's words, seemed 'foolishly daring.' When he did not fall down dead, one of officials said 'There is no deception,' and took a radish. The others copied him. As everyone was eating, Pereira explained the need for trust in negotiations: 'One must have faith in the natural goodness of men.'



**Figure 2:** A woodblock print showing Nerchinsk in 1710, two decades after the treaty was signed ([https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/83/UB\\_Maastricht\\_-\\_Ides\\_1710\\_-\\_p\\_57.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/83/UB_Maastricht_-_Ides_1710_-_p_57.jpg))

Days passed. Worries returned. The ‘Moscovite’ ambassador was too slow in coming. The Chinese leader, Songgotu, wrote a letter asking what the problem was. A reply came...

Let me interrupt for a moment. These events had already involved several letters and visits across the river. There would be many more. This was not an easy trip: to get from Nerchinsk, the messenger, probably with an escort, had to ride or walk the three kilometres to the Nercha’s junction with the Shilka, which was some 250 metres wide with a strong current. They must then either take a ferry or tackle the river on horseback, which meant at least a wetting, more likely a total soaking in the water, while hanging on to the horse. It was risky. Frequent downpours raised the water level. Already the Chinese had lost several men and horses, and there would be many more losses. Each crossing must have taken an hour or two, depending on conditions. Remember this when a messenger appears or letters are exchanged in the narrative.

This particular reply was rather sharp in tone. The governor expressed surprise at the size of the Chinese delegation, and suggested that they were a bit too close for comfort. Would they please move further away? To which Songgotu replied impatiently, directly to the messenger, that they had no choice – they needed pasture for their animals, and they were surrounded by rivers, swamps and mountains. Perhaps if the governor could suggest a better campsite, they would move. The governor took the point. They could stay where they were,

but trust had retreated further.

Ambassador Golovin arrived, as the Chinese knew from the sound of trumpets and flutes, but he did not cross the river. Days passed. Then came not a visit or a start to talks, but a request to move some of the boats. The canons on their prows looked threatening. Pereira thought the delay and this petty request were ploys to assert authority. Why hadn't Golovin send his Latin interpreter? What was going on? Clearly, trust was fast draining away.

On the 21<sup>st</sup>, progress: an agreement that both sides should have 300 soldiers. The Russians made two stipulations: only 500 soldiers in the boats, only 300 to disembark, and the boats themselves were to be the same distance from the meeting place as the fort was. Songgotu agreed, but, next day, when the moment came, all the 500 soldiers disembarked on the Russian shore – an obvious sign of suspicion, an obvious threat. Pereira wondered who gave the order. His question embarrassed Songgotu, who had a change of heart and asked Pereira to help. They went to see Golovin, but trust had gone. Golovin said he had no confidence in any agreement.

Back on their side of the river, Songgotu and the other ambassadors surmised that the Russian demand for fewer Chinese troops meant Golovin was about to launch an attack. Pereira was appalled. 'Making myself surgeon to this disease, I said they should have confidence in the Moscovites and that the dispute about the number of soldiers was a question of honour not a plot.' To no avail: 'Everything, even my yelling at them, was unsuccessful.' The Chinese refused point-blank to continue talks. Pereira was at a loss. They had come to make peace, and here they were on the brink of war.

He tried again, with fine words:

Sirs, you must realise that the Moscovites are human beings endowed with reason and are not wild beasts. They are not so perfidious as under the pretext of peace to wish us harm. It would be an insult to the whole world and make us the laughing-stock of the world, if, after all the expenses, pledges and hardships, we returned not having opened the door on which we have knocked and not having met the Moscovites face to face after being in their home.

What would the emperor say? 'It would not, I think, please him in the slightest' – an understatement designed to summon images of heads on poles and bodies torn apart by horses galloping off in opposite directions. Sensing victory, he sealed it with melodrama:

I offer to have the barrel of a Moscovite gun stuck into my ribs for the duration of the conference as a security against all risk, since if they have some evil design, undoubtedly, I, being the most exposed, will be the first to die.

The stunned silence was broken by Songgotu. He praised Pereira for his loyalty, experience and wisdom, and finished, 'I alone shall cross the river with him.'

That did it. The top delegates were ferried over to make preparations. Tents were raised by both parties. The Russians put out a grand table and silk-covered chairs. The Chinese, having assumed that they would sit in the floor in the Chinese style, decided they had to sit in the European fashion and set carpenters to work all night to make benches.

The next day, August 22, dressed in their finest robes, the whole delegation – two ambassadors, the priests, 100 back-up staff, a body of soldiers – were ferried across the river, meeting up with their horses that had swum across. The Russians paraded with equal pomp – troops marched to a band of flutes and trumpets, the bulky Golovin was dressed in furs and silks, accompanied by his aides on horseback. At the main tent, all dismounted together and made their way inside. The top officials sat, the Russians in their silk-covered chairs, the Chinese on their rough benches, the two priests between them. Interpreters stood by, translating Mandarin and Russian into Latin, and vice versa. The Russian-Latin translator, Golovin's aide, was a brilliant Pole named Andre Bielobitski, who had studied philosophy and theology in Cracow and then become Golovin's Latin teacher. As the go-between with Pereira, he would play an important role in what followed.

It was not an auspicious start. The Chinese were irritated by the Russian finery – their nice chairs and two fine silver cups – when they themselves had only lacquered wooden bowls for their tea. Barbarians were not supposed to have such things.

Lacking a chairman to manage proceedings, both sides began 'long useless disputations,' reviewing past letters, expectations, insults and

outbreaks of violence. This was not going as planned. Pereira, ignoring his lack of a formal position, interrupted, and told his officials that they were wasting time – the violence had been mutual. He urged them to move on, to negotiate the division of land, and secure peace.

Agreed.

Songgotu resumed by suggesting that the border be right here on the river Nercha. Golovin said, in effect: no way, this area was Russian and the border should be the Amur.

Deadlock. End of proceedings.

The next day was exactly the same – the river crossing, the parade, the formalities, the proposal, the deadlock. To Pereira, these were opening gambits, maximum demands on which to negotiate. But back in their camp, the haughty Chinese ambassadors, totally unused to opposition, said it was all over. Obviously, they muttered, the Russians didn't want peace. Better treat them as enemies, and go back to Beijing. For the second time, Pereira noted, 'war was practically declared.'

But he insisted that neither the Emperor nor the Tsar would want this! Golovin was only trying to fight his corner with normal negotiating tactics! This was all down to the inexperience of 'our ambassadors... Neither the Tartars [Manchus] nor the Chinese had negotiated in this manner before.' Don't make mountains out of molehills, he said. Don't confuse high-class people like these with ruffians. Some Chinese are thieves and drunkards, but that doesn't mean that all are. Same with the Moscovites. Don't despair! We can get this done! Again, the emperor's uncle Songgotu spoke up in support, persuading the others to let Pereira do the negotiating.

Towards Pereira and Gerbillon (almost always together) Golovin was friendly and open to suggestions. Eager for clarity, he worked through his Latin translator, Bielobitski, to avoid misunderstandings. One matter Golovin wanted to be made clear: They were discussing Mongol territory and the Mongols had resisted the Russian advance, so no Mongols were to be involved in these talks. Pereira agreed. As usual when great powers negotiate, lesser powers are excluded. The Mongols were to be crushed, or absorbed, or ignored.

Pereira, with Gerbillon, went back to the Chinese envoys, and reported his progress. Now, at last, they got down to the core issues. China wanted Russia to abandon claims south of the Amur. Russia wanted China to abandon claims to the west and north of the river. All this was proposed in exchanges of messages carried by the long-

suffering Bielobitski back and forth across the river. All seemed set fair for another, perhaps final conference.

And then, in the conference tent on the 27<sup>th</sup>, it all went horribly wrong again. The problem was Albazin. China wanted Russia to give it up, Russia refused. The fort was a red line for both, and amazingly no one had talked about it before this, each side having been locked into their own assumptions. China had twice taken it and, having in their view kindly allowed the Russians back, saw it as rightfully theirs, so assumed that Russia would give it up. Russia saw it as their property temporarily 'lent' to China. The ambassadors were eye-ball to eye-ball, and neither blinked. 'We concede nothing,' said Golovin, coldly. 'You ask too much.' The conference broke up. Pereira left with tears in his eyes, exhausted.

Back in camp, some of the Chinese were incensed at the failure. They made plans to cross with the whole army and blockade Nerchinsk, forcing compliance by threatening violence. Making peace by making war? This was a crazy solution. But Pereira, like a good poker player, kept cool. 'I still hoped the Moscovites would send people to look for us as they did not want to return empty-handed.'

He guessed right. He had just fallen asleep in his tent when he heard a yell from the emperor's uncle: 'The Moscovites are coming!' Golovin had blinked. It was the Latin interpreter, Bielobitski, with startling news. The ambassador wanted a third conference. As Pereira learned later, he had been pressurised by the governor to 'deny everything' as a negotiating tactic, and realised he had made a dreadful mistake. Emotion had trumped reason. Now he had a proposition, which he would make in the morning.

Pereira, a great negotiator, at once seized on the change of attitude. Perhaps Golovin had decided to agree that the Russians would hand over Albazin. He had declared it to be a red line, and it really wasn't. But perhaps by the morning he would have regained his nerve. Deals are made when both sides are so exhausted that they will do anything to get the deal done. Pereira made one more push. The morning, he said, would be too late. The time for propositions was right now, in the middle of the night.

Bielobitski agreed to deliver the message, but added 'Most Revered Father, assist us.' He was addressing Pereira as Christian to Christian, saying in effect 'Let's work together.' He left, and Pereira was 'overcome with joy.'



But the deal had not been finalised. His bosses were determined to make a river-crossing with their troops, and planned to meet up with some Mongol rebels to seize a dominant position in case of war. Yet they hesitated and asked Pereira what they should do. That placed him in a quandary. He said he was just a priest, not authorised to make such decisions. 'I said that the Emperor had sent me only to negotiate peace which had nothing to do with crossing the river.' Your Excellencies, he said, you have your own instructions, so follow them. But how? What was for the best? They had no idea, and begged for his guidance. For almost an hour they argued, in an agony of indecision and wasted time.

Finally, Pereira understood the problem: they were scared of failure – a botched advance, a lost battle, a failed treaty. They knew that he, a man noted for his honesty, would tell all to the emperor if asked, and the emperor would blame them, and they would end up with their heads on posts. Their only escape was to make sure he would be to blame. They could do this by refusing to make the decision, thus forcing him to make it for them. This was his dilemma: to offer any advice would be to exceed his authority. And if he spoke, whatever he said might lead to disaster – deaths in the river, a battle, perhaps war, and goodbye to the treaty. And if he survived, would he get back to Beijing? If so, what sort of a reception would he receive from his religious bosses and the emperor? Then he saw a way out. 'God,' he wrote, 'Who is always at hand to help, came to my rescue.' Whatever happened, he assured them, he would not tell the emperor. And 'with this, they were content.'

They then did what they had decided. Leaving the ambassadors behind in the darkness in case Bielobitski returned, a contingent of troops took boats, sneaked a few kilometres downriver, crossed the river and set themselves up on a mountain overlooking the town. Back in the camp, the dawn brought no sign of Bielobitski, so the priests followed the troops, escorted by a few horsemen. It had been raining heavily (we know this from Gerbillon, who recorded the weather every day). Crossing the swollen Shilka with horses, 'some persons and beasts perished, which is the usual loss in similar transactions.'

Meanwhile poor Bielobitski had arrived at the Chinese camp, found everyone gone, discovered their foolish plan, and followed them. Pereira, having caught up with the army, saw Bielobitski striding along a mountain track, and, guessing why he had come, ran to him

in delight, 'asked him everything all at once', grabbed his hand and led him to Songgotu and the other envoys. Three things were instantly clear: 1) He would have to report all this to his superiors; 2) If the truth came out – that the Chinese had mobilised their army to get their way, all would be lost; and 3) Bielobitski was eager to help.

If this were in a film, it would make a charming scene. I have slightly modified Pereira's words:

BIELOBITSKI  
(to the ambassadors)

Why are you here?

PEREIRA  
(aside, to the ambassadors)

Reply prudently. If you don't you put everything at risk.

SONGGOTU  
(to Bielobitski)

Ah, um, we ran out of pasture. We are here to look for fodder.

BIELOBITSKI  
In that case why are you in armour?

SONGGOTU.  
It is our custom. And... it's a mark of personal dignity...  
(emphatically)  
...indicating *no hostile intention*.

BIELOBITSKI  
In that case, why occupy a high place in the mountains with all your squadrons?

SONGGOTU  
The place is infested with Mongols. We don't know the country. To feel safe, we sent them on ahead to make a campsite.

Unfortunately, it was not quite so dramatic, because Bielobitski was talking to Pereira in Latin and Pereira was translating into Chinese. Still, Bielobitski accepted these outrageous excuses with a straight face, and invited Pereira and Gerbillon back to his headquarters to sort out a few details for the conference.

The Chinese, as usual, suspected the worst. It took Pereira an hour to convince them there was no risk, reminding them that it was they, not the Russians, who were guilty of duplicity. Bielobitski listened, unable understand a word.

No, no, said the Chinese ambassadors – Pereira treats them as if they were a chorus, speaking in unison – we cannot let you go in case they take you hostage and force you to make conditions we cannot accept.

At this, Pereira burst out laughing. If the Russians did that, he said, they would brand themselves as ‘barbarians, unworthy of human treatment.’ After an hour of such arguments, he had an idea: what if only one went? They agreed, and decided on Gerbillon, so that if he vanished Pereira could take responsibility. Off they went. Pereira and his ambassadors settled down to wait for his return, while Pereira berated them yet again for threatening the treaty and for their lack of trust.

Time passed. No doubt many dozed, recovering from so much tension and lack of sleep. At one point, Songgotu, still immovably distrustful, suggested a wager to Pereira: ‘If the treaty is signed, I’ll give you a good horse. If not, you give me a clock.’

‘I don’t have a clock.’

‘Well, pay me back when you get one.’

‘A good horse,’ said Pereira loudly, so that the crowd, which he guessed numbered over 100, could all be witnesses. ‘One that is worthy of your status.’

Songgotu agreed. To a round of applause and laughter, he added, ‘I would gladly lose.’

After a few hours, Gerbillon returned, to everyone’s relief, with a list of conditions for the next meeting. Fears dissipated. Pereira apologised, humbly and at length, for berating his colleagues. And everyone happily made their way back to camp.

On the next day, the 29<sup>th</sup>, Bielobitski appeared to discuss protocol, the main issue being the need for equality. Once that was agreed, other details took three more days to sort out. Then came a major question

of geo-politics. The Russians wanted to discuss a mountain range about 600 kilometres to the northeast. Now known as the Stanovoy Range, these mountains were unexplored at the time. About the only thing anyone knew about them was that they divided north-flowing rivers from those that flowed into the Amur basin and the Pacific, which made them a 'natural' part of China – for the Chinese. Not so for the Russians. They wrote a stern note: 'If you rise up against us, we, confident in the help of God and in the justice of our cause, shall defend ourselves to the limit of our energies.' The Chinese insisted. They had more troops, and Russia had no stomach for yet more arguing. Besides, the Chinese had a point – Manchuria was the homeland of China's Manchu rulers and its minorities (Daur, Ewenki, Tungus and Mongol) already paid tribute to Beijing. The Russians relented and let the Chinese have their way.

By now, both sides saw the end in sight. The two priests and Bielobitski spent four days and nights almost without sleep, 'translating at night what was conceded by day.' Both sides saw them as 'angels of peace.' One last back-and-forth, applauded by their guards as if they were finishing a marathon, and the deal was done. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, 'the whole night was spent in merrymaking, with lights and lanterns burning in the camp.'

Well, not *quite* done. On the next day, even as the Chinese delegation approached Nerchinsk for the signing, the Russians dithered over the final versions and the number of copies and who should sign which ones and in what order. It began to rain. Golovin sent the Chinese ambassadors a tent, with a polite apology. To Pereira, the delay was beyond belief. To quell the return of old suspicions, he broke away, rode to his team to urge patience, then ran back, resting to regain his breath, before reporting to Golovin. He was, he said, 'the doctor of two patients, one impatient, the other sickeningly slow.' A final sprint, and Pereira, panting and perspiring, urged the Chinese forward, slowly, so that their approach would inspire the Russians to finish their last-minute fiddling.

Still there was a question of seating. Knowing his people had been embarrassed by their bench, Pereira suggested that the Russians too sit on a bench instead of their silken chairs. Golovin understood. To make all equal, he arranged a round, rug-covered table, with benches, and, at Pereira's suggestion, stepped outside to welcome the Chinese in. Two Qing ambassadors, five officials and the two priests sat, with nine Russians.

Now that they saw the two copies – in Latin, the official version – another dispute arose, another delay. At the top were the two rulers, tsar and emperor, in that order. It was surely an insult to place the emperor in second place, muttered a Chinese official. No, said another, it's all right, because all Chinese know our emperor is in fact supreme.

Dusk was falling. Candles were lit. Then both copies were read out loud, to compare them, an exercise that went over the heads of most, since few present knew Latin.

At last, came the signatures, the Chinese first on their copy, the Russians first on theirs. In the treaty's hopeful words, it promised 'perpetual peace between the two empires. As proof to all, it would be engraved in stone in Russian, Chinese and Latin, 'which shall be placed as everlasting monuments on the frontiers of both empires.'

It was over. Servants brought plates of sweets, wine, vodka and, to the delight and amazement of the Chinese, 'a white loaf of sugar from the Island of Madeira', which was quickly finished as they all took a piece to show friends back in camp. The Russian band played, the Russians sang, ambassadors embraced, and at midnight the Chinese, lit by candles, crossed the river for the last time.

The next day was for rest, with an exchange of presents: among them, four watches and the two silver cups from Golovin, silks and one of the emperor's decorated saddles from the Chinese. Golovin invited the two priests for a farewell meal. On arrival they saw about 100 Mongol prisoners, taken when the Russians put down a recent rebellion. That gave Pereira an idea. China claimed many Mongols as subjects, and would claim many more in their newly acquired lands. A little generosity would be a good public relations exercise for Qing rule. Pereira asked Golovin to free them, to which he consented. Pereira then did something extraordinary. He spotted a little Mongol orphan boy, and decided to adopt him. Again Golovin agreed. Pereira gave no details, except to say that he took the boy to Beijing, where he caught smallpox and died.

Finally both sides were able to begin their long return journeys. Songgotu sent a messenger ahead to tell the emperor the good news and praise him for his wisdom in choosing the priests, 'to whom, we are not ashamed to say, we owe everything.' Praise, admiration and thanks rained down on them. Without them, there would have been no treaty, and what then? War, ignominy, ruin, disgrace.

The journey back was as hard as the one coming. Crossing one

river three men drowned, crossing another, no less than 14, with one 'unnoticed until his horse turned up rider-less.' A month later, they met the emperor, who had come north to meet them. He was well prepared for them, offering effusive thanks, holding a feast and even, in an unprecedented gesture, distributing food to the troops.

So to Beijing, a long debriefing for the two priests, and back to normal life with their Jesuit colleagues.

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The main result of the treaty was peace, but it had many other consequences. It fixed a new frontier along the Erguna and Amur, handing Russia a slab of land the size of England to the west of the Erguna, which China had claimed on the opening day of the conference. It allowed Russia to continue colonising, but gave China Manchuria, which it held for 150 years, until Russia seized it. In two so-called 'unequal treaties,' at a time when China was being savaged by western powers, Russia finally gained the land they had reluctantly abandoned in Nerchinsk: the fine words of those 'everlasting monuments,' the trilingual stone engravings of the treaty supposed to be placed on the borders had been forgotten. The Russian fort, Albazin (Yagza), was demolished. The treaty also allowed the Qing to focus on controlling the Mongols, particularly the Dzungars. Their aggression against Mongolia itself led Kanxi to extend Manchu rule there, which lasted for over two centuries. As he said, looking back almost 2,000 years, 'Of old, the Qin dynasty heaped up earth and stones and erected the Great Wall. Our dynasty has extended its mercies to the Khalkha [Mongolia] and set them to guard the northern territories. They will be even stronger and firmer than the Great Wall.' The effects of these words are visible today in Mongolia, where the Manchus are remembered not as cultural 'cousins,' but as Chinese imperialists – an attitude that inspired Mongolian anti-Chinese revolutionaries to embrace Russia in the 1920s.

The treaty of Nerchinsk was the high point of Pereira's career. His work was well rewarded with an edict of toleration for the Jesuits (1692). He worked on in China for another 19 years until his death, and was given a splendid funeral by the emperor.

The treaty remained remarkably little known. In China, Kangxi, careful not to create opposition among his traditionalist officials, did

not publish the text in Chinese. No Chinese secretaries took notes, no accounts of the negotiations appeared in China. In Russia, the treaty was regarded as a defeat, best forgotten. Golovin wrote a report, but it has never been published. All this explains why there is so little written about the treaty and why its significance is not more widely appreciated.

If you are ever on the banks of the Erguna, look over the invisible frontier running down the middle of the river, with Russia stretching to the horizon on the other side, and remember that the border is there thanks to the wisdom of a Manchu emperor, two western priests, and China's first modern international treaty.

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# ‘THE WALL OF GENGHIS KHAN’

## PART 1: EXPEDITION IN THE SOUTH GOBI

BY WILLIAM LINDESAY

THIS IS a series of two articles on expeditions to Mongolia, to examine sections of the so-called ‘Wall(s) of Genghis Khan.’ In this first article, the author visits a section of the structure in the southern part of the Mongolia, close to the border with China.

### ABSTRACT

*Contemporary maps of Mongolia mark the location of several long wall structures. They are widely distributed and all bear the name Chinggiisiin Kherem: ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’. In Omnögovi Aimag the ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’ aligns closely with a structure on the southern side of the Mongolia–China border. Scholars in Great Wall Studies in China have long regarded the Wall on their side as dating from the Western Han Dynasty (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), and have asserted, without field investigation, that the structure on the Mongolian side is of the same origin. I organised an expedition to gather evidence to confirm or disprove this assumption. My aim was to compare the character of the Omnögovi Wall with remains of the Western Han Great Wall in China. Samples of saksaul wood were taken from the body of the Wall in Omnögovi to carry out radiocarbon-14 dating tests. Results showed that the wood was cut in the 11-12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. This finding suggests that the Wall of Genghis Khan in Omnögovi was built by the Xixia (Western Xia), a dynasty not previously known through historical records to have built a Great Wall defence.*

### PREAMBLE

In 2011, 2012 and 2016 I conducted expeditions in Mongolia to investigate the remains of linear defence structures of extraordinary length. Paving my way to these structures was *The Chingghis Khaan Historic-Geographic Atlas*.<sup>1</sup> This is a geographical interpretation of *The Secret History of the Mongols*,<sup>2</sup> the biography of Genghis Khan (1162-1227 AD) written in the early mid–13<sup>th</sup> century. Each map in this atlas features swerving red lines spearheaded by an arrow. Their routes record the journeys of a man born in 1162 AD as the boy Tiemujin. By



1206 he had become Genghis Khan, the unifier of a Mongol nation. At the time of his death in 1227, aged 65, Genghis Khan had initiated an Asia-wide conquest, that would be continued by his descendants, and see the Mongols establishing the largest unified empire in history.

The atlas, which was produced in 1990, aroused my curiosity by its description of a rounded, rampart-like symbol depicting a fortification that was underscored with the name 'Wall of Genghis Khan'. Study of Mongolian provincial maps showed the remains of other long walls in Mongolia, totalling seven sections. Their remote locations, wide distribution and above all, association with the name of a notorious conquerer, sparked a slew of questions. As Hadrian's Wall records the name of its Roman emperor 'builder', did the name 'Wall of Genghis Khan' indicate that he had authorised the building of these structures? If so, why was this nomadic warrior and a renowned conqueror not known as a builder of defensive structures? Moreover, if he had these Walls built, who was he attempting to fend off? Or were these Walls misleadingly named, built by others for other purposes? Given their wide distribution, it seemed likely that Mongolia's 'Walls of Genghis Khan' had different origins and purposes. It also seemed probable that some were 'Great Walls Outside China' left standing in Mongolia as a result of territorial claims over the millennia.

#### EARLY MAPPING & RECENT RESEARCH

Mongolia's earliest known maps were produced in the early 1700s when today's Mongolia was part of the Great Qing Empire (1644–1911), though none of the resulting maps contained in *The Jesuit Atlas of Kangxi's Realm*<sup>3</sup> show any Wall of Genghis Khan. The geography of Mongolia was detailed further in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, yet neither the *Atlas of the Chinese Empire*<sup>4</sup> published 1908, nor *Stanford's Map of the Great Siberian Railway*<sup>5</sup> published 1907, show any 'Wall of Genghis Khan'. It is likely that the structures remained unknown because they are located in the uninhabited Gobi desert or in sparsely habited steppe-land, far from then-established trading or communications routes. According to my research on maps published in Great Britain, the term 'Wall of Genghis Khan' appears in the 1960 edition of *The Oxford School Atlas*<sup>6</sup>, though oddly the name is used in naming a fortification that is located south of the Mongolian border, in China. Published in the 1970s, both *The Times Atlas of China*<sup>7</sup> and *The Times Atlas of the World*<sup>8</sup> feature and name a structure in the

northeast of Mongolia as the ‘Rampart of Genghis Khan.’<sup>9a</sup> The first modern cartographic survey of Mongolia was carried out after the end of the Second World War when the country became a satellite state of the USSR. I used versions of these Soviet-made maps, reprinted in 2003, during this expedition.<sup>10</sup>

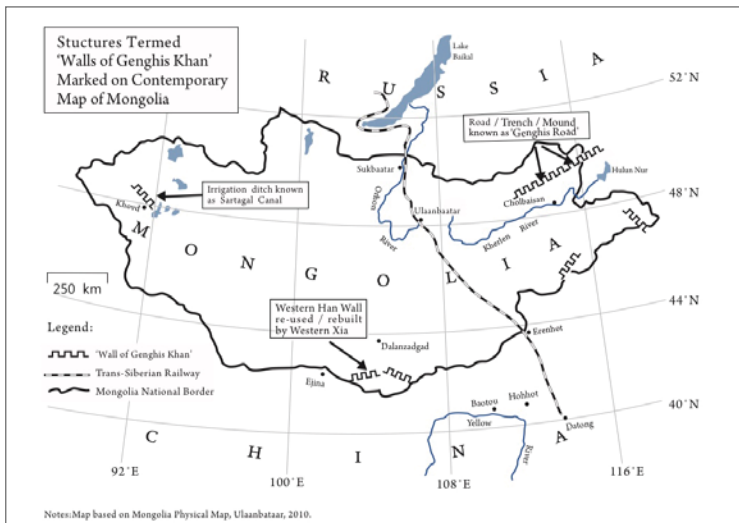
Research on the Wall of Genghis Khan in Mongolia has been pioneered by Tudevin Baasan, a geographer specialising in desert studies. In the course of his extensive fieldwork he encountered Walls of Genghis Khan in various parts of the country and published a short monograph ‘*What is the Chinggis Wall?*’<sup>11</sup> in 2006, which may be considered the most detailed written research to date. Professor Baasan devotes a page of his monograph to ‘Chinggis Wall Abroad Mongolia’, in which he notes that some of the Walls of Genghis Khan approach and abut Mongolia’s international borders and even continue through the neighbouring territories of the Russian Federation and China.

#### **BORDER WALL GEOGRAPHY, NOMENCLATURE & EXPEDITION FOCUS**

Based on geographical and archaeological surveys carried out in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the locations and lengths of the various dynastic Great Walls of China are depicted on a comprehensive map published in *Love China, Protect the Great Wall*.<sup>12</sup> This map, and others before it published in historical atlases and shown in museums, show a few lines of Great Walls nearing the China-Mongolia border, but coming to abrupt halts, without explanation. One exception is *Zhongguo Shigao Ditu Ji*,<sup>13</sup> *The China History Reference Map Collection*, which shows the Western Han Great Wall crossing the China-Mongolia border. In the main though, Chinese researchers have traditionally shied away from the study of the likely continuation of Great Walls into neighbouring states.

Figure 1 summarises and simplifies the wide distribution of the Walls of Genghis Khan in Mongolia. There are remains present in four regions: the far west, northeast, southeast and far south, totalling approximately 900 kms in length. Both national and regional maps published in Mongolia show that, apart from the most westerly Wall of Genghis Khan, in Khovd Aimag, all venture close to or appear to cross the Chinese border, into its Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. In Omnögovı Aimag (South Gobi Province), the most southernmost part of Mongolia, a regional map shows Walls on both sides of the

a This particular fortification is the subject of the second field report within this journal.



**Figure 1:** Map of Mongolia locating the principal remains of the Walls of Genghis Khan. Drawn by William Lindesay

international border, designated with different names and symbols.

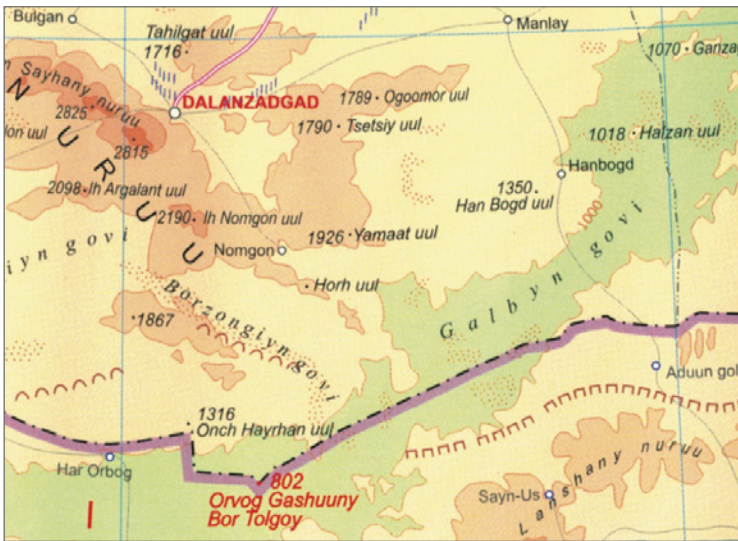
Within China the structure labelled ‘The Great Wall’ is represented by a right-angled battlement symbol, which is the standard style used by Chinese cartographers. It appears to continue, with a break in the vicinity of the actual border, into Mongolia, where the structure bears the name *Chinggisiiin Kherem*, indicated by a semi-circular symbol. Despite the name change, it appears that the ‘Great Wall community’ of researchers in China have assumed that the Walls on both sides of this border are in fact the remains of one and the same structure. In other words, the Wall of Genghis Khan to the north of the border is of Western Han age, and has been left marooned outside today’s People’s Republic of China over the past twenty one centuries due to a change in absolute border position. However, it appears no research has been undertaken to back up that assumption with solid evidence.

The primary source material used in Great Wall Studies are the ruins of the structure itself. Fieldwork was needed to collect data about the Wall of Genghis Khan, including its appearance, building materials, architectural design, distinguishing features and any indications of military strategic application. This would allow a cross-border comparative study of the relatively adjacent Wall of Genghis Khan and Han Great Wall between Omnögovı and Wulate Houqi.

Nowadays, the Wall of Genghis Khan in Omnögovı can be viewed



**Figure 2:** Satellite view of the Wall in Omnogovi Note that some lengths of the Wall show narrow shadows which indicate preservation of remains with a greater height. Photo courtesy of Google



**Figure 3:** Mongolian map showing Walls on both sides of the border.

on Google Earth. It appears as only a very faint linearity, although its straightness makes it highly conspicuous as it crosses terrain that is devoid of anything else man-made. Using Google Earth, the route of the Wall can be traced across Omnogovi Aimag. The satellite view shows numerous breaches in its line, where the structure has been swept away by muddy torrents, or buried under them, during occasional flash floods that must have swept down from the nearby

mountain ranges. Study of the Wall on Google Earth as shown in Figure 2 revealed some select lengths of the structure that appeared to be underscored by a thin, dark line. These dark areas were shadows cast by the greater height of the structure in comparison to adjacent remains. I pinpointed these better-preserved sections as the target area of my intended investigation.

#### **EXPEDITION LOGISTICS**

The organisation of the first expedition in 2011, into the border region of Omnögovı faced two major challenges. Firstly, the section of Wall of most interest lay within the remotest and widest part of the Gobi Desert. Secondly, the Wall in Omnögovı lies almost entirely within a 100 km border buffer zone of no access. The impetus for the bilateral strengthening of border security by the Chinese and Mongolian governments came from a spate of attempts made by North Korean nationals hoping to gain political asylum. After traversing the Yalu River, which forms the border between China and North Korea, they try to cross the Gobi into Mongolia – from there they are able to gain access to Seoul. My expedition faced challenges including gaining official access permission from Mongolia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, finding experienced guidance in the uninhabited Gobi, and equipping our modern caravan with the necessary provisions for a motorised entry into the Omnögovı area and a safe exit from it. I collaborated with Professor Baasan: our joint expedition consisted of seven persons and two vehicles. From Ulaanbaatar we drove south for two days to Dalanzadgad, the provincial capital of Omnögovı, where we were resupplied with fuel and water. From there we travelled south, into the Gobi, east along the line of the Wall, and then north back to Dalanzadgad, a triangular route of approximately 450kms.

#### **DESERT MORPHOLOGY & ECOLOGY**

Gobi-type desert is found straddling much of the China-Mongolia border, stretching east to west for a distance of 1,500 kms. Between Dalanzadgad in Omnögovı and Zhongwei in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, the Gobi is approximately 500 kms in width.

On our approach to the Wall, we encountered a range of desert terrain and scenery. Large expanses of stony plains dominated, while micro-landscapes of medium-sized sand dunes existed in pockets. Dark ranges of hills rimmed the horizon. Individual mountains

appeared like islands, standing out of a vast sea. There was much evidence of dramatic fluvial action in the form of shallow, dry watercourses and wide stony alluvial fans. The desert floor was covered with an assortment of colourful stones: jet black, creamy white, blood red and dark green were predominant. Some were elongate and angular retaining their overall crystalline shape, others rounded by tens of thousands of years' weathering, others gnarled, some squashed and textured like bark. These were tree branch fragments, petrified by lava spewing from volcanoes some 320 million years ago during the Carboniferous Period, now forming the cone-shaped mountains that dotted the landscape.

Related to the geology was the vegetation, sometimes non-existent, sometimes struggling, sometimes prospering. Coming over the brow of one hill we encountered an oasis-like swathe of greenery filling a wide, hidden gully. The sandy terrain was colonised by a saksaul 'forest' (*Haloxylan ammodendron*), some specimens of which stood four metres in height. Saksaul grows in stands, or island clumps, at least ten metres apart, since the roots of the woody shrub spread out and around to reach both deep groundwater and shallow moisture from any brief falls of rain that may be expected once or twice per year. Rhubarb, native to the Gobi, was a familiar yet surprising sight.

### THE GENGHIS KHAN WALL

Arriving at the GPS co-ordinates that marked the location of the 'shadow-casting Wall' we observed a section of the Wall of Genghis Khan that stood more than two metres in height and extended for several hundred metres in length. An important reason for arriving on target at this location was to fulfil a precondition of our access permits: it had been arranged that, on this day, at these co-ordinates, officers of the Mongolian Army would intercept us, check our paperwork and brief us on the local conditions. We met two officers as planned, who permitted us to continue with our expedition. They kindly offered to accompany us on the next day to the place where the Wall ascended a mountain and to inspect nearby associated fortifications.

For the rest of the day we studied the Wall before us. At first observation it bore a distinct similarity to sections of the Western Han Wall extant in the Dunhuang region of Gansu Province, far away on the Chinese side, made from earth and *luwei* (reeds) and another composition made of earth and *hongliu* (tamarisk) – see Figures 4 &





**Figure 4:** Western Han Wall located in Guazhou, Gansu Province, China, made of tamarisk branches and earth. Photo by William Lindsay



**Figure 5:** Western Han Great Wall located near Yumenguan, Gansu Province, China, made of reed stalks and earth. Photo by William Lindsay



**Figure 6:** The author examines wooden material at a section of Genghis Khan Wall in Omnögovı consisting of saksaul branches and red earth. Photo by James Lindsay

5 respectively. Close inspection revealed that the Wall here contained the most dominant of local drought-resistant woody plant material, branches from saksaul that we had seen en route (Figure 6). Its branches were bound within a host fabric of earth of a distinctive colour.

In the low-angle, softer afternoon and dawn sunlight, and with more shadows, the linear extent, morphological texture, cross-sectional form and natural colour of the Wall could be much better appreciated. I paced it out at 330 strides, approximately 350 metres in length, as shown in Figure 7. In terms of extant width, the derelict



**Figure 7:** Western Han Great Wall located near Yumenguan, Gansu Province, China, made of reed stalks and earth. Photo by William Lindsey The most-finely preserved and continuous stretch of saksaul and red earth Wall investigated on the expedition.  
Photo by William Lindsey



**Figure 8:** This section of Wall lies within the restricted zone close to today's present-day Mongolia-China border, as can be seen by the black line denoting such on the map being studied by the author. Photo by James Lindsey



structure in cross section was composed of two parts, the decayed and fallen upper structure of the Wall that was now strewn as rubble at the base of the standing Wall, and the standing Wall itself.

The maximum height of the Wall was recorded at 2.30 metres. Saksaul constituted about 30% of the fabric, and its branches were highly variable in size, ranging from short spindly twigs less than one cm thick to long, solid branches, and occasionally, even logs. The longest branches were up to 60cms in length and 4cms in diameter. Exposed examples were of bleached, bone-white wood, and appeared untrimmed, that is they had many offshoots. Some of the woody material found up on the top of the structure still retained bark covering of a distinct copper colour. This appeared to be quite a different type of wood to saksaul.

A second striking feature was the red earth that constituted the main fabric of the Wall. It remained cemented to the saksaul branches, suggesting that the red earth was wet at the time of construction. I surveyed the surroundings in order to locate the builders' possible source of the distinctive red earth, and soon spotted a likely candidate, a large hillock some 300 metres away, on the south side. It appeared then that the three main building materials of this Wall were earth, water and saksaul wood. A section of Wall extending for hundreds of kilometres would have thus required a large deployment of labourers working for a considerable time. Water supply, not only for use within the Wall itself, but to sustain the workforce, must have been a major,



**Figure 9:** Most of the Wall in Omnögovi exists as a line of wind-blown sand that has collected around the extant branches and rocks of the original structure. Photo by William Lindsey

but clearly not an insurmountable logistical problem.

A short distance to the east of the 'Wall casting shadows' we found the remains of a structure that was much less impressive, and appeared to have been made of different materials.

It was devoid of any binding red earth or similar. All that appeared to remain was a severely eroded line of the Wall marked by its hardest parts, saksaul branches and rocks, around which wind-blown sand had gathered. The rocks were igneous in character, of various colours and composed of diverse crystal structures: some were fine-grained volcanics that had cooled on the surface of the earth, while others were larger grained magmatic that underwent cooling underground. They did not appear to be 'field' stones, gathered in the vicinity, perhaps having being transported here by flash floods. Their sharp edges seemed to indicate that they had been produced by cutting actions, by labour using strong and sharp iron tools. This suggested that a quarrying 'industry' was required to produce them, a process that would have demanded a well-organised workforce and transportation system.

One question that arose for us concerned the stationing of the men, both when the Wall was being built and during its presumed operation, was the absence of watchtowers along this Wall. Along the best-preserved sections of the Han Wall in China, the Wall is dotted with *fengsui*, high watchtowers.

These structures provided their occupant guards with high vantage points to detect enemy activity in the desert beyond. The location and relative alignment of towers also functioned as an ingenious optical telemetry system, a term proposed by archaeologist Aurel Stein<sup>14</sup>. Being strategically located with sight of one another, and exploiting the relief of the land, guards deployed thereon could signal their sighting of danger by igniting nearby beacons. In the course of occupying towers for many decades, even centuries, a variety of daily use articles were broken and abandoned: items were simply tossed out to fall beside the towers. Their subsequent burial by wind-blown sand combined with the perfectly dry climate of the Gobi resulted in such objects being preserved from c.110 BC and many fine examples were found by Aurel Stein. The translation of inscribed wooden slips known as *hanjian* has provided a vivid picture of life on the Han frontier some 2,100 years ago.

## SAMPLES FOR RADIOCARBON DATING

I only came across one artefact: a short fragment of what appeared to be rope, partly in the fabric of the Wall and partly exposed. However, as a consolation we had at our disposal a method of chronological dating unavailable to Aurel Stein back in 1906: radiocarbon-14 dating.<sup>b</sup> I collected samples of woody material from the base, middle and top of the structure to test. Radiocarbon dating would reveal when the saksaul was cut, and presumably used in the Wall soon after.

### ‘HIGH MOUNTAIN WITH WALL’

The next day, under army escort, we left our camp and made our way west. We were following the scant remains of the Wall towards the only other feature or place named on my map: *Khermiin Undur Uul*, ‘a high mountain with Wall’ which lay about 20 kms away. From a distance it appeared as a black volcanic island on the otherwise flat Gobi. At the foot of the mountain, the earthen Wall was transformed, as the builders had switched to using lava blocks from the slopes of the volcano. As shown in Figure 12, the Wall snaked up the mountain, standing out in stark contrast against its bare grey slopes.

The blocks on average weighed 15-20kg. Many were jet black, others dark brown, reddish brown and light brown – all were fine-grained volcanic rocks of differing mineral compositions. Most were of the basalt family. Some were rounded, others more angular, occasionally pitted where bubbles of gas or steam had escaped from the molten rock. Many of the rocks exhibited a handsome, matt-vitreous lustre, a



**Figure 10:** James Lindesay examines animal tracks in sand beside the Wall made from basalt rock. Photo by William Lindesay

- b The radiocarbon dating method works on materials of a biological origin, namely plant and animal samples. When an organism dies, the ratio of its ordinary carbon 12 isotope to the radioactive carbon 14 isotope is locked in and approximately equal to the ratio in the atmosphere (about one trillion to one) at that time. This ratio has remained more or less unaltered during the last 50,000 years or so due replenishment by cosmic radiation. However, the radioactive isotope contained in the dead animal or plant, which is unstable, decays at an exponential rate, and is not replenished, and thus changes the ‘internal’ ratio of the specimen. By comparing the current ratio of a specimen to the past ratio allows the radiocarbon age of the sample to be determined, with a plus or minus 30-year accuracy.



**Figure 11:** Prof.Baasan, assisted by his daughter Naomi, measures the width of the Wall.  
Photo by William Lindsey

patina gained by million of years' sandblasting. The height of the Wall averaged 1.5 metres here, with fallen blocks at its side suggesting that the structure, at its highest and most complete form was originally about than 2.5 metres in height.

It was clear that the builders had made a strategic effort to route the Wall up and over this mountain to command the most supreme of vantage points, see Figure 12. In a 360 degree panorama from the summit I estimated that I could see a radius of 30 km, and a quick *pi* calculation informed me that from here the observer could survey an area of 2,800 square kilometres – perhaps an advantageous standpoint for Han guards to observe the approach of enemy Xiongnu warriors from this mountain lookout 21 centuries ago.

Strangely though, we found no evidence of a watchtower, even on the summit. Within several kilometres, back on flat Gobi terrain, we were shown the remains of a large walled square, approximately 50 x 60 metres, which I estimated to be positioned about 1 km from the extant line of the Wall. According to the army officers, such walled squares were to be found spaced out to the south of the Wall and running along its whole length. From here we returned to our camp, and the next day continued east following the Wall, before turning north to return to Dalanzadgad. From there we faced a two day drive across the monotonous but beautiful Gobi-steppe. The question in



**Figure 12:** View from the summit of ‘the mountain with Wall’. Photo by William Lindesay

my mind on this return drive was: if this was a Western Han Wall, why were there no signature *fengsui* watchtowers? I turned my thoughts to a historical example to try to find an answer.

#### **AN INCOMPLETE HAN GREAT WALL?**

In 119 BC and in the wake of successful strikes against the Xiongnu in the Hexi Corridor to the west of his capital Chang’an, Emperor Han Wudi (140-87 BC) dispatched three large armies to attack the Xiongnu in the north. The nomads relied on their time-honoured strategy of letting the desert defeat their attackers. With no fixed abodes to defend they broke camp and simply retreated, leading the three armies, as many as 100,000 men in strength, deeper and deeper into unfamiliar terrain and stretching their supply lines. They crossed the Gobi and much of the steppe beyond. Eventually the Han, under the leadership of generals Wei Qing, Huo Qubing and Li Guangyi won great victories by military reckoning, but at enormously high costs by another yardstick: economics. According to the leading Sinologist on the period, Michael Loewe, writing in *The Campaigns of Han Wu-ti*,<sup>15</sup> the so-called *Mobei* Campaign, or ‘North Desert offensive’ resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Han cavalry, the loss of 100,000 horses and huge payouts of gold as rewards to the victorious soldiers. The bounty alone was said to consume half of the state’s annual tax revenues.

Sustained cost was perhaps the reason for a U-turn. The Han had inflicted a major defeat on the Xiongnu – who did not trouble the border again for more than ten years – and gained territory. However, unlike the Silk Road to the west, it was land that was useless to them, useless to anyone. In the Hexi Corridor there were oases, which enabled agricultural production, self-sufficiency and the posting and survival of a garrisoning army. But in the South Gobi there was nothing: no water, and no trade routes. There was nothing to defend here, except abject desolation. Even attackers on their journeys south would skirt the region. The Gobi was a defence in itself. While it appeared that the Wall here was indeed a missing piece of the Han Wall jigsaw, could it be that soon after the initial phase of construction, the project was deemed too heavy a financial and logistical burden? There were few benefits, so perhaps it was abandoned, unfinished.

#### ANALYSIS OF LABORATORY RESULTS

Three samples from the ‘saksaul’ Wall in Omnögovı Aimag were submitted for laboratory testing at Beta Analytical Inc. in Miami, Florida, to carry out the testing. According to the laboratory report, the samples contained plenty of carbon for assessment and the dating tests proceeded normally. Evaluated ages of the samples were found to be: Sample A = 970 years old; Sample B = 890 years old; Sample C = 860 years old. These were totally unexpected results. Subtracting these age figures from the year date of testing, 2012, tells us when the branches and hemp (from which the rope was made) were cut, and presumably used fairly soon afterwards in the course of constructing the Wall. Specifically, Sample A = 1042 AD, Sample B = 1131 AD. and Sample C = 1151 AD.

These dates, or the range of these dates, from 1042–1151 AD, reveal that the ‘construction period’ at this location was of approximately 110 years in duration. If we match these dates against both the chronology of Chinese dynasties and the political arrangement of the Mongolian steppe (to the north of the location in question), we learn that during this century-long period, three political regimes co-existed or succeeded one another: the Western Xia (1032–1227), the Liao (946–1125), the Jin (1115–1215). That narrows the results down to suggest the Wall’s construction and use during the co-existing Western Xia and Liao periods. Secondary sources suggest the ‘border’ between these two regimes may have just touched upon the Omnögovı region.



However, the Liao regime had collapsed by 1125, suggesting that if the Wall was a component of Western Xia defences against the Liao, then it was maintained for continued use after their demise, because other enemies from the north posed threats.

Now, let us consider some additional factors. While sampling was limited, from one location, it does suggest revamping and maintenance over a considerable period of time, perhaps the operation of a Wall for at least c.110 years, from c.1040 to the 1150s. The lowest level sample proved to be the oldest while the highest level sample proved to be the youngest. This suggests rebuilding followed by maintenance over at least 110 years. The reason for this was surely the hostile weather of the region, especially the very strong winds laden with sand and loose, dry vegetative materials, which would damage the Wall by attrition.

Given that the campaign against the Western Xia by the Mongols under Genghis Khan began in 1209 and was sustained until 1227, we can rule out this reason for the Wall's construction and existence. It is too late; the Wall seems to have been built and used primarily in period just before. However, prior to Genghis Khan's unification of the steppe tribes in 1206, individual tribes would surely have been perceived as a problem by the Western Xia, and it seems that, for this reason, the Wall may have been rebuilt and maintained as a defence.

#### **WESTERN XIA BACKGROUND**

The Tanguts who established the Western Xia regime were a semi-nomadic people and had built their capital on the site of today's Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Their second most important city was Khara-Khoto, known as Heicheng in Chinese, located where an ephemeral river, the Ejin, made habitation possible in the desert. This city lay just 150 km slightly southwest of the Wall within the Omnögovı region, which may have been one reason for the Wall's construction there: to protect it from steppe nomads.

Relatively little is known about the Western Xia regime. The main reason for this is the destruction of many of the period's buildings and its historical records during the war with Genghis Khan. It took the Mongols almost 20 years to defeat the Western Xia, with Genghis Khan dying during the concluding 1227 campaign. The Mongols' anger at the length of the campaign was vented on the people, places and records of the defeated Western Xia: almost everything was thought to be destroyed. The only extant Western Xia architecture are

the remains of Khara Khoto, the desert city fortress near Ejina, and the tombs of the Western Xia kings, backing up against the Helan Shan to the west of Yinchuan. It was not previously thought that the Western Xia had built any long defensive Wall.

#### CONCLUSION

Field work in Omnögovı, and the collection of organic samples permitting radiocarbon dating analysis, provides evidence that Great Wall in this region was constructed during the period 1042-1151 AD. It is most likely that the construction work and maintenance during this period was carried out by the Western Xia regime, a dynasty not previously known to have built a Great Wall. The original, historical records of the Western Xia are thought to have been destroyed by the Mongols. Only centuries later were chroniclers employed to fill the gaps in the continuous historical chronology, by which time there was no awareness of the existence of a Western Xia border defence.

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# ‘WALL OF GENGHIS KHAN’

## PART 2: TWO EXPEDITIONS ACROSS THE GREAT EASTERN STEPPE

BY WILLIAM LINDESAY

### ABSTRACT

Mongolian maps show a section of the ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’ in Khenti and Dornod provinces. Stretching for more than 400 kms across the Great Eastern Steppe, it reaches the border and continues into China. Backed by historical and archaeological evidence, scholars of Great Wall studies know the structure dates from the Liao and Jin periods (10-13<sup>th</sup> centuries). However, a Mongolian historical source, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, records that Ögödei Khan, Genghis Khan’s successor, authorised the building of walls and fences to control the movement of wild animals. Two expeditions were made by researchers to follow the ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’ across the Eastern Steppe in 2012 and 2016, to ascertain from ecological and logistical perspectives whether the Wall might have fulfilled a ‘game reserve’ function, as a barrier to restrict the movement of wild animals. Based on the populations of gazelle in the region and the perceived hunting advantages of using a barrier, I conclude the ancient wall in that part of the Eastern Steppe is likely to be the “forgotten Wall” of Ögödei Khan.

### PREAMBLE

The ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’ of the Great Eastern Steppe remains to this day a contemporary ‘border’ Wall. It crosses the current national boundary of Mongolia into China, but then, after traversing just 80 kms of Inner Mongolia it exits into Russia from a point directly north of Manzhouli.<sup>1</sup> Its international route is referenced in its various epithets: ‘The Great Wall in Mongolia, China and Russia’ and ‘The Great Wall of Three States’. In Mongolia it is known as *Chinggisiin Kherem*, the ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’. The short section in China is known specifically and locally as *Jin Changcheng*, or Jin Great Wall, while Great Wall scholars prefer a term appearing in *Jin Shi*, (‘The Official History of the Jin Dynasty’) which uses *Jie Hao* or ‘Mound-Trench’, because the structure is an earthen mound created by the excavation of a trench. In Russia it is known as *Val Chingis Khana*, which translates as ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’. Built before border treaties

and the drawing of demarcation lines upon modern maps, the remains of this structure stretching across the territory of three states should have the same history. However, historical records suggest its story might have consisted of three episodes.

#### USE OF THE GENGHIS KHAN NAME AND IMAGE IN MONGOLIA

Mongolia is still, in a living, ongoing, eternal sense, Genghis Khan's country. His name and image appear on Mongolia's currency; Ulaanbaatar airport is named after him; and his image adorns numerous brands of the national drink, vodka, and scores of other products.



**Figure 1:** Genghis Khan's name and image are widely used to brand commodities of scale and strength, including vodka. Photo by William Lindsey



**Figure 2:** A 'Genghis Khan Wall' of graffiti in Ulaanbaatar. Photo by William Lindsey

No other nation possesses an historic personage whose past remains so powerfully omnipresent, more than eight centuries after his life.

According to an academic in Ulaanbaatar (who wished to remain anonymous), many large-scale and great things in Mongolia are given Genghis Khan's name. It was, the academic professed, 'a name that satisfied the emotions of Mongolians'. My own enquiries found the name for the wall was credited to the Russian explorer Pyotr Kropotkin (1842–1921) who led surveys in Manchuria during 1865–66 and coined the name *Val Chingis Khana*, which translates from the Russian as 'Wall of Genghis Khan'. It appears that this name spread westwards into Mongolia. It should be noted however that 'Wall of Genghis Khan' would not have been used to identify the structure on Soviet-made maps. Under Stalin's direction, the Soviet overlords in Mongolia from the 1930s actively worked to eradicate Mongolia's native history, culture, religion and language during its period of domination. Much of Genghis Khan's heartland in Khenti province became a highly restricted area during the Soviet occupation.<sup>2</sup> The birthplace of Temüjin, near Dadal in the mountains of Khenti close to the Russian border, wedged between the headwater tributaries of Mongolia's two main rivers, the Onon and the Kherlun, is now a place of pilgrimage for all Mongolians.



**Figure 3:** The Genghis Khan Statue outside the State Parliament House in central Ulaanbaatar. Photo by Tjalling Halbertsma

This cradle to grave land of Genghis Khan (although his tomb has never been located) lies approximately 50 kms from the west end of the 'Wall of Genghis Khan' on very edge of the Great Eastern Steppe. This proximity might also be considered a factor in the structure's naming. However, the Genghis Khan Atlas shows that the Khan's journeys east from his homeland were either via the established safe route of the Kherlun River, which bisects the Great Eastern Steppe, or along its northern edge, through birch-forested hills that straddle today's Siberian-Mongolian border. According to the Atlas he appears to have never traversed the Great Eastern Steppe along the line of the 'Wall of Genghis Khan', nor anywhere near it. These facts weigh against the idea that the structure's name had been authorised by Genghis Khan himself.

If the 'Genghis Khan Wall' was not created by Genghis Khan, was it built as an instrument of defence against him? If it was, then the Genghis Khan Atlas clearly reveals the futility of its positioning. The Mongols' outward plan of attack focused south, on China, the land of plenty, not north to Siberia, where only furs and horns could be obtained. Routes to China therein show that Genghis Khan's cavalry moved in a south-easterly direction out of their Khenti stronghold, heading well to the south of the Genghis Khan Wall. If it were a Jin-built Wall to ward off outward advances by Genghis Khan, or earlier tribes, it appeared to be in a most unsuitable place, way too far north. Popular history tells that Genghis Khan's toppling of the Jin exposed their defences as being insufficiently short, and easily circumvented by Mongol cavalry.<sup>3</sup> Such strategic incompetence seemed unlikely for a regime that militarily had toppled the Liao and pushed the Song even further south.

#### **HISTORICAL RECORDS ON THE LIAO, JIN AND MONGOL PERIODS**

The *Liao Shi* ('History of Liao') covers the native history of the Khitan people (Qidān in pinyin), who supplanted Han rule in northeast China in the early 10th century. They were toppled by the Jin a century later and then re-established post-Jin as the Western Liao. Written during the late-Yuan Dynasty in 1344 by Toghto, a Mongol who also wrote the official Jin and Song histories, its 36<sup>th</sup> part concerns *Bian Feng Cheng* or 'Border Defence Fortifications'. Toghto states:

‘To the northwest of the Liao State, border defence fortifications and cultivated fields to support those posted there were constructed [...] making safe good land at *Jing Bian Cheng* which was the home of more than 20 tribes united by the Liao, and protecting their way of life against the hostile Yujue and Shiwei [...] thousands of cavalry were deployed along this defence line which ran for 1,500 *li* [c. 750 kms] towards Shangjing [the ‘Upper Capital’, one of the Liao’s five capital cities].’<sup>4</sup> (Translated by Wu Qi)

Historical references concerning the extent of Liao territorial dominance have been summarised in map form and provide some clarity. They show the northern edge of Liao territory running well north of the Kherlun River, in a southwest to northeast orientation across the Great Eastern Steppe, north of Hulun Nur (Lake) and into Manchuria, exactly along the line of the remaining ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’ on the Eastern Steppe. *The China History Reference Map Collection*<sup>5</sup> even marks the line of the ‘Wall of Three States’ within Liao territory c.1111 AD, an attitude that suggests its principal function may have been to protect the important Kherlun River valley to its south. This suggests that this ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’ is a Liao Great Wall in origin.

In *Jin Shi*, (History of Jin)<sup>6</sup> compiled by the same author, Toghto, the chronicler informs us that three Jin emperors – whose reigns spanned the entire century – span of the regime from the early 11th to 12th centuries, authorised construction of *Jie Hao* or ‘mound-trenches’. According to Toghto these defences were raised in four areas of Jin territory. Among them, the *Dongbei Lu* section correlates with the Eastern Steppe Wall. Toghto’s use of alternative terms to describe the defences, *Bian Bao* (边保) and *Bian Pu* (边浦) which translate as ‘border forts’, may also be of specific significance. On Google Earth I could see a string of squarish structures tucked inside the entire line of this section of the Genghis Khan Wall.

While the route of the ‘Wall of Genghis Khan’ appears as a feature on some maps in ‘The Genghis Khan Atlas’,<sup>7</sup> the book does not expound its origins or purposes. However, *The Secret History of the Mongols*<sup>8</sup> on which the atlas is based, does. Walls, fences and postal stations are all mentioned. These references provide the only written clues that any such fortifications or installations might have been constructed by or reused by Mongols.

*The Secret History* is a precious primary resource. Family tradition required all children to listen to and remember their family's history, told over and over again, especially during the long winter months when hostile weather kept families confined to their *gers*, or tents. *The Secret History* is an oral history of Genghis Khan's clan, the Borjigin, first written down in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. When Temüjin, the boy who would rise to become Genghis Khan, was young, the Borjigin clan did not possess a written language: everything was spoken. Only two of the steppe tribes, the Naiman and the Ongguds, developed writing of their own. It was called 'Uighur-Mongol' script and was to be adopted by the Mongols.

The earliest evidence of the script's adoption is found on the so-called Genghis Khan Stele, erected c.1225 near Lake Baikal. It was found by a Russian archaeologist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and taken back to the capital St. Petersburg, and was eventually deposited in the Hermitage Museum. It features five columns of script and commemorates a magnificent feat of archery achieved in the Khan's presence.<sup>9</sup> From this time at least Uighur-Mongol was being used by the Mongols, and it was surely used for writing down the first edition of *The Secret History*, c.1228, immediately after Genghis Khan's death the previous year. The earliest surviving edition of the work is an early Ming translation of a Uighur edition that was brought to China in the 1370s, about 140 years after being written.

There is much secrecy and mystery surrounding *The Secret History of the Mongols*, beyond its alluring name. According to the colophon at the end of the book it was written in the Year of the Rat when a *khulterai*, or great assembly, was convened to ceremonially invest Genghis Khan's chosen successor, Ögödei, as the new khan (r. 1229–41). This combination of a rat zodiac year and rare assembly is believed to indicate 1228. At the end of the book we find some references of interest made by Ögödei towards the end of his life, and it is these 'second edition' comments that tell us that the written version was being continually 'updated', as was the oral history. These paragraphs read rather like Ögödei's valedictory, a summary of his life, his aims and deeds, merits and demerits. The last page<sup>10</sup> hints as to why Mongols may have built (or utilised an existing, abandoned structure) as either a communications route for its postal messengers, or as barrier to halt the movement of wild beasts.

I shall not let suffer the nation that my father, Genghis



Khan, established through his suffering. Instead I shall rest their feet on the earth, their hands on the ground [...] sitting on my Father's great throne, the deeds that I have accomplished since my Father's reign include campaigning against the Jaqats [Jurchen people of North China]. My second deed was to establish post stations so that our messengers can gallop swiftly towards their goal and transport our necessities.

Ögödei then goes on to confess his mistakes.

[...] being covetous, and fearing that the wild beasts, born with their destiny determined by Heaven and Earth, would advance onto the lands of my brothers, I had fences and walls of pounded earth constructed

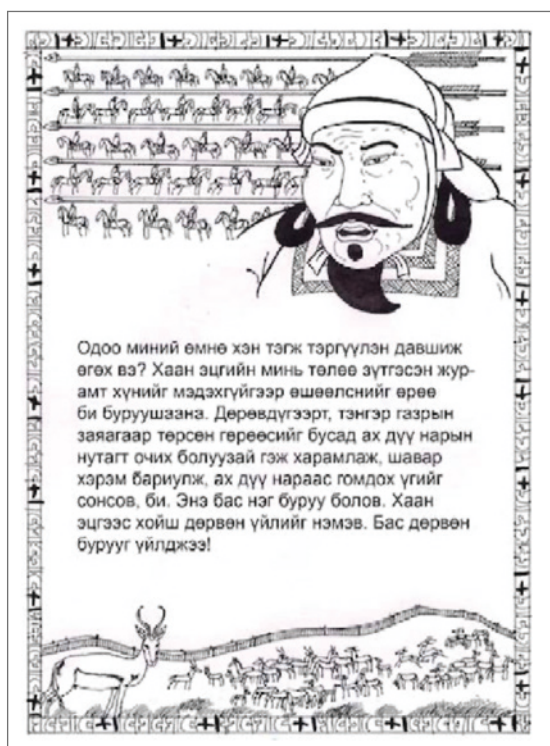


Figure 4: Page from a comic-strip version of The Secret History of the Mongols showing Ögödei Khan confessing to his greed by building a wall and fence to limit the movement of wild animals



Shamanists deemed anything that interfered with the flow of nature to be sinful.<sup>11</sup> Genghis Khan had strictly prohibited his men from eating alone to avoid sharing their food with others. It is, therefore, no wonder that keeping reserves of game to oneself should be considered a sin of great greed.

#### FIRST SIGHT OF THE STEPPE'S GENGHIS KHAN WALL

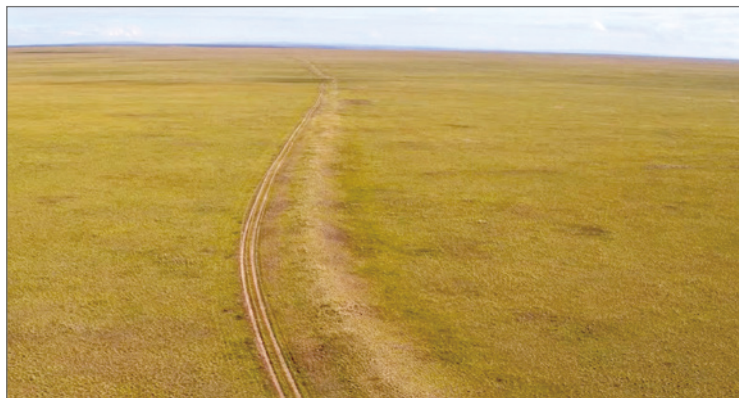
In July 2012, our expedition of Great Wall researchers drove to Khenti Province to examine the 'Wall of Genghis Khan'. By late afternoon the hills of Khenti had receded and our three vehicle expedition<sup>a</sup> entered the grasslands on the edge of the Great Eastern Steppe, the largest pristine temperate grassland in the world, covering an area the size of Shanxi Province. The region has one of the lowest population densities in the world, averaging just two or three persons per square kilometre. On the western 'shoreline' of this ocean of grass we hoped to pick up the beginning of the Wall as marked on the Soviet-surveyed 1: 500 000 maps.<sup>12</sup>

In Northern China, be it in desert, hills or mountains, in time one's eyes become accustomed of catching sight from afar of the Great Wall's signature linear character. On the steppe, 'Wall-spotting' is quite different. For 'The Wall' manifests itself, not as an object of sudden, surprising and startling appeal, but as a subtle difference, indicated by a little height or a faint shadow. It wasn't so much a case of 'us' finding 'it', but rather a case of 'it' finding 'us', for the tyre tracks we followed led us to right beside it. After a few kilometres I could see why. There was nothing but flat grassland ahead, for as far as the eye could see. The only features ran in parallel, away from me. There were tyre tracks on the left, a slight depression in the centre and a slight rise on the right, each part of a cause and effect relationship. 'The Wall' was built by digging the earth and creating a mound. Even though it had been eroded to a fraction of its former depth and height, it remained as a line to follow across this empty steppe-land: the Genghis Khan Road beside the Genghis Khan Wall.

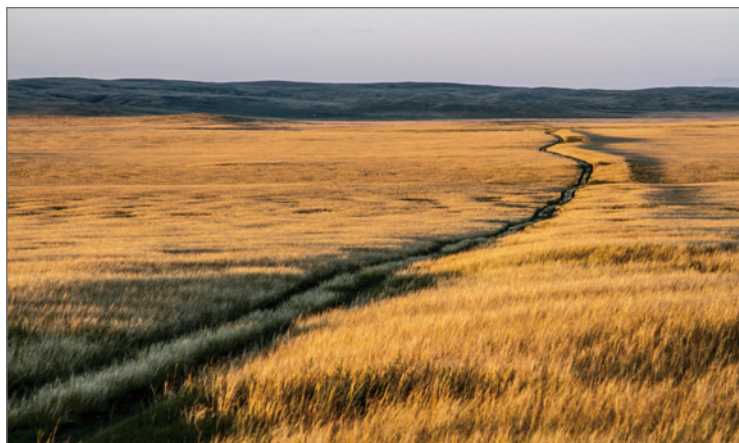
Having benefited from my first 'Wall spotting' experience the previous day I could now see the well camouflaged mound-trench even at the height of midday when the light was flat and the structure had been deprived of its signature, paralleling shadow.

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a The principal expedition members were William Lindesay, Dr. Kirk Olson, Wu Qi, James Lindesay, Thomas Lindesay, Dondug, Nara



**Figure 5:** The steppe is a low relief and featureless expanse of grassland, devoid of trees for lack of rainfall. The Wall, as a line to follow, is paralleled by tyre tracks and has become more commonly known as the 'Genghis Road'. Photo by Depictograph



**Figure 6:** The Wall's remains, a shallow trench and low mound, are much more visible at sundown. Photo by William Lindesay

Both a pattern and a standard were emerging as we proceeded east. The shallow trench was colonised by a darker and more varied assemblage of grasses and flowers, prevailing on what was marginally damper ground. Higher, to the right, the mound rose gently, marked with its browner, thinner grasses. In cross-section the layout's entire width, road plus trench plus mound, equalled approximately 12-14 metres, while the crest of the mound varied from 60 to 110 cm above the height of the Road. (Fig 7).

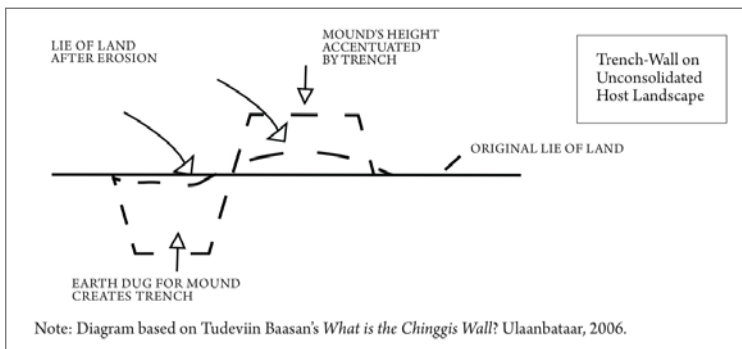
At its zenith it must have been a much deeper trench and much higher mound. I envisaged its improved effectiveness as a barrier



**Figure 7:** Measuring the width of the mound. Its line is indicated by the drier grasses on the mound catching the evening sunlight. Photo by James Lindsey

against man and beast alike by the addition of sharp wooden stakes, planted fence-like along its crest, in the form of a palisade. The steppe, for lack of water, is devoid of trees to provide such timber. The closest source is the Siberian birch forest belt. Archaeological evidence of a wooden fence was not anticipated due to natural decay, and probably pre-dating that, its re-use by local people as combustible fuel.

As for the remains of the mound, it was low and flattened now, but just how high could it have been back then? Earthen Walls in China were, in the main, constructed by ramming damp earth to hardness, layer upon layer, into a wooden frame, building up the height of the structure.<sup>13</sup> This process relies on the stickiness of the earth, its humus content, its adhesiveness. But the soil of the steppe is completely different: dark, with coarse quartz grain sand that resisted binding



**Figure 8:** Cross-sectional diagram showing the original shape of the Mound-Trench and its eroded state. Diagram by Baasan

together. These characteristics absolutely precluded it being used as a material for a rammed earth wall. I believe that the mound-like structure we were following had always been a mound, only a higher one, and it has, over the centuries, slumped, or rather ‘spread out’ and become lower in height through various actions, including rain wash, wind erosion and the passage of animals, both herded and wild.

### WALLED SQUARES

Walled squares, sometimes right beside the Wall, and in other places a few hundred metres away, were found every few tens of kilometres apart, always inside, to the south of the Wall itself. Their locales suggested that certain common criteria, most likely the availability of groundwater, had been sought by their builders and occupants.

One such compound that I paced along had sides 52 strides square (approximately 60 metres). Its former walls of grassed over earth stood about a metre above the height of the surrounding land.

The corners were slightly higher than their adjoining sides, suggesting they were originally higher than the adjacent rampart, likely the location of corner towers, turrets. The face furthest from the Wall-Road had, at its mid-way point, a lower area suggesting it was the site of a doorway. The compound may have functioned as a small fortress, a barracks for those patrolling the Wall, or a rest and watering station for messengers, travellers and their horses making their way along the Wall-Road, carrying goods and messages. This walled square, and others like it, might have been the *Bian Bao* mentioned by chronicler Toghto in his *Jin Shi*, ‘Jin History’.

The square enclosed an area roughly the size of four tennis courts, colonised by grasses and flowers. I combed the area carefully, but



**Figure 9:** Walled squares are located along the line of the Wall on its southern side.  
Photo by Depictograph

could find nothing on the surface. We made our camp outside. It then occurred to me that the ancient occupants would have also have lived in tents, a mode of abode that would account for the absence of any ruins within the square itself. All of the possible candidates that may have constructed, inherited or re-used the main structure nearby, namely the Khitans, Jurchens and Mongols, traditionally lived in *gers*, or felt-walled tents. Even today the *ger* remains the abode of herders. Our expedition called at their camps in order to re-supply with water. This gave me the chance to ask locals for their opinions on the history and functions of the ‘Genghis Khan Wall’ nearby.

I heard two folk tales worthy of mention. One family called it the ‘Princess Road’ and claimed it was used as a safe passageway by a Mongolian princess sent to Korea to be married. Another version was that it was used by Mongolian Queens as a safe route to travel to Khanbaliq via Manchuria, thus avoiding the dangerous crossing of the Gobi.

Without archaeological clues to assist in dating its origins, I tilted towards circumstantial evidence, considering the logistical undertaking – the manpower – required to build such a structure. A little spadework in the vicinity was enough to illustrate the sheer amount of labour input needed. The digging of a trench with the piling up of excavated earth, and presumably its packing down must have been labour-intensive enough, and set in motion more precise questions on labour sources, materials provision, tools required, possible transportation and provisioning, which included water.



**Figure 10:** Chancing upon a herder family on horseback provided an opportunity to gather folk tales relating to the Wall. Photo by James Lindesay

Other factors to be considered were the seasons, given that summer in the steppe is barely three months in duration, and for at least seven months temperatures do not climb above zero, even during the day.

Collectively, such demands spoke of the need for industry, organisation and supply lines. Clearly, significant resources would have been required. Moreover, if we consider what the Road/Wall and its associate squares must have looked like during their period of use – perhaps with wooden fittings and installations – then the required resources could be even greater. It seems that a professional, very well organised approach to manpower deployment, transportation of at least some materials, proven construction techniques and finally sound provisioning would have been necessary, for at least several years, perhaps even for decades.

#### GAZELLE

‘Huge herd of gazelle on the right – 3 o’clock direction!’ crackled the radio between our vehicles. About a kilometre away I couldn’t see gazelle as such, I could just see a huge area of the steppe shimmering with motion. Several thousand gazelle, maybe more than 10,000, were running. How could we get closer to witness this great spectacle? Could we swing off road, across the trench and over the mound, stepping on the gas with the aim of competing with them in speed? That, apparently was not the way to do it, according to a man with vast experience in this part of the world.

Explorer Roy Chapman Andrews (1884–1960), the American palaeontologist, made several fossil hunting expeditions in Mongolia in the early 20th century, and left this advice on gazelle behaviour in his book *Across Mongolian Plains*

The gazelle were about five or six hundred yards away and as the car leaped forward they range themselves in single file and strung out across the plain. We left the road at once and headed diagonally towards them. For some strange reason, when a horse or a car runs parallel to a herd of gazelle, the animals will swing in a complete semicircle and cross in front of the pursuer. Whether they think they are being cut off from the more desirable means of escape I cannot say, but the fact remains that with the open plain on either side they will always try to ‘cross your bow’ [...]<sup>14</sup>





**Figure 11:** Gazelle running across the ‘Genghis Road’ in front our vehicle. The Great Eastern Steppe is the gazelle’s main habitat where the population is estimated to number approximately 1.5 million. Photo by Chen Xinyu

And they did cross our bows. Across the Wall, the trench and the road, in leaps and bounds, right in front of us, unleashing a power to behold, a survival sprint. There and then in that freeze-frame moment the gazelles proved how useless just such a trench-mound structure alone would have been, masters of sheer speed and spring that they were.

In contrast though, I could imagine the drama, even carnage, invoked by Ögödei’s fence of stakes. On a follow-up expedition in 2016, we used drones to capture dramatic footage of gazelle running across the remains of the Wall.

Our field director and guide was Smithsonian biologist Dr. Kirk Olson. He explained that the presence of large herds was a sign that the



**Figure 12:** A drone view of a gazelle herd crossing the line of the Genghis Khan Wall. After serving as defence, the structure might well have been repaired to re-function as a ‘game reserve’ wall to restrict the movement of gazelle herds, and serve as a platform for their slaughter by archers. Photo by Depictograph

animals were in difficulty. Recounting his own autumn 2007 expedition to monitor the state of the species, he'd seen the largest gathering of the gazelle ever witnessed. Back then he estimates that he saw a quarter of a million. As Olson put it, 'they filled the horizon.' He speculated that the oversized gathering had resulted from rare, extreme circumstances. 'It was a severe drought year and I expect that many "large herds" distributed across the Eastern Steppe were running out of good grazing and were instinctively drawn to find what good remained.' He continued. 'The huge gathering happened upon a green island on the parched steppe – an intense downpour two weeks before had watered the grass, making it a refuge [...] In fact, coming here and seeing nothing for days, except for gazelles, does make people think that this environment is a safe haven – it is, but the question is, for how long?'

Olson said that the Eastern Steppe is the last refuge for gazelle because it was the last remaining intact grassland in this part of the world. 'But as it shrinks so will the gazelle population – it's already plummeted, from an estimated 15 million during the Genghis Khan period to less than one million now, and it's dwindling at a rate of 100,000 – that's 10 percent – per year.'

Although these animals are protected, limited hunting was permitted within quotas if licensed, but the numbers of animals shot illegally for meat remains high, causing concern for Olson. Besides hunting, there were many new threats, like fences that block migrations. According to Olson's field studies, GPS tracking of gazelle shows they don't migrate in a set pattern, they are nomadic for life, always on the move. Fences along the border and along the trans-Mongolia railway line pose serious obstacles that could block paths to survival for herds when, for example, they encounter extreme weather conditions, or get spooked by something such as a grassland fire. Another threat comes from the mining companies that have already begun to explore land on the edge of this last refuge.

In 2014 Mongolia's Eastern Steppes were placed on a tentative UNESCO listing of World Heritage Site, but only for their natural value. The 'Wall of Genghis Khan' may lay claim to being the largest ever structure built in Mongolia. This structure is best observed at sundown as shown in Figures 13 and 14. The author believes that the UNESCO listing should include both the natural and cultural heritage of the region.





**Figure 13:** A ground view of the Wall at sundown on the approach to the Mongolia-China border. By early September the grassland is thinning and turning brown as winter approaches. Photo by William Lindsey



**Figure 14:** A drone view of the same section of wall as depicted above in Figure 12, taken just minutes later. In terms of its original material volume it may well lay claim to being the largest construction in the history of Mongolia. Photo by Depictograph

#### **CONCLUSION: NOMENCLATURE OF THE WALL AT THE BORDER FENCE**

On our expedition in the previous year to Omnögov, we had met the army border patrol at a predetermined GPS location. On this expedition into the sensitive border zone of Dornod, we again needed entry permits from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and we were intercepted once we had entered the border buffer zone. From that point we were escorted to a border camp to negotiate access for the final stage of our journey. The commanding officer kindly permitted us to follow the Wall right up to the demarcated border.

I walked upon the mound of the Genghis Khan Wall towards the low barbed-wire border fence. In front of this stood an inscribed border post. The script on the face of the post facing me was etched in

Cyrillic for ‘Mongolia’, a number and the year ‘2002’.

I leant forward, not stepping on Chinese ground, merely making a momentary foray into its airspace. This was just enough to confirm that the reverse bore a different script in red: 中国, (*Zhong Guo* – China). On the far side of the the fence lay bare ground, a ploughed tract, to function as a firebreak. Beyond this strip, 100 metres or so in width, the grasslands resumed. The fence was not only a ‘name changer’ of nations, but also for the same Wall. It had different names on either side, a reminder that one’s view of something, anything, depends on where one is standing. Due to the experience of being on the steppe, of seeing huge herds of gazelle on the grasslands, I had come to appreciate what a coveted meat resource the gazelle is, and how difficult the animal is to hunt, on account of its fleetness of foot. If a wall of pounded earth and a wooden fence had been built to contain the steppeland’s greatest resource of ‘wild beasts’, then it would have been here on the Eastern Steppe. I believe the ‘fences and walls of pounded earth constructed’ referred to by Ögödei Khan in *The Secret History of the Mongols* was the structure lying under my feet, and it should be renamed ‘The Wall of Ögödei Khan’. As such, it should be recognised and preserved.

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# THE GREAT RED SUPER HIGHWAY – CHINA'S WARTIME LINK TO THE SOVIET UNION

BY PAUL FRENCH

## ABSTRACT

*At the time of Japan's attack on China in the summer of 1937 it immediately became apparent that the country's coast would be effectively lost and that supply lifelines would be needed running inland. The Burma Road is the most well-known of these. However, a major lifeline for supplies from the Soviet Union was also developed – The Great Red Super Highway. Its creation in part dictated Japan's later attacks on northern China and the Mongolian border. Though now largely forgotten and rarely considered, The Great Red Super Highway was for a few years a major strand of Nationalist China's resupply and rearmament strategy.*

## ESSENTIAL SUPPLY LINES

When it finally came, Japan's invasion of China was rapid. Driving down from occupied Manchuria in the early summer of 1937 first Beijing, and then Tianjin, fell and were occupied. By late summer the Japanese were bombing Shanghai and then moving swiftly up the



Figure 1: The Great Red Super Highway.  
(Chattanooga Daily Times, January 2, 1938)

Yangtze to devastate Nanjing. As the Japanese pushed both south down China's coast and inland upriver the Nationalist government retreated ever further inland – from Nanjing to Wuhan, and eventually to the “Fortress City” of Chongqing at the head of the Yangtze.

By the last two months of 1937, with access to the sea lost as Japan moved to control southern China and the major part of the long coast, supply routes into Free China became essential. Both at the time and ever since, the famed Burma Road winding, often perilously, from Lashio in the Shan States to Kunming in Yunnan and then on into Sichuan province, became legendary and the subject of books, documentaries and magazine articles. But the 717 miles of the Burma Road, and its many narrow bridges, were in a terrible state of repair. Though the Burma Road remained a lifeline, and was upgraded, China's other supply route, the road and rail routes up into south-western China from French Indo-China, were to become problematic due to internal French politics and Japanese pressure. New supply routes were essential.

After 1937 over two hundred thousand Burmese and Chinese labourers worked night and day to repair and upgrade it. Eventually China would claim that a million worked on the project. The labourers and the truck drivers of the convoys that traversed the route with petrol, oil, munitions, medicines, and various other supplies became the stuff of legend, a major plank in the Nationalist propaganda machine and a lifeline for Chongqing and the guerrilla forces.

But there was another route, one that for some time was equally, if not more, important than the Burma Road – the Great Red Super Highway. Yet this alternative route into Free China has been largely overlooked. The plan for the Great Red Super Highway was based on an old camel train route that had been in use for centuries. It ran nearly two thousand miles from Turkestan in Soviet Central Asia to the city of Lanzhou in Gansu, and then with a spur road, known as the Khoto Highway, a further 830 miles up to Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia. While it was able to operate largely unhindered, the Great Red Super Highway was longer and faster than the Burma Road. Its construction would take a million labourers with over a hundred petrol and supply depots also planned along the route. It's worth remembering the Great Red Super Highway, and how Japan's need to close it down as an artery of survival for the Chongqing government was a paramount aim of Tokyo's war in China.

## A MILLION LABOURERS MOBILISED

In 1937 the Japanese army in occupied Manchuria (renamed Manchukuo) aggressively pushed further inland and occupied the adjoining area to the north of Beijing. There they established an autonomous government, the Cha-nan (or South Chahar) Province with its titular capital at Kalgan, the ancient trading gateway city, and latterly an important railway terminus, now known as Zhangjiakou. In one swift movement Japan had severed one of Free China's major supply lifelines between Zhangjiakou and the Outer Mongolian capital (and then Soviet satellite state) of Ulaanbaatar. A new supply route between the USSR and China was urgently needed.

Consequently, a massive construction exercise was begun: one that Chinese engineers told the newspapers was akin to building another Great Wall. A road that would stretch from deep into Soviet Union-controlled Central Asia, well away from the range of Japan at the time, across the vastness and sparsely populated Ningxia province to Lanzhou on the banks of the Yellow River.

From the start the Great Red Super Highway was as much a propaganda exercise as construction job. The Nationalist government proudly announced that the project would be undertaken almost exclusively by an American-educated Chinese engineering team. Ambitiously the government stated that it thought the entire road – from Alma-Ata (now Almaty) in Central Asia, as well as the spur up to Ulaanbaatar – could be finished and start moving essential supplies within a mere 'several months'. Indeed they did report that 'token' trial shipments of guns and tanks from the USSR to Nationalist China were taking place as early as December 1937. If it could be done then, despite the Japanese incursions around Zhangjiakou, armaments and war matériel could be shipped from the armaments manufacturing cities deep in the interior of the Soviet Union to the heart of Free China in Gansu in just a fortnight, as opposed to the then current two months. China's greatest asset – its vast population – was mobilised. A million labourers, including a reported hundred thousand Mongolians willing to help build the road as part of their resistance to a Japanese invasion of their own country, were assigned to the project.

The Great Red Super Highway was also political. The Burma Road of course started in what was then a part of the British Raj and involved co-operation with both Great Britain and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. But its poor condition and slow winding

route meant it alone as a lifeline simply couldn't ship enough oil, petrol and arms to China. The Great Red Super Highway, essentially a straight expressway, had the possibility to move much more, much faster, and including tanks and partially disassembled fighter planes that would could never have been efficiently moved along the Burma Road.

However, there was a political price to pay. The Highway dragged Chiang Kai-shek leftwards, towards the USSR. Pragmatism triumphed – Chiang was, to say the least, no lover of communism, but in 1937 only the USSR was prepared to go beyond humanitarian, medical and fuel aid and send military equipment to China. War had brought strange alliances – while some in Chiang's Kuomintang (KMT) party were going so far as to argue that China should submit to Japanese domination (and indeed, a year later Chiang's opponent as leader of the KMT Wang Jingwei would form a collaborationist pro-Japanese puppet government), the Chinese Communist Party was arguing Chiang should remain in charge of a united front. The Communist Party position was reinforced by the fact that Moscow would only supply arms to Chiang and not to them.

#### **THE JAPANESE RESPONSE**

Construction got seriously underway by Christmas 1937 and naturally the Japanese were aware of the creation of the Great Red Super Highway. It was inevitable that they would respond.

Work on the Burma Road was continuing apace. Japan was not yet ready to stage an invasion of British-controlled Burma. They were, however, able to apply pressure on the French administration in their Indo-Chinese empire. In 1938 France was in domestic political turmoil, and feeling threatened as the European situation deteriorated with the German-Austrian Anschluss and the Nazi moves against Czechoslovakia. France was feeling weak in its Asian colonial empire. Japan applied a lot of pressure on the French in Hanoi and persuaded them in February 1938 to end shipments of armaments to China on the road and rail routes up into south-western China. This just left the Burma Road as a lifeline. The Great Red Super Highway was needed more urgently than ever.

The construction of the Great Red Super Highway is seemingly, at least partially, responsible for the Japanese increasing their incursions into Inner Mongolia at the time. They began attacking the labouring

crews trying to build the spur road to Ulaanbaatar, and also used fighter planes from bases in occupied Manchukuo to strafe the camel trains going in and out of Gansu province. By the early spring of 1938 the Japanese started bombing Lanzhou city itself regularly and skirmishing with Free China guerrillas across Inner Mongolia. The Chinese Nationalist air force (ROCAF) put up resistance in the air, but was out-classed by the Japanese pilots of the Manchukuo Imperial Air Force.

#### **THE SOVIET–JAPANESE NEUTRALITY PACT & THE HUMP**

In 1939 the Soviet Union reacted to Japan's constant incursion on their borders with China and Mongolia. Fighting on the border escalated in the spring and summer of 1939, with combined Soviet and Mongolian forces fighting the Japanese to a standstill in the so-called Battle of Khalkhin Gol. The Japanese Sixth Army was defeated and military planners in Tokyo made a fateful decision not to push north into the USSR and seize the resource-rich Siberia, but instead to move south through South East Asia and capture the oil fields of the Dutch East Indies.

Even if the Great Red Super Highway had been completed as planned it is unlikely it would have had a long life. The Asian version of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact was signed by Stalin and the Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka in April 1941. The agreement meant that for the rest of World War Two, the two nations fought against each other's allies but not each other. Shipments from the USSR to Nationalist China on the Great Red Super Highway were terminated. In June 1941 Hitler took the decision to invade the USSR. Operation Barbarossa saw any Soviet arms and matériel that might have been diverted to the war in China sent west to European Russia, with none left spare to be shipped east to China even if Stalin had wished to break the terms of the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact.

And so ultimately the Great Red Super Highway was never fully completed and was unable to become a lasting supply line of significance. China had to rely on the Burma Road until the successful Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942 cut off even that route. The only route then left was “The Hump” whereby United States Air Force planes flew over the Himalaya's from Assam in British-controlled India to Kunming. The planes flew from the spring of 1942 to the



war's end. Approximately 650,000 tons of matériel was flown to China during the 42-month history of The Hump.

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## MOVING MOUNTAINS: HOW CHINA IS COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY DEFEATING POVERTY. ALMOST.

BY MATTHEW CHITWOOD

LI SHAORONG left the goat stewing in the kitchen and joined us in the courtyard. He drew a Cloud Mist cigarette from its red pack and sat down next to a traveling salesman who was gaping wide-eyed on the porch. Li's courtyard bustled with villagers. Women chopped up cabbage and radishes with hefty cleavers and used chopsticks to turn lengths of intestine inside out. Men squatted on foot-high stools leisurely sipping corn liquor and spitting sunflower hulls. The Lis had swept the family tombs that morning and now, having satiated the spirits of their ancestors, they attended to the living.

'Can you smoke this?' Li Shaorong asked the salesman, extending a cigarette and water pipe his direction. The three-foot section of bamboo was wide as a coffee mug and sloshed with water. The salesman looked at it aghast. 'No, no, no,' he said, waving his hands in refusal and laughing nervously. Li lit the Cloud Mist, placed it in an opening at the base of the pipe, and inhaled deeply through the top. Smoke gurgled through water in the base and filled his lungs.

'None of you *waidiren* can smoke!' Li chided, calling us 'outsiders' and grinning at me through a thick haze. I wasn't keen to be lumped in with this salesman from the city, but I was less keen to get lung cancer. I had been living in Bangdong village for several months and had already foregone hundreds of Cloud Mists and Red Pagodas. In rural China, there are few greater expressions of love than peer pressure, so Li pushed the water pipe toward me, his grin widening. I used my usual fib: 'I don't know how.'

'You *waidiren* are no fun!' Li pouted playfully, stomping off into the kitchen to check on the stew.

I had met the goat earlier that morning, before it was stew. A dirt lane loops through Bangdong, and I liked to stroll past its houses and vegetable gardens, to trace the contours of the mountainside along its bamboo groves and tea terraces, and sometimes even to wheeze up Hell Hill, which I named for its ungodly grade. I liked to stroll because things happened when I strolled. Most often, villagers would

wave me into their homes for tea or a meal. In fact, strategically timed strolls often spared me from my own mediocre cooking. Sometimes an innocent stroll would become an expedition into the forest to hunt medicinal plants or smoke out beehives. And once I went for an evening stroll and didn't return until dawn once we'd finished digging a neighbour's grave.

As it happened, on my stroll this morning, I ran into Li's brother-in-law with a goat on a rope. Soon thereafter we were at the Li family tombs, the goat gasping for its last breaths and blood spurting from a hole in its neck. Now, Brother-in-law Li squatted on a low stool in the courtyard sticking toothpicks in the goat's scapula. 'Two is bad,' he explained, rightly assuming I had little experience in divination. He forced a third toothpick into a pinprick in the bone. 'But three is very good!' he exclaimed with satisfaction.

The salesman marvelled at the scene. 'We are getting the authentic Tomb Sweeping experience,' he told me, adjusting his glasses and flaring his eyebrows. 'No one does it like this in the city anymore.' He was an 'outsider' and he looked it. He wore a short-sleeve button down with cheap slacks and was the only one in glasses – a very urban



Figure 1: A goat endures a last ride



Figure 2: Divination by reading a goat's scapula.

accessory. He looked bookish and uncomfortable, like an actuary at a house party.

To be fair, it is a long journey from Hunan to Yunnan, from central China to its south-westernmost province. And it's even further from the provincial capital of Kunming to Bangdong village – a 10-hour bus ride plus another four hours by passenger van, over 70 kilometres of switchbacks. In the nearest township there are three hardware shops, each owned by a Hunanese who migrated to the middle of nowhere, tailing a rural construction boom and the word of a friend. This bookish *waidiren* came hawking hardware supplies, using his hometown connections to offload construction tools, light fixtures and farm implements.

'Hey! Can you *waidiren* eat this?' Li was back and holding a plastic grocery bag under our noses. The salesman and I pulled back instinctively. A gamey stench wafted from the bag and eked into my nostrils, triggering an involuntary shudder that began in my shoulders and ran down my spine. The salesman's face contorted.

Li giggled with glee. 'It's stomach,' he said, which was not entirely a lie. 'Try some!'

Now, I know what stomach looks like – something between a sea sponge and a skinned porcupine fish – and whatever was in that bag looked more like spinach-stuffed tortellini. But I didn't care. Li was calling me a *waidiren*, lumping me in with this third-tier city slicker, and it was time to set straight who lived here and who was just visiting.

'I'll eat it if you do,' I pressured the salesman. He balked. I upped the stakes.

I grabbed a piece from the bag and gave it an impassioned sniff. It was ripe. ‘Whhhhooooohheeeee!!!’ I cried, wagging my head in delirium. ‘We Bangdong people love this stuff!’ All eyes were on the salesman and I was certain he no longer wanted the authentic Tomb Sweeping experience. Begrudgingly, he took a piece and I grinned, triumphant. But my victory was short lived.

We popped them in our mouths and chewed. My stomach lurched and my nostrils flared even before my tongue screamed, ‘No!’ But the gamey odour was already manifest, a putrid, waxy residue covering the inside of my mouth. I watched the salesman wretch and felt an immediate pang of guilt, but pride kept me chewing, even while he reached for a trashcan.

‘You’re eating shit!’ a man from a nearby village shouted, laughing. What Li called “stomach” was a loose interpretation. “Large intestine” would be more honest. And the spinach-filled part of the tortellini had not been cleared with chopsticks. Li’s friends and family laughed and laughed until one decent soul finally poured us each a shot of corn liquor, which I gladly gulped down in solidarity with my fellow *waidiren*. The 56 percent alcohol burned going down – hopefully disinfecting the half-digested grass – and the salesman cringed again. ‘We do not eat that in Hunan!’

‘Neither do we!’ said the man from a nearby village, riling the crowd. ‘Only Bangdong people eat shit!’

‘Maybe so,’ Brother-in-Law Li retorted, rummaging around in the plastic bag for a desirable piece. ‘But ours is the best shit!’

### **MOUNTAIN BEYOND MOUNTAIN**

Not long before Tomb Sweeping Day, while the days were still slow with feasts and cards games, and before the village stirred to life with the first flush of spring tea, my friend Li Shaorong became Landlord Li. He could still recall a time when he would have been abused for belonging to the landed class. Some in the village shared stories of being beaten or forced out of school during the Cultural Revolution because of their class status. But the chaos of the 1970s eased into the economic reforms of the ‘80s that gradually trickled down to Bangdong. Li’s family was granted their own small plot of land, Li graduated from subsistence farming to tea farming, and now he had become a landlord—my landlord.

I moved to Bangdong in late 2017 to research rural issues. It is a

small village, home to about 350 tea farmers, with sparse amenities: a Communist Party activity centre, one stand-alone convenience shop, an abandoned schoolhouse and no restaurant. Unsurprisingly, there were no apartments for *waidiren*. But in 2014 Li Shaorong had built a new home and his childhood home next door had been abandoned ever since. We drew up a contract, affixed our thumbprints in red ink and posed for a photo. It was official: I was a Bangdong resident and Li was a landlord.

A narrow dirt path runs past Landlord Li's courtyard to the Old House. It winds around a neighbour's open pit bathroom, under low-hanging chayote vines and along a stone wall until it opens up into a field of tea trees. In their midst stands the Old House, two stories of wooden beams and rammed-earth with walls two feet thick. 'We were one of the first families in Bangdong to have a wood-frame house,' Li told me. Each family in the village collective was tasked with felling a tree and hauling it to the site. The Li's previous house – thatched bamboo walls smeared with mud – was rickety and had become too small for seven children.

But the Old House was now thirty-five years old and aptly named. It was one of the few traditional structures still standing in Bangdong – the others having been demolished and replaced with the modern concrete houses along the loop road – but in its current state was



Figure 3: Renovating Landlord Li's Old House

uninhabitable. Its front doors creaked on their wooden hinges as I swung them open, revealing dirt floors and cobwebbed ceilings. Mud and straw plastered the inside walls and the upstairs floorboards were littered with empty beer bottles, cigarette butts and playing cards – like a tree fort for grown men. The kitchen walls were black from years of cooking over an open fire and now, overtaken by chickens, the floor was thick with droppings. It had no electricity or running water and it shared the open pit bathroom with a neighbour. I liked the place immediately.

The Old House would need some work, however, and Liu Congyou was the man for the job. Brother Liu, as I called him respectfully, was about fifty years old and stood no taller than my shoulder. He was the man I'd seen leading crews at community workdays and manning the wok at village festivities. And he was the one in the denim ball cap emblazoned with big pink letters: "BOY." Brother Liu had served as Bangdong's mayor for six years and was known for being dependable and a problem solver. This was good, for there would be many problems with the Old House, and perhaps a few with the *waidiren* as well.

I stayed in Brother Liu's spare room while we fixed up the Old House. Each morning, promptly at 7:30, he would holler up at me, 'Ma Tai, wake up! Come quick and eat!' We'd eat our fill of rice, soup and leftovers from the night before and then sip some tea. He would smoke his bamboo water pipe then we'd be off to the Old House. Lunch was a repeat of our breakfast routine – rice, soup, tea, and smoke gurgles – then we'd work again until dusk and walk the dirt road loop back for dinner.

In the evenings, we would squat on tiny stools in Brother Liu's kitchen and chat around a corncob fire. A poster of President Xi hung on the wall, his eyes smiling and reassuring as we cracked peanuts and sipped on Liu's home-brewed corn liquor. Liu is soft-spoken and at first seemed self-conscious about talking to me in his accented Mandarin rather than local dialect, which I struggled to understand. He would stare into the fire, watching the peanut shells fizzle into smoke, and pick at his calloused hands, searching for the Mandarin. But the more he sipped the less he cared about pronunciation.

He would describe changes in the village or explain holiday customs. Sometimes he would complain about village politics or the work on the Old House. 'You can stay in my nice new house instead



of crying yourself to sleep with the rats!’ he snarked, his hospitality generous yet scathing, his grin rippling to his ears. Sometimes he would express worry about his son, Ah Hua, who didn’t have a good head on his shoulders, said Liu. The 23-year old was content driving his truck for 100 *yuan* a day if there was work, or, if there wasn’t, sitting shirtless in the courtyard with his friends, drinking and playing *Glory of Kings* on his phone. ‘He doesn’t have the brain to think about the future,’ Liu told me. ‘I don’t know when he’ll get married or if he’ll be able to take care of his mother and me. He probably hasn’t thought about it...’ His voice trailed off. Then Brother Liu would take up some other topic and talk unprompted for another hour until the corncobs burned down to an ashen glow and we’d call it a night. As always, morning would come early: ‘Ma Tai, wake up! Come quick and eat!’

One day at dusk, we packed up our tools at the Old House and walked back toward Brother Liu’s house. The dirt road loop weaves in and out of the hillside and at one overlook I paused to take in the view. Terraced fields and wild forests surrounded Bangdong, stair-stepping into the river valley below and wrapping around the mountainsides in every shade of green – feathery bamboo, needled pines, leafy poplars and banana palms. *Baihua shu*, or “white flower trees,” bloomed across the valley like bursting fireworks in a dark sky. And endless mountains of green, then blue, then grey, faded imperceptibly into the dusk sky. I breathed deep the fresh air and felt the last of the sun’s rays warm my face. In that moment, I felt myself succumbing to the fantasy of a rural idyll.

‘Do you still appreciate the view here?’ I asked Brother Liu, staring out over mountain beyond mountain. Liu was born in Bangdong and had left the village only a handful of times. I feared perhaps he took such beauty for granted.

Brother Liu’s voice was restrained but his words were not minced: ‘Those mountains are why we are poor.’ He turned quietly from the mountains and strode silently up the hillside toward home.

#### THE END OF POVERTY

When I moved to Bangdong in 2017 China’s poverty eradication campaign was in full swing. Slogans plastered the countryside – posted on billboards and painted in meter-high characters along the roadside – pushing for ‘Complete Victory in the War Against Poverty.’ In the village, a sheet of paper hung on each door recording household





**Figure 4 & Figure 5:** Ah Hua, local truck driver, and the loop road in Bangdong, Linxiang district, Yunnan

data such as number of family members, amount of arable land, and annual income. The data for Landlord Li's family was conclusive and unapologetic, its header read: "IMPOVERISHED HOUSEHOLD." Below, in three characters, it summarised the cause of his poverty – "LACKS SKILLS" – and included a nine-point plan to lift his household out of poverty. Li's photo and a red fingerprint completed the report.

Over the past forty years, drastic economic reforms have already lifted over 800 million Chinese out of poverty. Collectivised land was distributed to households like Landlord Li's, and farmers were allowed to keep any grain beyond the state's quota. This meant that farmers no longer spent the days leaning on their hoes smoking, as one villager told me, and instead worked from sunrise to sunset, eager to store away extra grain. Unproductive labour in the countryside migrated to cities to look for work and new roads and rails brought urban centres increasingly within reach. WTO accession in 2001 made China the factory of the world and created even more jobs for the rural poor. And the Hu-Wen administration from 2003 to 2013 expanded social welfare programs which meant improved living standards for hundreds of millions. But these efforts were aimed at poverty alleviation, not eradication. It was not until a speech in 2013 that President Xi became the first leader to make it a specific, measurable and time-bound goal: to eradicate poverty by 2020.

Of course, determining the definition of "poor" was the campaign's first challenge. *How to measure poverty? And how to know when it is eradicated?* China decided upon six metrics to define poverty in a slogan-friendly mnemonic of '1-2-3': "one income," "two no-worries," and "three guarantees." The "one income" standard is an extreme rural poverty line set in 2010 at 2,300 *yuan* (US\$340) per person per year, which, after annual adjustments, is now roughly 4,000 *yuan* (US\$590). The "two no-worries" refer to sufficient food and clothing, and the "three guarantees" include compulsory education, basic medical services and safe housing.<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of thousands of officials were dispatched across the country to survey all rural households – a feat in itself – and to determine who qualified as poor against the "1-2-3" metrics. The paper on Landlord Li's front door is the fruit of their labour.

After targeting whom to lift out of poverty, the second challenge, then, was doing the lifting. Unprecedented amounts of money have been directed toward poverty eradication. Since the campaign's inception in 2015 with over 55 million Chinese in poverty,<sup>2</sup> the central government has spent over 425 billion *yuan* (US\$60 billion) and increased allocations each year by 20 billion as the deadline approaches.<sup>3</sup> Over 145 billion *yuan* (\$20 billion) is earmarked for 2020<sup>4</sup> and only 5.5 million remain in poverty.<sup>5</sup> The Chinese Communist Party has also tapped into the expansive state system: civil servants,

teachers and state-owned enterprise employees, even tax auditors. Party members were paired with each impoverished household and tasked with ensuring they escape poverty. Urbanites gifted cooking oil and leveraged personal networks to sell farmers' produce. Some wealthy places like Shanghai adopted entire poor regions like Yunnan.<sup>a</sup> Healthcare workers visited remote areas to do check-ups and minor surgeries, and universities sent teams to monitor and evaluate progress. Private companies sent executives into the countryside for team-building, or even sponsored the construction of entire relocation villages, while conveniently garnering favour with officials. China's war on poverty has mobilised hundreds of millions of people, dollars and labour-hours in a community service project on a national scale.

Part of the success – and challenge – of the Chinese political system is that national bodies set broad policy directives, then rely on local governments to tailor implementation to their region. So while the “1-2-3” metrics remain consistent across rural China, implementation has varied from county to county. Most have provided cash payments to raise incomes above the poverty line, along with subsidies for healthcare and education. But some townships have also relocated residents from remote areas to new apartment complexes. Others have given out lump sums of cash for house renovations or food and clothing.

In Bangdong, my neighbours below the poverty line received quarterly income supplements posted publicly at the Communist Party activity centre. Landlord Li's household was classified as impoverished so his son went to school for free and each family member received a healthcare stipend of 180 *yuan*. The government also covered ninety-five percent of qualified medical costs. Health issues were common in Bangdong – construction accidents, brake failure, cancer, and drunken knife fights – and easily wiped out family savings. Having healthcare for the first time gave residents a new sense of security. It also meant that they could dig up that money hidden under the mattress and splurge on smart phones, washing machines or clothes on Taobao, China's massive online marketplace.

But the most obvious affect of the poverty eradication campaign in Bangdong was the new houses. Throughout the village the old rammed-earth houses, like the Old House, were torn down and

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a Shanghai adopted the whole province, though poverty alleviation work was concentrated on 26 key counties <https://www.iprcc.org.cn/English/Index/warehouse/id/4464.html>

replaced with blocky concrete houses two or three stories high. The government gave villagers stipends of up to 50,000 *yuan* (US\$7,400) cash transfer and another 50,000 in low-to-no interest loans to replace their “unsafe housing.” The house I stayed in with Brother Liu was one such new house. On top of subsidy from the government, he borrowed more than double that from friends and family to do it right the first time. It stood three stories tall with elaborate columns and more rooms than furniture, which he easily filled up with ears of corn or cakes of tea and the occasional foreign guest.

One supplemental benefit of housing subsidies is the construction boom. Not only could Brother Liu build a new house, he could build other people’s new houses. Then when people were finished building houses, they started building greenhouses for tea processing. A government-led hygiene drive even subsidised new cinder block bathrooms with running water for each household. Money started circulating in the Bangdong economy and ended up in the pockets of skilled labourers like Brother Liu, or even businesspeople like the Hunanese salesman.

The government has also invested heavily in infrastructure. Just twelve years ago, more than 40% of Yunnan’s rural population had no direct access to a paved road. But during my first week in Bangdong, workers paved its first stretch of road. By fall, a construction crew had laid stone pavers along the loop road through Bangdong – even up Hell Hill, though it wasn’t long before the hillside began eroding and pavers were tumbling into my backyard. Nearby, a bridge was almost completed over the Mekong River, and a new highway tunnels through the mountains that had left Bangdong isolated for so long. With six months rainy season, these improvements were critical to allow my neighbours to access cash crop markets, healthcare and education.

The result is that Bangdong people are living their best lives now. Brother Liu has a new house. Landlord Li’s son has free room and board at school. And when my friend’s scooter brakes failed, plunging him down the mountainside, he had access to hospital care and health insurance. Most rural residents attribute their newfound prosperity to the Chinese Communist Party and, specifically, to President Xi Jinping. It was Xi after all who pushed for this ambitious goal and it is his face – not Mao’s – that now hangs on posters in people’s kitchens.



**Figure 6 & Figure 7:** The national Poverty Eradication Program has led to a construction boom in Yunnan; villagers enjoy a housewarming party

### **A WILL BUT NO WAY**

Yet for all the money the Party has committed to the campaign, not everyone is as happy as Brother Liu. One evening I headed out for a strategically timed stroll and saw Landlord Li on his porch smoking. He kindly insisted I join him for dinner and dished me up a generous bowl of rice doused in broth with processed sausage and white yam.



'It's too simple,' he berated his cooking.

'No! It's very good!' I assured him. 'Much better than last time!'

Landlord Li and I chatted into the evening as he burned through Cloud Mists. As the daylight dimmed, a glow in his living room intensified. His twelve-year-old son was on his phone playing *Glory of Kings*. 'He'll eat when he eats,' Li said with resignation. The boy's mother had left six years prior and never returned.

Li was just glad his son was still in school. Li himself had dropped out of third grade because he hated it. His family was poor, so Li only had tattered clothing to wear. He'd felt humiliated in front of his classmates and finally one day his parents couldn't force him anymore. Li quit. Now, as an impoverished household, he hoped his son didn't face that same sort of humiliation, but he couldn't be sure. His son boarded at school during the week so was only home Saturday nights. They didn't talk much.

'Tell me about this nine-point plan,' I said to Li, pulling the "IMPOVERISHED HOUSEHOLD" paper off his front door. I wondered how the expressionless case-worker in the photo had determined that Li "LACKS SKILLS."

'It's all a lie,' he said brusquely and returned to gurgling his water pipe. His comment caught me off guard. While I'd heard some complaints about local implementation, most villagers said positive things about the poverty eradication campaign. Li's comment diverged far from most.

'What do you mean?' I asked. His nine-point plan emphasised skills training and part-time work, so I was curious what that meant for him or if it was a standard template. 'Didn't they follow this plan?'

'I don't know,' Li said. 'I haven't looked at it.'

I was astounded. *This is the plan to get you out of poverty. It's been hanging on your front door for years. And you haven't looked at it!?* I finally mustered my thoughts out loud: 'You mean, you don't even know what the plan says?'

'Of course I don't know what it says,' he retorted, unfazed. He inhaled another gurgle and blew out a puff of smoke. 'I can't read.'

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'It is impossible to turn an uneducated person into an entrepreneur,' one Party official told me. "It's a *sixiang wenti*" – a mind-set issue.



**Figure 8:** Traditional water pipes remain popular in rural communities

But it's not for lack of trying. The local government has tried to provide economic opportunities rather than hand outs. It surveyed local soil, climate and elevation to determine suitable cash crops such as tea, coffee and walnuts. It then subsidised farmers to switch from subsistence agriculture to cash crops and it set up industry associations to share agricultural best practices, and to establish branding and pricing standards. Elsewhere I met officials who pushed e-commerce platforms for 'farmerpreneurs' and I even sat through a weekend training that taught local women how to nanny and clean house, to equip them for city jobs. But, even though there's a will – even the will of the Party – there's not a clear way.

One Bangdong neighbour, Mr. Huang, has boxes of unsold tea stacked in his house. He confessed he has no sales network or marketing strategy other than waiting for an unknown tea boss to show up. Another villager, Mr. Zhang, supports elderly parents, two kids in school and a wife with mental health issues. He himself is an alcoholic. Landlord Li is 50, has a third grade education, and "LACKS SKILLS." Even if China nominally achieves its goal of eradicating poverty by 2020, what prevents the Huangs and Zhangs from falling back into poverty in 2021? Beyond Bangdong, 600 million Chinese still live on a monthly income of 1000 *yuan* (US\$140). 'It's barely enough to cover monthly rent in a mid-sized Chinese city,' China's premier, Li Keqiang, told a press conference in Beijing. Extreme rural poverty may be eradicated in 2020, but China still has a poverty problem.

## THE WEIGHT OF THE MOMENT

In 2019, Landlord Li was officially lifted out of poverty. All the “1-2-3” metrics boxes had been ticked: his meagre tea farming income – not to mention my rent – kept him and his son well above the extreme rural poverty line; he had sufficient food and clothes; he had healthcare and education subsidies from the government; and he was living in a massive, new house. But to Li not much had changed.

‘There’s no difference,’ Li said, describing life before and after de-improvement. ‘They cover our health insurance and my son goes to school for free. That’s it.’

‘But what about your new house?’ I asked. I assumed Li had received subsidies like so many neighbours.

‘That was with my own money,’ he corrected me. Li had one of the first modern houses in the village – much like the Old House and its wooden beams forty years prior – but he built it before the subsidy policy kicked in. ‘I built this kitchen too,’ he made clear. ‘Really all I got was that extra cinderblock bathroom.’

Li paused and his face fell with somber resignation. ‘The government says I’m not poor anymore,’ he told me earnestly, ‘but I still feel poor.’

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My last tea harvest was fall 2019, just before I left Bangdong. During the day, the village would hum with pickers, mostly women, who would climb into the branches of its ancient tea trees and pluck off the broad leaves. As evening fell, farmers would strap bulging feed sacks onto overloaded motorcycles and ride precariously on the mountain trails home. Soon the air would hang thick with the aroma of honey roasted grass, as processors, mostly men, cooked bushels of fresh tea in their wood-fired woks, kneaded them and spread them on bamboo mats to dry. These loose leaves were later packed in cardboard boxes that read “Yunnan Famous Tea” and shipped to tea bosses in Kunming or on the wealthy east coast.

This also meant work for those on the periphery of the tea economy, like Brother Liu’s son, Ah Hua, who would haul these boxes of tea in his diesel truck, Steed, up to the post office in a nearby township. One October day, a villager asked him to pick up a load from his house at the top of Hell Hill. Ah Hua started Steed’s engine and began pattering



around the loop road with a deafening roar. But rather than taking the long, prudent way around, he headed toward Hell Hill. I'd not seen anyone drive up that road since the pavers started falling into my backyard, but that did not stop Ah Hua. He turned straight up the hill, pattering slowly, and straining the engine against the incline. It would not prove a faster route.



**Figure 8:** Frying fresh tea leaves in a wood-fired wok

Ah Hua got halfway up the knoll, to Hell Hill's steepest point, before the road collapsed. The weight of the truck was too much for the eroding embankment, so it tumbled 20 meters down the steep hillside, tearing through Li's tea trees and coming to rest in my backyard at the Old House.

I sat with Brother Liu after the accident, silently sipping tea at his house under the poster of Xi, always smiling, always reassuring. Ah Hua would be fine. Miraculously, he had jumped from the truck as it teetered on the edge and he landed near the top of the hill, far from the wreckage, bleeding and stunned, but very much alive. He spent a week in the city hospital four hours away, fighting infection with a foot-long gash in his thigh. Ninety-five percent of his bill was covered by the state. Meanwhile, the village continued to appeal to the local government to fix the loop road—as it had done ever since the shoddy construction finished.

'Stupid kid,' Brother Liu said, his voice equal parts anger and affection. 'He wasn't using his brain driving up that road.' Liu had seen enough collapsed roads and brake failures to know what might have been. The weight of the moment hit him and he used a single hand – his thumb and index finger – to casually wipe the outside corners of his eyes. I felt a rush of warmth to my own eyes and sat staring into my teacup.

I walked by myself from Brother Liu's home back to the Old House, tracing the steps he and I had walked so many times on the dirt road after early mornings of rice, tea and smoke gurgles. For one of the last times, I stopped to look out over the mountains. They still looked beautiful to me, as they could perhaps only to a *waidiren*. But they too had changed. Their peaks appeared taller, their folds deeper,

their shadows darker.

I watched them, at once familiar and unsearchable, until the sun dropped below the horizon and they withdrew into the half-light of dusk. Then I turned quietly from the mountains and strode silently along the road toward home.

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# ‘LET THE PAST SERVE THE PRESENT’

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOFT POWER IN THE PRESERVATION OF CHINESE VILLAGES

BY ANNA-PAOLA POLA

### ABSTRACT

*In 2000, two villages in Anhui Province, Xidi and Hongcun, were declared World Heritage Sites. This designation was a pivotal moment, for it was the first time the historical and cultural values of a Chinese village were recognised at such a level. Twenty years later, the country is eminent in the discourse on World Heritage Sites and is experiencing a national rural revival on a grand scale. World Heritage properties in China already include thirty villages, with more than seventy-five other potential nominations on the national Tentative List. As a result, nationwide protection measures have been established, and rural heritage has been identified as an intertwined set of tangible and intangible, natural and cultural components. However, attention remains mainly focused on the promotion of tourism as a leverage for rapid development. This approach often leads to the transformation of traditional urban spaces into empty stage sets, the marginalisation of local communities, and the reinvention of cultural practices. In this conflicting framework, understanding the situation and promoting alternative paths of development is a challenge.*

*Drawing upon four years of research and on-field assessment of historic villages in China, this article presents a critical overview of the situation describing the policies, approaches and practices at stake.*

### INTRODUCTION

In December 2000, two small settlements in southern Anhui Province, Xidi and Hongcun, were declared World Heritage Sites.<sup>1</sup> It was the first time that the historical and cultural value of a rural village in China had gained recognition of such high calibre. However, the nomination was just the tip of the iceberg, a partial outcome of a more extensive, planned process.

### THE RURAL ISSUES

At the end of the 1990s, two decades after the economic reform that powered the development of China's eastern seaboard cities,



**Figure 1:** The distinctive architecture of Xidi, Anhui (September 2018)



**Figure 2:** Tourists photograph lotus ponds in Hongcun, Anhui (September 2017)

discontent with the widening urban-rural divide was rising and the debate on rural problems becoming more fractious. In March 2000, Li Changping, a Party secretary from a rural township in Hubei Province, wrote to the Chinese premier Zhu Rongji about his personal experience. In his letter, later published in the Guangzhou-based newspaper, *Southern Weekly*, Li sadly lamented the conditions of farmers, villages, and agriculture (农民 *nóngmín*, 农村 *nóngcūn*, 农

业 *nóngyè*).<sup>2</sup> One year later, the contribution of ‘agriculture, villages, and farmers’ to the modernisation of the country found its way into Zhu Rongji’s report on the 10<sup>th</sup> Five-year Plan to the National People’s Congress (NPC). These three words, increasingly quoted in national media, quickly came to be known as the *three rural* (三农 *sān nóng*) issues, a formula devised by the intellectual Wen Tiejun in his 1999 article reflecting on the crisis in the countryside during the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

With the leadership change from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao in 2002, the Party signalled its commitment to tackling the urban-rural gap. In 2004, 2005, and 2006, the annual *No. 1 Directive Document* was released on rural issues. In the 11<sup>th</sup> Five-year Plan, a programme for the social and economic development of rural areas, namely *Building a New Socialist Countryside*, was included.<sup>4</sup> In 2018, a strategic plan for *Rural Revitalisation* further confirmed the government’s commitment to these issues.<sup>5</sup>

The countryside was officially recognised as the missing piece to accomplishing the full socio-economic development of the nation and achieving the goal of a *moderately prosperous society* (小康社会 *xiǎokāng shèhuì*).<sup>6</sup> The ‘unbalanced and inadequate development’ was set as the new national contradiction to be solved, and clear goals were laid out: ‘We must ensure that by the year 2020, all rural residents living below the current poverty line have been lifted out of poverty’.<sup>7</sup>

Compared with the past, when the rural problem mainly revolved around food security,<sup>8</sup> the discourse on the *three rural issues* marked a shift towards a more comprehensive approach. This time, the rural crisis was conceived as a result of different factors: rural people (income, migration), society (social capital development, socio-economic and political issues), and production (agriculture, local enterprises development).<sup>9</sup> All these components interact in complex ways. Their causes and solutions lie far beyond the rural domain: they involve the city, the government’s urban policies, and, more broadly, the very model of development.<sup>10</sup>

Since rural areas had been placed at the top of the national agenda, all government offices mobilised to address the crisis in their specific sector. Solutions to promote rural development included: structural reforms that aimed to modernise the agricultural sector, increase the income of farmers and investment in rural areas. Changes addressed the review of the rural land use system (the *separation of three land rights*, 三权分置 *sān quán fēn zhì*) and rural financial institutions. The

burden of taxes was reduced (including the abolition of the millenary agricultural tax in 2006), rural school fees cancelled, and the rural health insurance system was redesigned. The government supported digitalisation in rural areas and subsidised entrepreneurship, fiercely promoting rural tourism.

Measures to reduce the urban-rural gap included, notably, the definition of a new planning regime aimed at reorganising the hierarchy between city and countryside.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese development model is closely tied to urbanisation processes, with national regulation stating that ‘urbanisation is the only way to modernisation’.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the development of rural and marginal areas was perceived as an issue of urbanising the countryside. The strategy of *urban-rural integration* (城乡一体化 *chéngxiāng yītǐ huà*) pursued the goal of bringing urban standards of living to rural areas. Many interventions followed the ‘rationalisation’ of villages and regional layout: scattered hamlets and settlements were demolished, villagers relocated into compact clusters of new buildings on the outskirts of rural towns, and primary farmlands were consolidated.<sup>13</sup> In 2007, the *Urban Planning Law* became the *Urban and Rural Planning Law*, and rural land was officially incorporated into the spatial planning regime.<sup>14</sup> From then on, the involvement of every administrative level was required to formulate a spatial plan. Provinces were required to issue a provincial urban system plan; urban municipalities and townships were put in charge of drafting urban plans and town plans, respectively. Within this strategy, townships were designated as service centres for their territorial basin. Hence, town development had to be aligned with the needs of its surrounding rural areas, to provide the services that villages lack. Accordingly, arrangements for infrastructure (hydrological engineering projects, rural roads, biogas, power grids) and welfare services (schools, health centres, kindergartens) were prioritised. For the first time, administrative villages were asked to define a 20-year village plan including land use, functions, infrastructure provision, transport development, as well as protected areas for farmland, natural resources and cultural heritage.<sup>15</sup>

Support for Party officers in village planning processes often comes from the example of other villages that have achieved ‘model status’. *Model experiences* (典型经验 *diǎnxíng jīngyàn*) allow for a policy to be tested first and, if deemed successful, to be formulated into national policy, and then extended throughout the country (this





**Figure 3-6:** (clockwise from left) A stage for performances being built over the river in Dangjia, Shaanxi (September 2016); restoration work for a Tulou museum, Xiananxi Yongding Fujian (September 2019); renovation work in Qikou, Shanxi (September 2019); new infrastructure construction near the Hani Rice Terraces, Yunnan (November 2018)

policy-making methodology is also known as the *point-to-surface* technique).<sup>16</sup> Different lists of model villages, responding to diverse aspects and scopes, are managed by various government departments. The list of *Beautiful Villages*, managed by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), aims to improve the village environment, organisation and public services in compliance with the *Building a New Socialist Countryside* program. The *Eco-civilisation Villages*, under the supervision of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), addresses energy efficiency, water and soil quality, and the atmosphere in rural areas. The list of *Traditional Villages*, focusing on built heritage and intangible traditions, is entrusted to the combined efforts of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD), the National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA), the Ministry of Culture (MOC), and Ministry of Finance (MOF). Every group defines a set of criteria that villages must meet in order to be included in these lists. The success of a project is judged through a point-attributing mechanism, and villages achieving model status receive funds for further implementation.

The system of model villages is a crucial feature of China that dates back to the Mao era. The paradigm of the model village is Dazhai, in Shanxi. In the 1960s and 1970s it was the starting point of a nationwide emulation campaign on the efficiency of Communist agricultural productivity.<sup>17</sup> Model villages are not the only parallel between current policies and previous “to-the-countryside” campaigns. There are multiple initiatives that bear a notable resemblance to previous experiences. The consolidation of dispersed hamlets and villages onto single sites has been common practice in the PRC, as the focus of preserving farmland has remained unchanged throughout the years: from Mao, through the Economic Reform Period, until now.<sup>18</sup> The idea driving the *Building a New Socialist Countryside* policy is also not entirely new; the *People’s Daily* editorial, on July 2, 1956, was titled precisely ‘Building the New Socialist Countryside’.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the inspiration for the homonymous 2006 policy is rather evident as the 1956 programme targeted improving agricultural production, water conservancy, road building, rural housing, public health and sanitation, and education.<sup>20</sup>

However, even if the intent of the 2006 action plan for rural environments is not entirely new, the fresh heritage component has injected a very different twist to contemporary rural development policies.

#### THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE PAST

In a 1980s essay, Simon Leys (the alter ego of Belgian-born sinologist Pierre Ryckmans) tried to describe the complex relationship that China, the oldest living civilisation, has with its past. This relationship, he wrote, combines a great sense of continuity with indifference for the preservation of its material vestiges and even, at times, iconoclasm.<sup>21</sup> Today, a further layer of interpretation could be added to the “attitude” highlighted in Leys’ remarks. Many tangible and intangible cultural items – after having been neglected, barely considered, or fiercely criticised – have been so strenuously re-evaluated and promoted that the country is now witnessing a “heritage craze”<sup>22</sup> or “heritage fever” (遗产热 yíchǎn rè).<sup>23</sup> This heritage momentum accords with a cultural shift that has been progressively implemented since the mid-1980s.

China’s effective entry into the global heritage discourse occurred in 1985 after the country had signed the 1972 UNESCO *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*



(World Heritage Convention). In 1987, the World Heritage Committee, gathering at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, approved the inclusion of the first group of “outstanding” Chinese properties in the World Heritage List: the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, and the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor with his terracotta warriors were among those. In January 1990, the *People’s Daily* published a speech by Li Ruihuan, then Minister of Culture, titled *Some questions relevant to enhancing the outstanding elements of national culture*.<sup>24</sup> In his speech, Li described the promotion of national culture as having critical political significance and instructed that ancient buildings, cultural relics, and ancient texts be protected and restored. According to Guo Yingjie, the Minister’s speech has to be interpreted as the Party’s effort to promote culture as a tool for stability and to rekindle nationalism and Party legitimacy in a post–1989 context.<sup>25</sup>

Within a few years the country had promoted so many new inclusions in the World Heritage List that in 2019, with 55 nominated properties, China equalled the longstanding pre-eminence of Italy. By signing the UNESCO Convention, the country has taken part in the global process of heritage recognition and protection, embracing its principles, terms of reference, and narratives. However, in China, as in any country, the World Heritage nomination has become a political feature, affirming the prestige of the nation. Thus, international heritage narratives underwent a process of domestic appropriation to serve the strategic objectives of the Party-state.<sup>26</sup> This “domesticated” discourse on heritage was used to promote a ‘consensus version of history’<sup>27</sup> and became an instrument of governance, used to legitimise political decisions, support economic choices, reinforce the national sense of identity, and generate soft power abroad.<sup>28</sup>

In international politics, the concept of *soft power* refers to the ability of a state to alter the behaviour of others to achieve its objectives, using cultural charm instead of coercive means.<sup>29</sup> Coined by Joseph Nye in his 1990 book about the “American power”.<sup>30</sup> In 1993 the term was introduced in China, and, in a short time, it was adopted into the official discourse of Chinese leaders.<sup>31</sup> Hu Jintao mentioned the *cultural soft power* (文化软实力 *wénhuà ruǎn shí lì*) of the country in his 2007 Report for the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).<sup>32</sup> Ten years later the concept was still present in Xi Jinping’s speech to the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress: ‘We will improve our capacity for engaging in international communication

so as to tell China's stories well, present a true, multidimensional, and panoramic view of China, and enhance our country's *cultural soft power*.<sup>33</sup> As a result, cultural awareness rapidly spread across the country, enriching the national debate, its vocabulary, and the very idea of what is considered heritage. From "cultural relics" (文物 wénwù) to "heritage" (遗产 yíchǎn), from monuments to vernacular buildings, from ancient towns to cultural landscapes, from tangible items to intangible practices, this conceptual extension has enabled a progressive inclusion of more and more sites under the heritage umbrella. Old villages and rural areas have felt this renewed cultural mood the most.

For thousands of years China has been an agricultural empire and an incredible array of remnants of this past still marks the land: hydraulic works, rural settlements, old postal and commercial routes, etc. The narrative of the Chinese ancient farming civilisation is a powerful message to articulate the State's identity and continuity in world society. Therefore, villages that have escaped the pace of modernisation conserve a cultural richness that is a precious resource for the *Beautiful China* (美丽中国 měilì zhōngguó) promoted by today's national slogans.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, many of these villages are home to different ethnic groups, and their promotion is crucial to convey to the world a much more inclusive idea of "Chinese identity".

In the 2000s, the debate on the *three rural issues* brought rural heritage to the foreground across the country. Social and economic transformations in the countryside threatened rural heritage, but paradoxically also stimulated its conservation. This was possible thanks to enhanced fiscal and regulatory support from the State and a more engaged interest from the broader public.<sup>35</sup> After the inclusion of Xidi and Hongcun in the UNESCO World Heritage List, many other rural settlements rapidly followed. The *Kaiping Diaolou and Villages* (designated in 2007) count four villages, *Fujian Tulou* (2008) includes six clusters of settlements, the *Cultural Landscape of Honghe Hani Rice Terraces* (2013) has five nominated villages plus 77 rural settlements within the nominated property.

In 2011, the *West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou* (2011) stimulated an intriguing debate among experts regarding the exclusion<sup>36</sup> of some tea villages from the nomination. Moreover, the national Tentative List, where sites to be considered for World Heritage nomination are listed, includes many villages looking for



**Figure 7-9:** (from top) Dance performance in Langde Miao Village, Guizhou (May 2017); Tulou buildings in Tianzhongcun, Fujian (September 2019); Taoping Qiang Village, Sichuan (March 2019)

international recognition. In 2008, the *Ancient Waterfront Towns in the South of Yangtze River* submission described four water towns (Zhouzhuang, Luzhi, Wuzhen and Xitang) but, in time, the tentative dossier progressively developed and now includes 18 settlements. The *Ancient Residences in Shanxi and Shaanxi Provinces* (2008) proposed two villages, the *Miao Nationality Villages in Southeast Guizhou Province* (2008) had more than 30 ethnic villages, the *Ancient Tea Plantations of Jingmai Mountain in Pu'er* (2013) included eight villages, the *Diaolou Buildings and Villages for Tibetan and Qiang Ethnic Groups* (2013) counted 15, and the *Dong Villages* dossier (2013) applied for the inclusion of 22 small settlements.



**Figure 10-11:** (from top) Watertowns have become popular tourist destinations. Restaurants line the canal in Tongli, Jiangsu (July 2016); Tourists are rowed on small boats in Zhouzhuang, Jiangsu (October 2018)



As Yan Haiming notes, even small towns barely known in their provinces have shown their intention to compete for a World Heritage nomination. In 2004, the small ancient town of Qikou, located on the shore of the Yellow River, hosted the *International Symposium on the Protection of Ancient Architecture in Qikou* with the ultimate aim of placing the town on the World Heritage List. Local officers and scholars acknowledged that this goal seemed impossible but admitted the statement itself would strengthen public and tourist interest and bring more attention and financial support from the government.

The case of Qikou reveals that the national concern with World Heritage is not just related to the international designation, but it also relays to very domestic logics.<sup>37</sup>

Besides the World Heritage List and its overwhelming relevance, a mechanism to ensure the conservation of historic villages was established, implementing inventories at state, provincial, and local levels. In 2003, the first group of *Chinese Historical and Cultural Towns & Villages* was listed.<sup>38</sup> The list, replacing ‘cities’ with ‘towns & villages’, assumed the same name as the *Chinese Historical and Culture Cities* list that in 1982 identified historic cities to be protected at the national level. The process of inclusion includes a standardised set of criteria to objectively evaluate villages across the country. It assesses the period and state of conservation of buildings, construction techniques, the consistency of the built fabric (mainly along streets and waterways),



Figure 12: Qikou Village on the Yellow River, Shanxi (September 2019)

the integrity of the settlement layout, as well as conservation tools and any regulatory system in force.<sup>39</sup> The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) and the National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA) are in charge of coordinating the protection of these villages, which now, after several rounds of inclusions, totals 487.

In 2007, the issue of the *Circular on Strengthening the Protection of Vernacular Architecture* introduced the concept of “vernacular heritage” into the Chinese official lexicon. In 2012, a new list of villages was released. The press conference for the launch of the *Chinese Traditional Villages* provides an exhaustive account of the establishment of this new list of small settlements:

The country has a thousand year old farming civilisation rooted in the countryside; traditional villages that have preserved their heritage are the soul of the nation and the root of our culture [...]. Such heritage is not renewable and is facing a crisis caused by the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation of the last decades [...]. Therefore, although some villages might not have many ancient buildings, they embody in their layout, in their location, and many intangible aspects the cultural elements that reflect the essence of Chinese culture, probably even more deeply than *Historical Villages*. Ancient buildings display old material forms, but our ultimate scope is not the forms themselves, but to preserve the culture that is embedded in those forms and places.<sup>40</sup>

The list of *Traditional Villages*, therefore, intends to expand the scope of the previous list, including a larger number of villages. Accordingly, it defines a more comprehensive standard template of selection. Criteria are articulated in three main categories: architecture, settlement layout, and intangible elements. Throughout all the sections, regional and ethnic elements and the ‘local sense of beauty’ are steadily emphasised. Traditional building techniques are considered relevant especially when combined with existing skills and tools still applied in ‘the architecture of everyday life’ (日常生活建筑 *richáng shēnghuó jiànzhú*). Feng shui (风水) is not directly mentioned, but the symbiotic relationship between villages and

their specific natural environment is broadly considered, both in the scientific and cultural aspects reflected in site selection.<sup>41</sup>

Support and management mechanisms for the nominated villages are ensured through informative documents such as the *Basic Requirements for the Preparation of Traditional Villages Protection and Development Plan*<sup>42</sup> and the *Guidelines on Enhancing the Conservation of Traditional Villages*.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, a *Research Centre* and an *Archive on Traditional Villages* have been established. The Ministry of Finance (MOF) – in charge of the list with the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD), the Ministry of Culture (MOC), and the National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA) – offers a subsidy to villages included in the national list. As a result, many villages that previously did not qualify for the title of *Historical and Cultural Villages* enrolled in the *Traditional Villages* list. Now, there are 6,819 traditional villages recognised at the national level, and the number of villages at the provincial level is even larger.<sup>44</sup>

The 2013 Press Conference for the launch of *Traditional Villages* announced the government's plan to enhance the promotion and knowledge of traditional villages in the wider public, using television and other media.<sup>45</sup> Hence, a year later, the first broadcast made its debut on national CCTV (Chinese Channel of China Central Television). *Nostalgia* (记住乡愁 jì zhù xiāng chóu) is a TV documentary series (in its sixth season, in 2020) which met with great acclaim among mainland and overseas Chinese audiences.<sup>46</sup> The series, a Chinese cultural heritage project, was planned in close coordination with the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) and the National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA) and produced by the Central Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television. Every season has 60 episodes, each describing a traditional small settlement, its people, stories, and traditions, covering all regions across the country and different ethnic groups, 'in search of the country's cultural genes' as the broadcast description on the website declares.<sup>47</sup>

Until recently, rural environments were considered backward areas in opposition to urban development and progress, but villages are now experiencing increasing appreciation throughout the country. A nostalgic sense for traditional lifestyles, genuine Socialist-Confucian values, and Chinese ancestral precepts is embedded in this new feeling

for the countryside. Rural nostalgia is a distinctive feature of rapidly urbanising societies. In post-socialist China, these nostalgic feelings may act as a tool to create an idyllic image of ecological rurality and screen out painful memories. As Davis notes, nostalgia may contribute to the maintenance of solidarity in whole societies after ‘untoward historic events’.<sup>48</sup> In younger generations, this nostalgic feeling – that is not truly nostalgia as it concerns places never seen and events never lived through – creates a powerful collective archetype of continuity between past and present, replacing the void of painful memories that remain unscrutinised.

#### IT COMES FULL CIRCLE

The promotion of culture in the 1990 discourse of Minister Li Ruihuan can also be read from another perspective, besides its function as a tool for stability and nationalism. Tim Oakes notes that the speech can be interpreted as the Party green light for a ‘cultural turn’ in economic development strategies.<sup>49</sup> In the early 1990s, after fiscal decentralisation emburdened local governments, the PRC recognised culture as a potential and underexploited economic resource for regional development. In a few years, this resulted in the rapid rise of cultural regionalisms, the promotion of local specialities, and rural tourism development.

The interpretation of culture in instrumental terms, to increase the economic value of a location and its products, is certainly not original and is not limited to China. This entrepreneurial approach to culture has become an international feature. UNESCO has promoted it since the *World Decade for Cultural Development* (1988–97) and further implemented it with the UNESCO *Creative Cities Network*. Founded in 2004, the Network sets its goal in ‘placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of [city’s] development plans’.<sup>50</sup> China, with its 14 ‘creative cities’, leads the Network and plays a very active role in the group, periodically promoting and co-organising the UNESCO *Creative Cities Beijing Summits*.

The combination of culture and entrepreneurship also seems to be the rationale for establishing the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2018, merging two formerly separate entities, the Ministry of Culture and the China National Tourism Administration. Tourism in China is a rapidly growing market, with demand steadily increasing alongside national incomes. Rural tourism, in particular, exploits





**Figure 13-15:** (from top) Art students on a field trip in Hongcun, Anhui (September 2018); a glass bridge over Huangling Wuyuan, Jiangxi (September 2018); panoramic view of Shiyuanzi Yongding, Fujian (September 2019)

vernacular architecture, pastoral landscapes, agricultural products, as well as local rural traditions and ethnic features, that are an essential part of the 'exotic' attractiveness villages display to urban visitors. Walks through old villages and itineraries among fields are offered to tourists, employing short default paths, panoramic observation decks, glass bridges hanging over blooming fields, and hot-air balloon rides.

Farmers are being asked to replace traditional crops with ornamental plantations such as rapeseed, lotuses, and chrysanthemums to increase the tourist appeal of the site. Thus, visitor flows follow seasonal blooming, when rapeseed flowers surround villages in a sea of yellow in mid-March, or red maples flame the landscape in the autumn.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, rural tourism is intended to offer tourist visits, entertainment and shopping opportunities, boosting employment and increasing the income of farmers.<sup>51</sup> This growing economic sector is considered a means to fight poverty by redistributing national wealth from coastal cities to inland regions. According to the *National Tourism Development Report*, rural tourism in China is creating ten million new jobs annually. Between 2014 and 2015, this sector grew by 60 per cent. Estimates show that by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-year Plan (2016–2020) 150,000 villages will have been designated as rural tourism sites with three million operators and four billion tourists in this sector alone.<sup>52</sup>

Rural heritage is, therefore, seen as a powerful economic asset for local government in meeting its need for rapid development.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in remote, rural, and ethnic regions, the tourism industry is introduced as a modernising tool to promote economic, social, and cultural development and to better integrate minorities within the nation-state.<sup>54</sup> Consistent with this vision, the *National New Urbanisation Plan 2014–2020* states that urban plans:

should take into account the natural, historical, and cultural conditions of different regions and highlight regional differences, promote diversity, and avoid homogeneity; cities and towns should have distinctive historical memories, cultural contexts, and regional and ethnic features so that we can develop a new model of urbanisation that reflects reality and embraces diversity.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, the 2015 revision of the *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China* specifically mentions ‘the cultural diversity of different ethnic groups, regions and of the vernacular cultural heritage with unique local features’, and suggests that the targets of conservation should be focused on social benefits, economic growth, and urban and rural development.<sup>56</sup> A list of *Beautiful Leisure Villages* and experimental zones for rural tourism, established by the Ministry of Agriculture, pioneered this strategy, and, at the end of July 2019, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism launched a further group of *Key Rural Tourism Villages*.

What the statistics usually do not explain, however, is the mechanism behind those tourist development projects. Large-scale investment companies – based on a model of public-private partnership – are invited to act as engines of rural development. These enterprises obtain monopoly contracts (up to 50 years) for the tourism development of a location, usually one or more entire villages, plus potential plots of land. This model of tourism development is generally known as *Enclave Tourism* because the investment company separates the village designated for tourism-leisure activities from the primary territorial unit and manages the intended use of the space.<sup>57</sup> Old buildings are maintained, and many restructured in line with proposed uses (modifications to the facades of ancient buildings are generally not allowed). The company takes charge of the construction and management of all tourism facilities on the site. New structures built range from parking lots, toilets, information boards, and ticket offices (there is always an entrance ticket to visit the village) to large-scale accommodation structures, hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, exhibition centres, theatres, as well as electric buses, new roads or even cable cars to transport visitors to the site.

Investments are in proportion to the company’s means and the expectations of local Party cadres. Hence, such a process is easily subject to external pressures. Outcomes show that this model of tourism development often leads to homologated interventions, cultural and historical reinterpretations, and commodification of local traditions.<sup>58</sup> Very little room remains for local initiative. The company has to maximise short-term profits to generate return on invested capital and legitimise its work and role with Party officers. The distribution of the benefits resulting from tourism activities to the local population is left to free negotiation between representatives of the inhabitants



**Figure 3-6:** (clockwise from left) A new parking lot in Qikou, Shanxi (September 2019); the cable car to the village of Huangling, Wuyuan, Jiangxi (September 2018); a tourist map in Taoping Qiang village, Sichuan (March 2019); and the culture centre under construction in Qianghu Miao Village, Guizhou (June 2017)

and the private company. Such an approach regularly marginalises local communities, who end up obtaining meagre dividends by way of compensation or limited income from low-level tourist jobs (quite often companies prefer to employ cheaper, non-local labour). In the past, some situations have generated tensions between the local population, investment company, and visitors, resulting in the renegotiation of agreements and even the expulsion of the company.<sup>59</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The 2012 *Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Protection and Development of Traditional Villages* clearly expresses the strategic nexus that ties together rural heritage preservation, national identity construction, and economic development in China. The document decisively states that the promotion of rural heritage conservation is important for three main reasons: it enhances the awareness and confidence of the country in its culture, it safeguards the cultural diversity of China preserving all its ethnic cultural expressions, and it improves the economic development of rural areas.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, in the past 20 years, rural heritage conservation has

matured in China. This is evident in the enhanced regulatory system, and the number of villages added to the UNESCO World Heritage list and other official, national lists of protected sites. Accordingly, rural heritage values have been acknowledged and included in a more comprehensive and updated concept of heritage. Current ideas of heritage are no longer limited to monuments and ancient relics but reflect a host of contemporary values, encompassing social structures, agricultural patterns, environmental practices, intangible customs, and belief systems. This inclusive idea of heritage is also a result of the influence of international trends that have attuned to national needs.

China has witnessed a recurrent mechanism of congruence-building and domestic appropriation of international heritage policies to legitimise a national agenda.<sup>61</sup> Rural heritage has, therefore, been handled by the central government to convey a narrative of an ancient farming civilisation, acting as a powerful tool to revive national identity and produce soft power. Cultural resources and rural tourism have been used by local governments as a social-economic driver to attract investment and reduce rural poverty. However, the impact of an aggressive tourism industry can marginalise the inhabitants of rural communities, thus undermining the state policies that were designed precisely to promote cultural industries and rural development.

The picture emerging from this interpretation of current dynamics is consequently complex, and not without its contradictions. The Chinese experience in rural heritage preservation reflects a constant negotiation process among multiple priorities in the national political agenda (development, stability, heritage conservation, etc.). Equally, rural heritage is subject to a continuous reconceptualisation process to create a vision for the future rooted in the country's past – or at least in what today is deemed to be its past.

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# REFLECTIONS ON JUNE 25<sup>TH</sup>: THE LINGERING IMPACTS OF THE “FORGOTTEN WAR” OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA

BY DAVID M RODEN

## INTRODUCTION

This year marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of June 25<sup>th</sup> 1950, which was the date on which the Korean War began. My involvement with Korea started about halfway through those last 70 years, when I went to Korea as a 22-year-old Peace Corps volunteer. At the time, I didn't have much understanding about the war, or the country where I would live for the following 30 months – probably something I had in common with the young American soldiers who went in 1950. Since this first visit I have returned to Korea probably more than 60 times, as a commercial banker engaged in funding Korea's industrial development, as an Honorary Consul serving the Republic of Korea (ROK), and as an officer and board member of the non-profit organisation, Friends of Korea. While my experience with Korea has given me a lifetime of opportunities to engage in business, culture and friendship with Korean people, it is my interactions with the Korean War veterans that have had most impact. Although the Korean War is something of a forgotten war, the recent comments by China's political leadership on the importance of this war indicate that its impact in the region continues.

## THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA IN THE SEVENTIES

Twenty-seven years after the start of that divisive war, I arrived in the Republic of Korea as a Peace Corps volunteer in the 43<sup>rd</sup> group, known as K-43. In the almost 60 years of its existence (since March 1961) more than 240,000 Americans have joined the Peace Corps and served in 142 countries.<sup>1</sup> The Peace Corps sent over 2,000 volunteers to Korea between 1966 and 1981.

My first full day in Korea was on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1977. At that time, I did see any signs of this important date being formally marked by the local people or government – no signs, no parades. Peace Corps volunteers spent a few days in Seoul before being sent to our sites for three months training in-country. I took the opportunity to explore

Seoul and found it a surprisingly modern city with many of the conveniences familiar to anyone who grew up in a major urban area. Buses, crowded subways and people in packed eateries of all varieties, bustling shops and a frenetic pace of life. My initial thought was: Why would I be needed here?

After my time in Seoul, I took a high-speed bus to my new home city of JinJu-si located in the Gyeongsan-namdo province for language and cultural training. It was hot, a typically humid summer, which meant intense mornings of work, then relaxing in the afternoon when work became unbearable. It was the year that Elvis Presley died, which I learned at a *dabang* or coffee shop that was playing his music non-stop. I spent most of my time trying to learn the language and consuming prodigious amounts of *soju* (distilled rice or barley liquor) and my favourite, *makgeolli*, a milky, lightly sparkling rice wine. For a 22 year old, it was comfortable existence.

In 1977, thoughts of war were not in my mind, as I went in search of temples and I gradually became more comfortable exploring. There were however several constant reminders of the division in the country – South Korea was, at the time, still effectively under a military dictatorship, and it was very much a surveillance state. There was a curfew from midnight until 4 am and this was very strictly enforced. In addition, on the 15th of every month an air raid alarm was sounded and immediate “shelter in place” was observed. Everyone was expected to be vigilant and prepared at all times, in case of a North Korean invasion.

North Korean guerrillas and sympathisers did penetrate South Korea during those years, coming in through tunnels and other means, and carried out various attacks – including the killing of the President Park Chung-Hee’s wife in 1974. The state of ongoing conflict was still very much evident, and the region was far from being calm. The Republic of Korea was allied with Taiwan at the time, and the USA had not officially recognised the People’s Republic of China.

When the USA officially ceased combat in the Vietnam War in 1973, it was seen as a failure of USA diplomacy. By contrast, we seemed to have been more successful in efforts of “nation building” in Korea; the presence of US troops meant that the ante bellum status quo in terms of territory was restored. After the armistice in 1953, the decision was made to reduce troop numbers, but US troops never fully left Korea. During my time as a Peace Corp volunteer, President Carter



threatened to withdraw US troops from South Korea.<sup>3</sup> This greatly upset my Korean friends, who didn't want the US forces to leave. It was preposterous to talk about reunification in those days, and nobody liked talking about the War.

Travelling north from Seoul, one observed more frequent cement blocks spaced out at intervals over roads through rice paddies, which could be detonated to slow a tank advance.

We also visited the buildings in Panmunjum, where the armistice was signed. I have been back there on several occasions, and when I saw the televised reports of Chairman Kim and President Trump walking around the demarcation line in June 2019, it gave me a very strange feeling.

#### **SOME BACKGROUND ABOUT THE KOREAN WAR**

The Korean War created the conditions for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to pit itself against the United States, without engaging in a full war. A year after the creation of the PRC, Mao Zedong decided that China would enter the Korean War to fight the United States and 15 United Nations allies for control of the Korean peninsula. The conflict allowed for the first military engagement between the US and China since the Boxer rebellion in the last years of the Qing dynasty.

Occurring so soon after World War II, this war did not loom as large as other wars, partly perhaps because it settled into a stalemate after the initial months. It became overshadowed by the World Wars. Being limited to the Korean Peninsula, it was described merely as a "conflict", or even a "police action".<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Korean War was among the most destructive conflicts in modern times. Estimations of War fatalities vary, but it is generally agreed 3–5 million, with a high proportion of civilian deaths – more than in World War II or the Vietnam War.<sup>5</sup> The three-year conflict caused the destruction of virtually all of Korea's major cities, and there were many massacres of both sides, purging communists or nationalists. The final years (1951–1953) became a war of attrition.<sup>6</sup>

Many people are unaware that a peace treaty was never signed between the two Koreas, sixty seven years ago (it was signed by representatives from China, the US and North Korea. South Korea refused to sign the agreement).

The war had not been sought by the United States or China. The Truman administration had already distanced itself from Chiang Kai-

shek. Truman was ready to move on after the Chinese Communist victory in the civil war. Regrettably, the Soviet Union approved the North Korean leadership's attack plan against South Korea, which ultimately required Chinese involvement. This led to Truman resuming support for the Chiang's Taiwan government, a situation that vexes US-PRC relations to this day.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (PVA)<sup>a</sup> suffered heavy casualties, including his own son. Mao Zedong judged China's intervention a victory for several reasons. It saved the communist regime in North Korea (DRPK) from being conquered or being controlled by a western power, and secured China's north-east border. It was also had an important influence of Sino-Soviet relations at the time, allowing the Chinese to demonstrate their commitment to Communism, and willingness to fight hegemony. China gained—and maintained—influence in East Asia, and permanent international status. In addition, China was able to project itself as a powerful state, standing up against imperialism and setting an example to other Asian states.<sup>9</sup> The Korean War marked the first time that modern Chinese armed forces engaged in large-scale military operations outside of China.<sup>10</sup> Some researchers identify the Korean War involvement of the PRC as the end of “the century of humiliation”, and the birth of a new China.<sup>11</sup>

The conflict also dismantled the US illusion that the nuclear bomb replaces the foot soldier. Overconfidence in their superior air power and an underestimation of the CCP capabilities meant that early clashes went China's way – the PVA demonstrated extraordinary march and camouflage discipline, giving the Chinese the element of surprise. Although the conflict would end in a stalemate, the Chinese demonstrated that they were an ingenious and well-disciplined foe.<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, the two commanders, General MacArthur and Peng Dehuai were ultimately relieved of their commands; MacArthur unceremoniously while in command and Peng, years later in a purge.<sup>13</sup> MacArthur famously asserted, ‘In war, there is no substitute for

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a Many of the Chinese were described as volunteers. In *The Great Flowing River*. Chi Pang Yuan recounts the story told by distant relative from Manchuria. He attended a village meeting organised by cadres seeking able-bodied men. It was the dead of winter and the men were sitting on the warm kang. The cadre had asked for the kang to be stoked at the precise moment he asked for volunteers to stand up. Of course the kang became so hot that they all jumped up. They were applauded and sent by freight train the following morning to Siniuju for deployment. This distant cousin ended up choosing Taiwan at the end of the war when POWs were offered a choice in repatriation.<sup>8</sup>

victory,' in his April 19th 1951 farewell speech to the US Congress.<sup>14</sup> That still resonates on the Korean peninsula today since neither side can clearly declare victory.

The war was the first no-win war for the United States, described as 'the wrong war, in the wrong place at the wrong time' by General Omar Bradley.<sup>15</sup> Most Americans, after the hostilities ended, were eager to let it slip from memory.

China veterans have an alternative view, describing how they won the war by defeating the world's strongest military force and preserving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a nation state. For the Chinese soldier,<sup>16</sup> the war in Korea was known as the 'War to Aid Korea and Resist America,' a struggle against imperialism. Now, 70 years later, the Chinese view may in fact be the more accurate evaluation, given the preservation of the DPRK.

#### **THE MIRACLE ON THE HAN RIVER**

As an external director of a Korean corporation, I visited Korea frequently in recent decades, sometimes several times a year. South Korean companies were on a march from the mid-1970s, and each general meeting showed substantial improvement in corporate performance, governance and technology—rapid industrialisation of Korea gave rise to the expression, "Miracle on the Han".<sup>17</sup> The pace of economic development in the South eclipsed North Korea, which had previously been the industrialised part of the peninsula.<sup>18</sup> I witnessed the miracle manifest around me, as confidence grew and attitudes became more upbeat. I recall seeing ships being built in shipyards as the shipyards themselves were being built. Seoul became a lively and fashionable city. The level of advancement dropped off quickly when one ventured into the countryside however, and political freedoms in the ROK did not keep pace with economic development during most of the 1970s and 80s.

During this period, the Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, slipped backwards. In the period of Japanese occupation in the 1930s, the Japanese had coordinated all the resources in region: manufacturing in the north of Korea had been linked with complementary industries in occupied Manchuria. At the end of the Second World War, when the USSR occupied Manchuria and then North Korea, a lot of industrial equipment was taken to Russia.<sup>19</sup> I recall the preparations for my company to establish of a plant in

Dalian, in China's northern province Liaoning during the late 1990s. The chairman pointed out that parts could be shipped easily by sea from our Pyeongtaek-si plant to Dalian. The North East region of China was again becoming fully integrated, much as it had been in the 1930s. Only this time, North Korea had to be worked around. My head filled with hopes that if only North Korea would see the value in fully participating, it could improve the lives of its citizens by charging transit fees for rail shipments. Needless to say, this didn't happen.

During my banking career we often relied on the concept of "Korea Inc" – the operating assumption was that the Korean government would not allow an economic collapse and that as a US ally, we had the ultimate "put", by shifting our risk to the US treasury, or placing risk elsewhere. Investors were encouraged to invest in the big companies, certain that they would be backed by the Korean government, or ultimately by the US treasury. This principle was generally known (though never written down), and caused a lack of incentive to guard against risk, as it was assumed the US treasury or the IMF would intervene if necessary. Eventually that intervention did happen, in 1997. The US and the IMF provided Korea with \$60Bn in a support package, which came with a number of requirements that were repulsive to the Koreans. Koreans lost control of their companies, and didn't think the treatment was equitable. The 2018 film *Default*, (Gukga-budo-eui Nal, literally 'National Bankruptcy Day')<sup>20</sup> provides an interesting interpretation of this real-life event, which many of my Korean friends believe accurately captures the mood of the people experiencing the calamity.

#### SERVING THE VETERANS

Since 2008 I have had the pleasure of serving as an Honorary Consul for the Republic of Korea in the state of Michigan, along with my work for a non-profit corporation. In this role, I have found the most memorable and moving aspects to be meeting with the veterans of the Korean War. Each year on July 27<sup>th</sup>, the day that the armistice was signed in 1953, veterans gather to attend ceremonies. Their numbers dwindle each year, as many of them are in their mid-90s and are, as MacArthur said, simply fading away. The average age of US Korean War veterans is 88.

Meeting these gentlemen reminds me of when I left from San Francisco for my two-year service commitment in Korea in 1977. One thing that I might have shared with those young men who were going

off to the War in 1950 was that we knew little about where we were going and what we would be doing when we arrived. For most of that generation, hearing about the war in Korea and signing up for the Marine Corps was something that young men just did then, perhaps not fully cognisant of what would lie ahead, but more out of a sense of patriotism and adventure.

Korea certainly changed all that for them in short order: they would soon find themselves in the harsh reality of war, lying in rice paddies with bullets whizzing overhead. A Marine veteran described to me how he discovered that the Koreans fertilised their fields with human faeces after he fell face down into this muck. He knew then he wasn't in Brooklyn anymore.

One observation I have is that the veterans of both sides believed that what they were doing was the right thing to do and they harbour little animosity today towards their former enemies.<sup>21</sup> Sadly, in both the USA and China today, the US and Chinese veterans of the Korean War might as well be from the Peloponnesian War, as their respective sacrifices are not appropriately recognised.

Until recently, the Korean War was seldom mentioned in CCP rhetoric, whereas the Chinese forces that overcame the Nationalists (KMT) to establish the Peoples Republic of China were held in the greatest esteem. In the US, veterans of the Second World War are referred to as "The Greatest Generation", while the Korean War is often considered a Forgotten War.

One of the veterans I met as Consul told me about gunfire killing the man on his right and seeing others with their body parts being exposed, and subsequently succumbing to their wounds. It is enormously humbling to connect with these war veterans, to try to understand what was asked of them and hear how they rose to the challenge.

When I think of these men I think of the evacuation from the port of Heungnam-si and the SS *Meredith Victory*,<sup>22</sup> filled with thousands of refugees fleeing the CCF (Chinese Communist Forces) onslaught, and the shelling of the evacuation. These US marines remained behind to defend the last piece of territory so those people could escape. If not for men such as these, would the ROK exist today? If North Korea had prevailed would it have evolved on a path similar to Vietnam?

The Republic of Korea has understood and honoured the sacrifices of these men and women. The UN Cemetery in Pusan has flags from

all the participating countries that defended the ROK. I had a general understanding when I worked in Korea as a Peace Corps volunteer, but now fully appreciate how the Koreans feel about these men and women. Korea invites them and their families back for honour flights, and awards the Ambassador of Freedom medal to these veterans. I know of no other country that does this. Korea not only recognises the military veterans but through the Korea Foundation, even Peace Corps volunteers are invited back for home visits to their places of service – I participated in one of these in 2019. I also know of no other nation that does this for former volunteers. Although young people in Seoul may think that the idea of an attack from North Korea is ludicrous now, it was not like that for the previous generations – it felt imminent. The South Korea government has made great efforts to recognise and show respect to the veterans. In 2020, as the USA plunged deeper into the Covid-19 pandemic, I was touched to learn that the ROK had shipped personal protective equipment to the USA to protect these elderly men.

#### REGIONAL RELATIONSHIPS TODAY

The situation today is markedly different compared with 70 years ago. The ROK was preserved, eventually becoming a truly democratic country, and flourished into a major trading economy, OECD member and a donor nation. It is ranked as the third highest country on the Human Development Index, and is the world's fifth largest exporter and eighth largest importer.<sup>23</sup> South Korea has assisted in humanitarian missions, peace keeping operations and provided highly regarded consumer goods such as electronics and motor vehicles. It also demonstrated advanced methods of medical application, and entertained us – South Korea is renowned for its globally influential pop culture, particularly in music (K-pop), TV dramas and cinema, a phenomenon referred to as the Korean Wave.<sup>24</sup>

North Korea has seen much less socio-economic improvement. The DPRK has allowed some minor economic freedoms and markets. This is largely as a result of the famines and sanctions forcing change. The government is unable to provide the standard of living it had when the Soviet bloc existed.

South Korea's relationship with both Japan and China has also changed. In 1977 it would have been hard to imagine the ROK trading and investing in China, or Japan. My school displayed big character posters that read '*banil*' and '*bangong*' – 'Oppose Japan' and 'Oppose

Communism'. These signs at my school extolling students to 'Oppose Japan' were not surprising, given the unresolved arguments over WW2 atrocities committed upon Korean citizens, including forcing women and girls to become comfort women, and enlisting citizens to perform involuntary hard labour. Many believed, and still believe, that the Japanese government has failed to provide suitable compensation, hasn't given a formal government apology, nor shown remorse.

In 2020 attitudes among Koreans toward Japan have hardened,<sup>25</sup> and the ascendancy of China recalls earlier times, when Korea when China held sway over Korea's customs duties and court.<sup>26</sup> Recent flare-ups of tensions over these historical grievances, as well as disputes about intelligence sharing, and territorial fights about the islands known as the Liancourt Rocks have increased negative feeling about Japan – a surprising number of South Koreans would side with the DPRK in the event of an attack on Japan.<sup>27</sup> Japan, a core component of the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US, continues to be, in a real sense, the odd man out and is dependent on the US alliance in which the ROK remains a critical partner. Unlike the experience of Germany after the war, welcomed into NATO, Japan exists as it is, an island with unresolved regional relationships.

The relationship for both Koreas with China is complex and delicate. ROK for its part is caught between its critical trade relationship with China and its military alliance with the USA, for which more and more cost sharing is being demanded. China is Korea's biggest trading partner by far, but the relationship continues to run hot and cold. South Korea's recent involvement with the USA's Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) missile program has aggrieved China, and brought embargo on Korean products, including Hyundai, and even K-pop. Dependency on trade with China for the ROK has become increasingly challenging. To provide a buffer, President Moon has adopted a "look South," approach and the ROK has been investing in India, Myanmar and Vietnam.<sup>28</sup>

While all of this plays out, what of the DPRK? Sanctions have not prevented missile launches and the development of increasingly sophisticated nuclear weaponry. What will Northeast Asia look like in five, ten years?

Too often the DPRK has been written off as being near to collapse. We have seen that the regime has resiliency and Kim the younger has demonstrated a masterful command of the apparatus of power. He



has lured in the giant regional players, brought Xi, Trump and Moon to the table and given a nod to Putin. In this regard, Kim Jong-un has outperformed his predecessors. He has improved the nuclear program and allowed enough reform to prevent starvation. Xi and Kim are likely to stay in power while successive administrations turn over in Washington and Seoul.

Recently, Premier Xi has met with Chairman Kim and has reaffirmed that China and North Korea were “close as lips and teeth,” underpinning of the relationship between China and the DPRK. (Chairman Xi and Chairman Kim have met four times in 2018 and 2019 after a long hiatus in relations).<sup>29</sup>

### **THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE USA**

While there was a moment of euphoria in June of 2018, when Chairman Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and President Trump sat together for the first time, it was, as the Chairman remarked, ‘surreal like a movie.’ Despite this promising meeting, little progress has been made. The Trump Administration has become more focused on domestic and international troubles since the 2018 meeting.

When the dialogue between the North and South picked up steam prior to the 2018 Winter Olympics there was hope for some breakthrough, and both sides committed to moving towards peace in April 2018 after secret talks with the USA. One of the developments was that North began once again to cooperate in efforts to return remains of US soldiers to US soil. Who could not be moved at the sight of those flag draped coffins in the hangars and the honour guards receiving these long lost men? North Korea is very adept at tugging on heartstrings, be it family reunions or the return of remains.

Increases in the tension created by the US–China trade war have involved Korea – just as the Korean War, so long ago, allowed China to confront the USA in a land war, China is taking advantage of the 70 year anniversary to fire some verbal shots at the USA. Xi Jinping chose the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020 to visit an exhibition about China’s involvement with the ‘War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea’ – the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the date that Chinese forces crossed the Yalu river and entered the Korean War. He stated that the war ‘will inspire the Chinese people and the Chinese nation to overcome all difficulties and obstacles, and prevail over all enemies.’<sup>30</sup> Although another armed

conflict is unlikely, it is worth noting that the military capability of the PLA is far greater than it was in 1950 and the United States would face an entirely new enemy in any conflict on the Korean peninsula.

Researchers have noted that Pan-Korean Nationalism<sup>31</sup> is rising, especially among young people, and antipathy towards the USA has been growing. More than 60 percent of people born in the 1980s told a popular newspaper poll that they would side with North Korea in the event of a war between USA and North Korea.<sup>32</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Seventy years later, the lingering effects of that war continue to impair relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China, and many aspects of that conflict touch the Korean Peninsula. Recent headlines about North Korea's increasingly successful missile launches and the Chinese resistance to THAAD deployment illustrate the challenges to stability in Northeast Asia. In the Trump era, we have seen an acceleration of conflicts at levels of intensity with clear and immediate impact on the peninsula.

As an observer and a participant who has lived and worked in a Korean environment and remain engaged, I suspect that with a reversion to a more Sinocentric Korea, North and South will align more and more. The USA will face mounting debt, inflation and a potential devaluation of the dollar over the next few years, resulting in less influence globally but with a magnified impact in Asia. It is not so much that Trump has caused this, but he has accelerated what was already happening. Japan and the ROK will, I believe, reach an accommodation with the PRC, as it will become more and more apparent that the US security umbrella has frayed. My fear is that the ROK will be pushed more into a confederal system with the DPRK and it is hard to see how those systems could mesh easily. And the DPRK has never wavered from the goal of unification under the Kim regime. In a bar fight, a guy usually never starts a fight he doesn't expect to win, and the DPRK presumably has the ultimate leverage.<sup>33</sup> However, the real moves towards the healing of this 70 year rift will allow to find common ground and to preserve human dignity and peace on the peninsula.

It is my hope that the soldiers who fell in defence of the ROK continue to be honoured, and remembered as they are by the ROK today we should reflect this year, and every June 25<sup>th</sup>, that war can come at any time.



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## **Section 2**

### **‘The Importance of These Meetings’**

*– Stories of Interaction*





# BUILDING RUSSIAN SHANGHAI: THE ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY OF THE DIASPORA

BY KATYA KNYAZEVA

## ABSTRACT

*The Russian population of Shanghai during the 1930s was close to 50,000 people,<sup>1</sup> and although this large community disappeared in the 1950s, it was not without a trace. Beyond signature monuments to the presence of the Russians – the Orthodox churches and the former Sino-Soviet Friendship Hall – there are over sixty public buildings, offices, villas, apartment houses and lane compounds designed by the diaspora. Architects, engineers and general contractors from the émigré community rose to the top echelons in the city-building industry and compensated for the precariousness of their statelessness by achieving eminent professional status and economic security. The careers in construction and real estate proved an opportunity for the Russians to integrate into the treaty port society and economy. They were occupied at every level in large and small Chinese and Western firms as bosses and subordinates, independent contractors and full partners, owners, independent consultants and clerks. The 1949 Liberation tore through the treaty port's social fabric, essentially removing the foreign society from the city, but the Russians' involvement in the physical building of Shanghai ensured their tangible mark on its map.*

## FOUNDATION

The first Russian-designed building in Shanghai was the Church of the Epiphany (1903), located on Baoshan Road in the distant northern suburb, on a site surrounded by farmland, canals and railway tracks. Constructed by amateurs without any professional supervision, the two-story brick building with a bell tower was regarded as picturesque,<sup>2</sup> but it had structural flaws and its functionally left much to be desired, as the resident priests admitted.<sup>3</sup> As an outpost of the Russian Imperial Orthodox Mission, headquartered in Beijing, the Shanghai mission was intended to become a place where orphaned Chinese children would be taught the Russian language, baptised and raised in the Eastern Orthodox religion. But immediately after its completion, the Shanghai church had to become a rescue station



**Figure 1:** Church of the Epiphany on Baoshan Road. Moscow Spiritual Academy

not exceed fifty people, most of whom were associated with the tea trade centred in Hankou, or with the Jewish community from the Pale of Settlement, who were living near the port and operating inns and restaurants. Nonetheless, the Russian Empire had official representation in Shanghai. The Russo-Chinese Bank, created in 1895 to finance construction of the China East Railway, received a new purpose-built edifice on the Bund in October 1902. Designed by the German architect Heinrich Becker, the European baroque building had a striking tile-clad façade decorated with three sculpted heads – a pair of moustachioed Cossacks flanking a Chinese man in a Manchu cap. The bank dwarfed the galleried ‘colonial’ bungalows on its both sides, making them appear old-fashioned and unstable. For ten years, this building signified Russia’s imperial prestige and commitment to China, until Russia’s devastating defeat in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War nearly bankrupted the bank and curtailed Russia’s East Asian ambitions.

The Russian Consulate – initially referred to as the Russian *yamen* – moved from one address to another until 1914, when diplomats secured a waterfront lot in front of the Astor House, taking advantage of the hotel’s temporary insolvency. The building design was the work of another German architect, Hans Emil Lieb, who had previously

for the Russian refugees, who began to arrive in Shanghai in August 1904 by the hundreds, driven from China’s northern city of Port Arthur by Russia’s loss in the Russo-Japanese War (1903–1905). On May 17, 1905, one among these refugees, the officer Basile Alfater, married his fiancée Alexandra Dessino in the Church of the Epiphany, treating the curious foreign society to the spectacle of the first traditional Orthodox wedding on Shanghai soil.<sup>4</sup>

Before the Port Arthur emergency, the resident Russian community in Shanghai did

built the German school, Kaiser-Wilhelm Schule. He designed the Russian Consulate in a similar Prussian renaissance style, with distinct undulating gables and arched dormer windows dotting the roof. The Russian Post Office initially operated out of the Consulate, until in 1913 it obtained its own building, designed by Atkinson & Dallas. It was located on the northern embankment of Suzhou Creek, at the corner of Wusong Road.

In early 1918, exiles from Bolshevik Russia started to arrive in Shanghai, traveling by river routes, overland and by passenger vessels from North China. The Church of the Epiphany placed these refugees in the mission buildings, which quickly became ‘fearfully overcrowded.’ As a foreign observer noted: ‘Refugees rent these tiny little rooms for a small sum, all of them in a very ramshackle condition; the priest lives in one no better and no bigger than the rest, just the kind of room our Chinese servants live in.’<sup>5</sup> By 1920, there were between 2000 and 3000 Russian refugees in Shanghai, and the numbers were increasing.<sup>6</sup> The exiles were desperately looking for work – many without success. In January 1920, unable to find a job, a man leapt in front of a moving train that passed by the church.<sup>7</sup> This grisly and well-publicised suicide provoked the foreign society’s concern for the wellbeing of the refugees. Solicitations in local newspapers listed the professions of sixty-five job seekers, among which there were seven building engineers, one carpenter, one mechanical engineer, one stonemason and one draughtsman.<sup>8</sup>

#### PILLARS

The number of Russian exiles in Shanghai sharply increased in the autumn of 1922, when a string of salvaged cargo and military ships from Vladivostok began to anchor in the port, ‘every inch of their decks filled to capacity with the sick, starved and nervously shaken men, women and children.’<sup>9</sup> The ships brought over three thousand people. Among the passengers was Colonel **Alexander Yaron** (1874–1935), who had an impressive résumé, having already designed a number of military and civic buildings that still occupy central streets of Tallinn, Estonia. In February 1923, Yaron joined the firm of the Spanish architect Abelardo Lafuente and assisted in designing a grand ballroom and a dining room in the annex of the Majestic Hotel.<sup>10</sup> After this success, Yaron became full partner in the firm, which was renamed Lafuente & Yaron. In 1924, he designed Linda Terrace in the

western part of Avenue Joffre (now Middle Huaihai Road) – one of the earliest residential lane compounds in this area, which marked the beginning of the Russian tenancy in the French Concession. Over the next years, the Russian settlement stretched along Avenue Joffre and the adjacent streets – Route Vallon (Nanchang Road), Rue Bourgeat (Changle Road), Route Paul Henry (Xinle Road), Route Grouchy (Yanqing Road).

Yaron's entry into Lafuente's firm provoked a stylistic shift from the Moorish-inflected designs enjoyed by Lafuente's Spanish clients to Italian and German classicism and Gothic revival. In his *résumé* from April 1927, Yaron listed several churches, chapels and cloisters for provincial missions, a large Catholic cathedral for Fuzhou, two apartment buildings on Bubbling Well Road, Kincheng Bank headquarters near the Bund, several lane compounds and even a mosque – which was not realised – altogether fourteen buildings, of which four were built under his supervision.<sup>11</sup> Yaron's son John also trained as an architect and worked at Lafuente & Yaron. In early 1927, Lafuente left for the USA, taking with him the project of a beach hotel, which became Yaron's last work for the firm. From 1928, A.J. Yaron worked independently, building two residences for Chinese government officials, a warehouse and office for the firm of D.G.M. Aronovsky, and a group of villas on Rue Bourgeat – one of these was the architect's residence, until he donated it to the St. Tichon's Orphanage, operated by the Russian Orthodox church.



**Figure 2:** Lafuente & Yaron studio on Bubbling Well Road. Pérez (2019)

In 1929, the sport of *hai-alai* was introduced in Shanghai, and Yaron proposed an arena in the Italian renaissance style, but his design was rejected in favour of a modernist structure designed by Spence, Robinson & Partners. Yaron never shared his contemporaries' enthusiasm for modernism. He openly despised utilitarianism and art deco. The journalist Ivan Kounin called him an 'undeniable classicist, though not a conservative.'<sup>12</sup> Yaron thought that post-1920 innovations lacked professionalism and represented a shallow understanding of the architectural vernacular. He saw the prevailing eclecticism as simplistic mechanical assembly of decorative elements devoid of any meaningful connection to the structural logic of the building. Yaron practiced a wide variety of styles, but one at a time. The Recoletos Procuration on Rue Moliere was in the Spanish mission style, the residence for the retired government official Wang Boqun, on Yu Yuen Road, was a Victorian Gothic manor, and Yaron's own residence looked like a Tudor country house.

In 1932, Yaron built the Bishop Apartments for the Russian Orthodox clergy, in the national revival style, with a temporary church and a bell tower, and started the construction of St. Nicholas Church, on Rue Corneile, funded by expatriate Russian military organisations. He took charge of all the building aspects, from the design to the purchase of materials and the workers' wages. The building was modelled on the religious architecture of Russia's north, particularly the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Church of Resurrection in Kolomenskoe.<sup>13</sup> It had a repeating pattern of eight petal-shaped volumes that gradually reduced in scale, supporting a large dome covered with a turquoise mosaic. Smaller domes and the crosses were covered in gold leaf. The use of reinforced concrete made it possible to create a single vault without supporting columns. The church was decorated with carved masonry and glazed tile outside and inside. The bell tower facing the street displayed the colours of the Romanov family – white, orange and black – reinforcing the dedication of the building to the monarch Nicholas the Second. Many Russian artists in Shanghai worked on the interior: the professional icon painter A. Berezin created the altar, A. Haritonoff painted the icons in the overhead niches; the inside of the central dome had a mosaic image of Christ made by the architect himself, the Twelve Apostles by the popular portrait artist V. Zasiipkin and the Four Evangelists by A. Kichigin. The sculptor I. Karsnitsky, a rare woman in the Shanghai architectural trade, assisted V. Biliani in

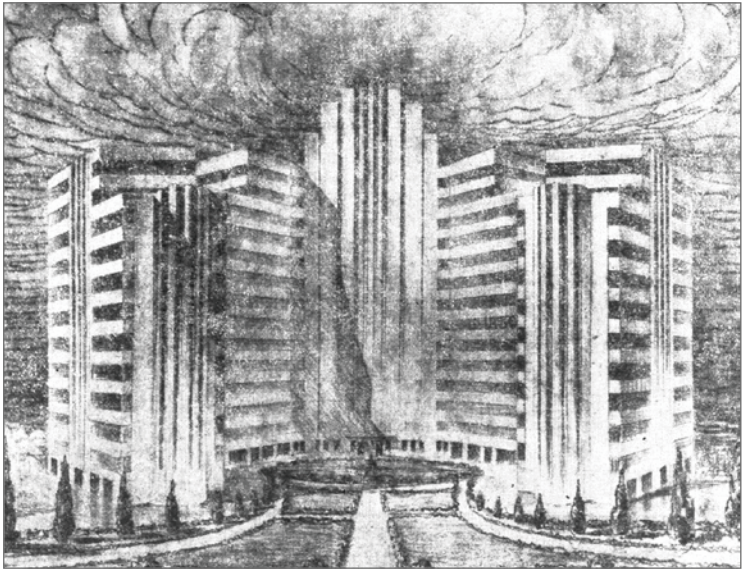
the making of the plaster mouldings throughout the interior.<sup>14</sup>

Yaron's final project was the Ministry of Communications in Nanking, which took four years to build. The ornate structure with a pale green traditional Chinese roof and a 120-meter frontage – 'the largest and the most magnificent in the capital'<sup>15</sup> – was inaugurated in October 1934, to become 'a splendid addition to the Government row.'<sup>16</sup> Its destruction by the Japanese army in 1937 was lamented as an architectural tragedy.<sup>17</sup>

An architect of Yaron's generation with an equally successful career but with a more progressive stylistic approach was **Wladimir Livin-Goldenstaedt** (1878–after 1956). He earned his degree in architecture at the Institute of Civil Engineers in Saint Petersburg and then designed municipal and private buildings in Vladivostok. When the Bolsheviks took the Russian Far East, he came to Shanghai. In 1925, Livin-Goldenstaedt and his compatriot M. Zdanowitch entered the countrywide design competition for Sun Yat-sen's mausoleum. Their designs earned 5th, 6th and 7th places, but an anonymous foreign observer criticised them as 'mongrel architecture' and 'some Ivan Nevski church garbed in Chinese details with struggling Japanese phoenixes under the roof.'<sup>18</sup> Livin-Goldenstaedt never tried Chinese styles again and instead plunged into the modernist aesthetic. In 1926, he founded the Eastern Asia Architects and Engineers Corp. and publicised plans for a new shopping emporium, to be built on Nanking Road, but land prices on this commercial thoroughfare were rising so quickly that the one-million-tael deal fell through and the project was not realised. Livin's other projects, however, were successful. Among them was the small and exclusive Hotel Tiny (1928), the large residential complex King Albert Apartments (1931), the elegant building of Irene Apartments (1935) and the stunning Astrid Apartments (1934). The latter building, comprised of seventy apartments and sixteen shops on eight stories, achieved such balance of form and surface that it is now viewed as the quintessence of Shanghai's art deco era, judging by the number of book covers that feature it.<sup>19</sup>

The year 1934 was prominent for Shanghai building. Thirty-eight apartment houses, 308 foreign villas and over 600 semi-European and Chinese-style houses rose in the French Concession alone. In the International Settlement, there were eight new apartment blocks, fifteen office buildings, 221 foreign residences and almost 2,800 Chinese houses.<sup>20</sup> Riding on the success of his Astrid design, Livin-





**Figure 3:** W. Livin's design of the Magnate Apartments (unrealised).  
*Shanghai Sunday Times*, December 15, 1935.

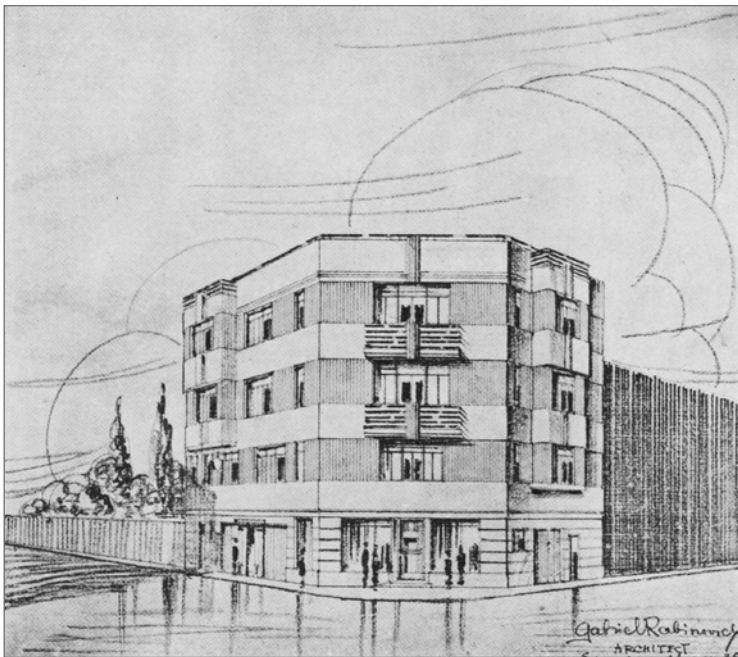
Goldenstaedt publicised several project proposals, one of which, named the Magnate Apartments, was a composite of Shanghai's greatest recent buildings – the Grosvenor (Palmer & Turner), the Medhurst (Davies, Brooke & Gran), the Picardie (Minutti & Ledreux), the Dauphine (Leonard, Veysseyre & Kruze) and the Empire Mansions (Kyetay Architects). But the boom was over. The world economic depression rippled to Shanghai and war with Japan was looming. Investors became cautious and large projects were downsized. The prices of construction materials rose in response to quotas imposed by the Republican government, who sought to reserve strategic supplies of stone, metal and wood for the defence effort. Completely unrelated, but equally damaging was the port strike in Portland, USA, which disrupted the supplies of Oregon pine, almost universally utilised in Shanghai for pile foundations.<sup>21</sup> Livin's ambitious Magnate project was not realised.

While Livin-Goldenstaedt worked independently and had his name associated with his creations, the majority of Russians in the architectural profession joined established local firms, forfeiting the right to put a signature on their works. Such was **Gabriel 'Gava' Rabinovich** (1899–after 1961), from Vitebsk, whose earliest known assignment in Shanghai was the conversion of a residential building



on Ward Road into the Ohel Moshe Synagogue, used by the Russian Jews living in the Wayside area. The rebuilding, completed in 1928, required the removal of the second floor and the addition of pillars to support the roof; a mezzanine was constructed for the women to pray separately.<sup>22</sup>

In 1933, Rabinovich joined the Chinese firm Republic Land Investment Co., which executed a massive development scheme on the north bank of Suzhou Creek. The flagship of the project – the New Asia Hotel – was designed by the company’s chief architect S.A. Sayer, while Rabinovich designed the other two – the Bridge House and Derring Apartments – both of which opened on January 15, 1935.<sup>23</sup> Rabinovich’s other known projects are several private residences and two compact multi-unit buildings in the French Concession – Koffman Apartments (1935) and Doumer Apartments (1941). Around 1939, he also built some residences in Wayside, which were rented out to European Jewish refugees. Years later, upon resettling in Tel-Aviv, Rabinovich built a synagogue for immigrants from China, on HaGolan Street.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 4:** Rabinovich’s drawing of the Koffman Apartments, dated by March 1935. *Jianzhu Yuekan (Builder)*, 1935 Vol. 3 No. 1.

The career of **Alexander Reyer** (1895–1946) demonstrated that in Shanghai's building frenzy of the 1930s, not just an architect but also a general contractor could become a celebrity. Reyer was a refugee from Saint Petersburg, who arrived in Shanghai in 1920. By 1933, his construction firm's portfolio included the general works and plumbing service for the Astor and Majestic hotels, the design and construction of the Country Club's swimming pool, the construction of the Cavendish Court and the North End Apartments, as well as multiple factories, wharves, and warehouses. Reyer's point of pride was his engineering work on the Grand Theatre (1933), designed by L.E. Hudec, for which Reyer devised and implemented reinforced concrete beams of unprecedented length – 'the longest concrete construction in the far East.'<sup>25</sup> Reyer's was the only Russian name found in the directory *Men of Shanghai and North China*, a collection of more than 280 biographies of the 'men of all races and creeds who, in various fields of endeavour, have contributed in some substantial measure to the material and cultural advancement of Shanghai and North China.'<sup>26</sup>

Although **Boris Krivoss** (1901–1990), of Russian and Czech origin, slipped under the radar of the directories, he was the most prolific and the most versatile builder of Russian Shanghai. His father, a cryptographer in the service of the Tsarist secret police, fell afoul of Bolshevik authorities, so the family scattered and young Boris Krivoss crossed the border to China. He opened his own real estate and architecture firm in Shanghai, and by the late 1920s had become one of the richest Russians here, practicing as a realtor, land broker, landlord and builder. Enjoying the friendship and patronage of the architect L.E. Hudec, Krivoss initially specialised in rebuilding and modernising existing buildings and gradually learned to build villas, apartments and lane houses of his own design.

The firm Krivoss & Co. produced almost two dozen buildings in eclectic and adventurous styles, such as La Tour (1928), Tiny (1930), Krivoss (1930), Petain (1931), Western (1931) and Nesthouse (1932) apartment buildings, as well as faux-Chinese terrace houses, Spanish mission style compounds and English colonial bungalows. One of his most celebrated projects was a mixed-use modernist complex Joffre Arcade (1934), which arranged 27 shops and 25 apartments around a cross-shaped courtyard with a fountain in the centre.<sup>27</sup> The courtyard was accessed through a passage in the front building, whose glazed

vertical section formed ‘a pleasant break in the regularity of the endless succession of shops on the road front.’<sup>28</sup> The majority of the residents and storeowners in the Joffre Arcade were Russians; their barbershops, ateliers, clinics and cafes earned it the nickname ‘the Russian bazaar.’<sup>29</sup>

Living in the penthouse of his own Krivoss Apartments on Avenue Joffre, Boris Krivoss was a major donor to Russian charities, an honorary chairman of the Association of Yugoslavian citizens and an avid yachtsman who navigated Yangtse inland waterways on a houseboat. Once he salvaged an old Chinese cannon weighing 100 kilos from the bottom of a creek and exhibited it in his real estate office.<sup>30</sup> In 1932, having returned from a round-the-world cruise, Krivoss gave a page-long interview to the China Press, in which he shared his ideas about city planning and architecture. He found California lovely and approved of Hollywood-style homes, however ‘garish and ornate.’ New York was dirty and grimy; Chicago was clean and orderly. He was impressed with skyscrapers, finding them efficient and attractive: ‘Too bad we can’t have such things here. Shanghai soil couldn’t support them; it’s too mucky and soft.’ In conclusion, he said: ‘I’m glad to be back in Shanghai. I consider it my home. I’ve seen Shanghai grow and it has a big future. I’m sorry I missed the war. There is apparently a great deal of work for everybody in Chapei.’<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 5:** Russian resident outside his former home in Zhabei, 1932.  
Historical Photographs of China

‘The war in Chapei’ (Zhabei) was the armed conflict between the Japanese and Chinese troops in January 1932, which turned the northern areas of Shanghai into a smouldering ruin. By that time, a big part of the Russian community had already moved to the French Concession, their exodus from the city’s north driven by the armed conflict that swept through the same territory five years prior. Back in 1927, the Chinese nationalists and warlord armies engaged in an urban warfare in the streets of Zhabei, damaging hundreds of homes and the Russian Church of the Epiphany. Yet, even in 1932 there were still Russians living in Zhabei, especially the new arrivals from North China. During the January 1932 conflict, Japanese snipers mistook the bell tower of the Russian church for an observation post and fired at it nonstop, while the Chinese forces responded with fire at the same target.<sup>32</sup> The damaged building was not used again.

The near-total destruction of the northern district stimulated the building activity in all areas of the city, and young Russian architects were ‘involved in the construction of almost every building.’<sup>33</sup> With low salary expectations and good training, they found positions on the staff of virtually every large foreign firm. Elliott Hazzard almost exclusively employed Russian expatriates, as did C.H. Gonda and Corit & Co.<sup>34</sup> The studio of L.E. Hudec employed and trained dozens of Russians over the years; the firm’s senior employees Jacob Slaschov and Konstantin Egikoff were the chief draftsman and construction supervisor during the construction of the first Asian skyscraper, the Joint Savings Society Building (1934).<sup>35</sup> **Leonid Pashkoff** (1884–?) was the third important person at the studio of French architects Alexandre Leonard and Paul Veyseyre, and he played a major role in designing and erecting the spacious new French Club (1926), to which he contributed ‘many of the most decorative effects of the interior.’<sup>36</sup> Others Russians worked on the club’s interior: V. Podgoursky designed coloured glass windows in some of the rooms; M. Stupin painted modernist murals; V. Shibaëff created the sculptures above the fireplace in the library.

The émigrés’ well-developed professional network allowed them to engage each other at all stages of design, construction, interior decoration, landscaping and furnishing. In 1935, after fifteen years of China practice, A. Chibunovsky’s engineering and plumbing company claimed 300 projects, including dozens of apartments, hotels and villas that his Russian colleagues had worked on.<sup>37</sup> When Cecilia Ezra,

the daughter of the publisher N.E.B. Ezra, became a draftsman at the firm of Minutti & Co. in 1934, she was celebrated as the first young woman to enter an architect's office in Shanghai.<sup>38</sup> Unbeknownst to the journalists, already in 1926, Leonid Pashkoff's wife Nina had been employed as a draftswoman at Leonard & Veyseyre, her employment reflecting the general trend amongst Russian women in Shanghai to work outside the home to support their families.

While older Russian building professionals had their Imperial Russian degrees, the younger ones were mostly educated at the Harbin Polytechnic Institute. Established in 1922, this school offered a programme modelled on the Russian imperial engineering academies, adapted to the requirements of the China Eastern Railway. The head of the architecture department was P.F. Fedorovsky, of the Saint Petersburg Arts Academy.<sup>39</sup> By 1937 the Harbin graduates in Shanghai numbered over a hundred.<sup>40</sup> In Shanghai, the main college for architecture and engineering was the Centre Technique Superieur based in the French school, Ecole Remi; architects and engineers V. Kotenev, A. Yaron, E. Gran, L. Pashkoff were lecturers there.

#### PINNACLE

No Russian rose higher in the ranks of Shanghai architects than **Emmanuel Gran** (1894–1969). Born in Samara, in central Russia, he graduated as a marine officer in 1917 and saw combat against the Bolsheviks when he was serving in the Russian Navy. Having landed in Shanghai in 1921, he instantly found a job as an architect with the largest and most prestigious architectural firm, Palmer & Turner. Gran was active in the firm during the decade Palmer & Turner completed its largest projects, such as the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation (1923), Yokohama Specie Bank (1924), West Park Mansions (1926), Custom House (1927), Beth Aharon Synagogue (1927), the remodelling of the Palace Hotel (1927), Cathay Hotel (1929), Central Arcade (1929), Metropole Hotel (1931), Hamilton House (1932) and Embankment Building (1932).

Always listed near the top of the list of Palmer & Turner's architects, Gran's was the only name there without credentials from either the Royal Institute of British Architects or the American Institute of Architects. For most Russians the problem of certification was acute and often led to precarious professional lives. In 1929, Paul Tomashevsky, an underemployed architect from Harbin, shot himself

through the heart; his will included his design for a monument on his gravesite. To support the compatriots in the profession, in November 1931 Gran and his colleague Nicolay Emanoff created the Russian Engineers' Society (also known as the Russian Technical Society). It offered public lectures, job placement and financial aid to young engineers and architects. By 1935, the Society had more than two hundred members.<sup>41</sup> Among its board members were successful general contractors, architects and engineers, including A. Chibunovsky, E. Gindper, and A. Kooklin.

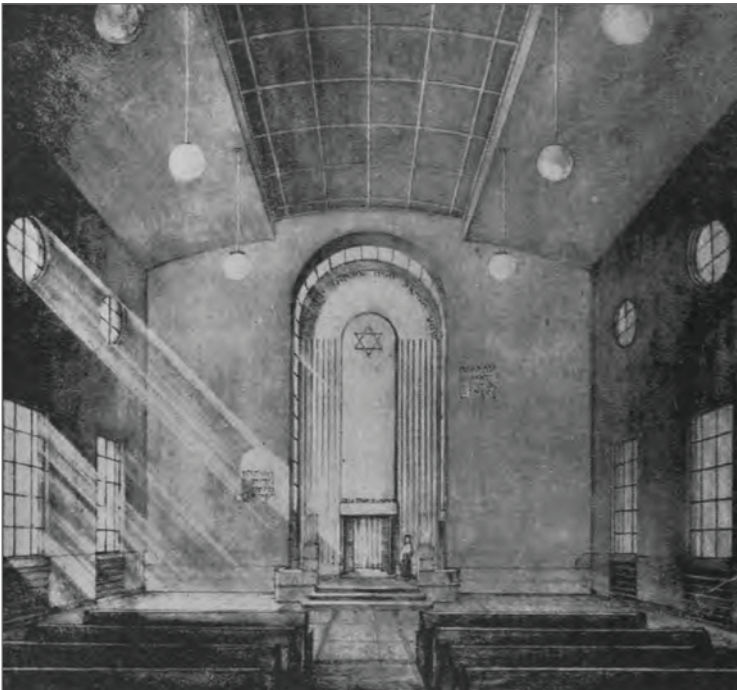
By the time Emmanuel Gran left Palmer & Turner, he was described in the press as the 'author of many notable buildings'<sup>42</sup> and 'an architect with an already established reputation.'<sup>43</sup> In January 1932, he joined Davies & Brooke, a firm with a history in Shanghai going back to 1897, which by the early 1930s had long exhausted its creative potential. As an 'exponent of the newer tendencies of modern architectural practice',<sup>44</sup> Gran rescued Davies & Brooke from stagnation and insolvency by steering the studio toward modernism. In his first year alone, he published eight new proposals for residences, apartment buildings and office blocks, all of which were angular, streamlined and radically different from Davies & Brooke's previous projects – the neoclassical Overseas Chinese Building (1930) and the eclectic Lyceum Theatre (1931). In early 1933, the senior partner, C. Gilbert Davies died, but his name remained in the firm's title, Davies, Brooke & Gran.

Gran expanded the staff and brought almost a dozen of his Russian colleagues – including architects and civil engineers N. Emanoff, E. Kostritsky, A. Skvortsov, C. Malinovsky – poaching mostly from Palmer & Turner. With the help of the building contractor Nan-Tsoo Loh (Lu Nanchu) of the New Shanghai Construction Co., the studio produced a number of large-scale projects, such as Lafayette Court (1933), Medhurst Apartments (1934), Victor Court (1934), Yue Tuck Apartments (1934), Commercial Bank of China (Development Building) (1935), Hanray Apartments (1937–1939) and Magnet House (1938). Gran also designed the Edgewater Hotel (1934) in Qingdao<sup>45</sup> and Bay View Mansions (1933) in Hong Kong,<sup>46</sup> traveling there to personally supervise construction.

Throughout the 1930s, Russians continued to migrate from China's north to Shanghai, populating the French Concession and making a thriving commercial centre out of Avenue Joffre.<sup>47</sup> Among



this population, there were about 4,000 Russian Jews, and they needed a synagogue closer to the home than the one in Wayside.<sup>48</sup> Gran was an activist in the Jewish community, and he personally designed a new synagogue to stand on a small lot on the corner of today's Nanchang and Xiangyang Roads. Gran's design was described as extremely modern and simple in style, with the 'severe lines of the interior [...] broken and softened effectively by an imposing altar designed in the ancient Hebrew style.' The architect also included a hidden choir, ensuring that 'the voices of the young choristers are clearly heard, but they are not visible to the members of the congregation.'<sup>49</sup> The seating for men was on the ground floor; women sat in the balcony. The Japanese attack, in the autumn 1937, delayed the work, but the inexplicable sympathy of Japanese marine commander Inuzuka Koreshige ensured the much-needed supply of cement to finish the construction. On April 6, 1941, the opening of the New Ashkenazi Synagogue was celebrated by a mass wedding of twelve couples.



**Figure 6:** Interior of the new Ashkenazi Synagogue, by Emmanuel Gran. *Shanghai Sunday Times*, December 12, 1937



## DECORATION

On May 17, 1925, the local daily China Press published the shortlist of the finalists for its cover design competition; among the seven names two were Chinese and five were Russian. The winner of the 100-dollar first prize and the right to design the cover of the October special issue was Benjamin Mamysh, an architectural assistant at Palmer & Turner, who came to Shanghai in 1921. His drawing portrayed the industrial waterfront and the port, with cranes and smokestacks against the silhouettes of Palmer & Turner creations – the HSBC building, the Custom House and the Chartered Bank – all contained in a large suspended lantern and placed under a stone arch with Chinese upturned eaves. Subsequently, Mamysh worked as an architectural draftsman at the Public Works Department of the Shanghai Municipal Council until 1938.

Russian artists and sculptors were plentiful among the diaspora. They competed relentlessly to fill the ranks of advertising, publishing and architecture firms, designing theatre sets, exhibition stands, store windows and even costumes for cabaret dancers. Although he lost the China Press cover design competition to Mamysh, **Victor Podgoursky** (1893–1969) rose to become the most famous émigré artist and decorator in Shanghai. One of four sons of a Polish aristocrat exiled in Siberia, Podgoursky grew up in Vladivostok and studied in the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in 1914–1918, under the tutelage of the painters Arkhipov and Vasnetsov.<sup>50</sup> Having arrived in Shanghai in 1920, he worked as a press cartoonist and a teacher of painting and figure drawing, eventually becoming a mainstay of Shanghai art exhibitions. Arthur Sowerby, of the China Journal, found his art to be ‘of high caliber,’ and expressed amazement that such a talented artist should price his pastels as low as \$50.<sup>51</sup> A member of the Shanghai Art Club since 1929, Podgoursky became the resident art critic and instructor in anatomy, life drawing and still life. The Club admitted owing much to his presence, as ‘the guide and the philosopher of the art classes’ and ‘an always attractive exhibitor at the annual displays.’<sup>52</sup>

Podgoursky’s interior décor commissions were not many, but they were significant. For the French Club (1926), he designed the coloured glass windows in some of the rooms.<sup>53</sup> In 1928, a large painting of his was installed in the foyer of the Capitol Theatre. For the Cathay Hotel (1929), he created the playful bacchanalian murals in the Bund-side

entrance hall, the tearoom and the bar.<sup>54</sup> In February 1935, the artist departed for Italy to supervise the assembly of the ceiling mosaic, commissioned for the HSBC building in Hong Kong (1935). The mosaic, that covered 4,000 square feet, was executed in bright colours without halftones and depicted 50 life-size figures as well as animals, machines, ships and contraptions. The centrepiece, in the shape of an inverted half-cylinder, evoked the theme of progress and depicted human endeavour from prehistoric to modern, 'with emphasis on industry and transport, the occidental and oriental contrasted on opposing sectors.'<sup>55</sup> There were also images of the sun, Greek gods, the signs of the Zodiac, the Chinese gods of fortune and Buddhist deities.

Podgoursky was the author of the bronze bust of the poet Alexander Pushkin, for a monument jointly executed by the architects W. Livin-Goldenstaedt and E. Gran. Sponsored by the Shanghai Russian community, the monument was installed in a quiet square in the French Concession, and its unveiling on February 11, 1937, was widely celebrated by the whole community.

Among the few female decorators and interior designers, the sculptor **Isabella Karsnitsky** (1902–?) was notable for her productivity and early success. She arrived in Shanghai in 1923 with her officer husband Victor Karsnitsky and joined the city's largest interior design company Arts & Crafts. In her first year there, she created bronze ornaments – symbolical trophies and the Roll of Honour – for the base of the War Memorial on the Bund, which opened in February 1924.<sup>56</sup> She also worked alongside the firm's chief sculptor W.W. Wagstaff to make statues of Hermes, Eros and Aphrodite, which were cast in bronze and mounted on the clock tower of the General Post Office. In the following years, Karsnitsky and Wagstaff exhibited their sculptures together at local art shows.<sup>57</sup>

After Karsnitsky left Arts & Crafts, she taught drawing at the French Municipal School and worked on private commissions, creating over a hundred bronze busts and reliefs.<sup>58</sup> Among them was a memorial to ten Russian traders, murdered by the bandits near Jianguyin, which was inaugurated at the Pahsienjao Cemetery in October 1928. The statue depicted a stooping figure of a peddler with a bundle on his back, holding a stick in one hand and clutching a cap in his other hand resting on his knee.<sup>59</sup> Karsnitsky's other work included a bust of the world chess champion Alexander Alekhine – perhaps, as a conciliatory tribute, after she actually won a chess game against him in January 1933.<sup>60</sup>

In 1935, the writer Vladimir Jiganoff complained that the quality of painting in Shanghai had declined due to the artists' excessive interest in decorative and applied arts, and their infatuation with 'modern' style.<sup>61</sup> The commercial career of **Jacob Lehonos** (1891–1942), however, does not seem to have detracted him from his painterly production; he was a fixture at Shanghai art shows. Lehonos was from Taganrog, in southwestern Russia, and graduated from the Painting Department of the Imperial Society of the Encouragement for Arts in Saint Petersburg, where he was a favourite student of Nicholas Roerich, an authority on landscape painting and ancient architecture. In 1923, having fought in the First World War and the Russian Civil War, Lehonos landed in Shanghai. The local press took notice of the artist's paintings and sculptures after a 1925 exhibition, where Karsnitsky and Podgoursky were present. Advertising as a 'mural painting and sculpture specialist,'<sup>62</sup> Lehonos received many commissions, including the lion relief for the Chinese Naval Military Department and a pair of cast-iron griffins mounted on cement pillars in front of the Majestic Hotel.<sup>63</sup>

In 1927, working with architect Robert Fan on the renovation of the Isis Theatre, Lehonos produced 'some of the most unusual decorations yet seen in Shanghai,'<sup>64</sup> combining painted murals, imitation stained glass windows in vivid colours and pillars, made to resemble onyx capped in bronze. The windows depicted Romeo and Juliet, Marguerite and Don Quixote 'assiduously tilting at a windmill.'<sup>65</sup> The décor was considered the best in any theatre in town, and included a variety of classical subjects, depicted 'in a manner vivid and restrained.'<sup>66</sup> Isis, the patron goddess of the theatre, was the central figure of a mural devoted to music; in another panel, the muse



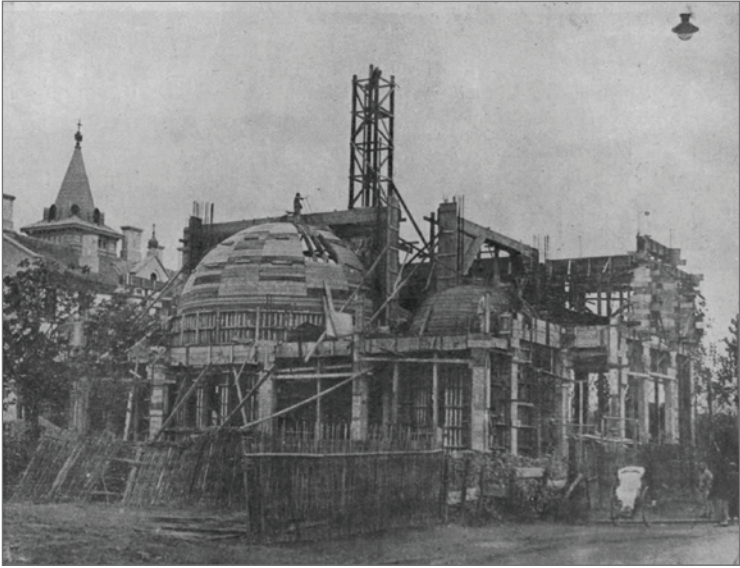
**Figure 7:** War Memorial on the Bund, erected in 1924. AGSL

of dance, Terpsichore, was featured; Bacchus and his court, 'in the midst of typical revels,' formed the subject of another panel. That year, Lehonos also created the décor for the ballroom of the Moon Palace – the 'aristocrat of Hongkew cabarets'<sup>67</sup> – which opened in December.

Lehonos' work on the interior of the Hotel Tiny, designed by Livin-Goldenstaedt, was praised for artistic touches in the dining room and the den, and the stained glass windows.<sup>68</sup> He also created murals and a relief frieze above the proscenium in the Grand Theatre, installed by C.H. Gonda in the old Carlton building. The artist treated the walls and staircases with a filigree flat-oil stain in old gold – a new technique for China.<sup>69</sup> Lehonos also produced four 2.5-meter allegorical sculptures – Progress, Commerce, Economy and Industry – in a distinctive modernist style, situated in niches on the Denis Apartments (1929). He created relief medallions for the Cathay Hotel and murals in the Clements Apartments and a number of private residences. Always in demand, Lehonos was one of the wealthiest Russian artists in Shanghai. He travelled around China, sketching and painting the countryside, city streets and Buddhist sites.

Lehonos' only work in the realm of architecture, the Russian Orthodox Cathedral (1937), was the largest and most conspicuous monument of Shanghai's diaspora. Its construction, initiated in 1927, was continuously delayed by changes in the building site's dimensions, shortages of funds and continuous turnover in the church administration.<sup>70</sup> Lehonos submitted his plan for the project in June 1933, and it replaced earlier approved designs by L. Pashkoff and B. Petroff. 'It is not a direct reference to any particular old Russian church,' Lehonos explained, 'but rather an amalgamation and an expression of the character of ancient religious buildings and construction methods. One of the prototypes was St. George's Cathedral [part of the eponymous monastery in Veliky Novgorod]. The outline also resembles the Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. I was not thinking about a specific province in Russia, but rather about our whole country – grand, majestic and dear to the Russian heart.'<sup>71</sup>

The construction of the Cathedral lasted from August 1933 to April 1937 and, as in the case of Yaron's St. Nicholas Church, it proved an opportunity to bring together a host of Russian architects, engineers, artists and decorators, all of whom voluntarily contributed expertise, labour, material supplies and artworks. The contractor A. Reyer designed and financed the foundation; N. Belanovsky, F.



**Figure 8:** Orthodox Cathedral under construction; Yaron-built Bishop Apartments is on the left. *Jianzhu Yuekan (Builder)*, Vol 2. No. 3, 1934

Zaharoff, P. Unterberger, A. Kooklin and G. Yourieff took charge of the engineering; the interior was executed by V. Podgoursky, M. Kichigin, B. Krenov and A. Yaron. In August 1942, as a result of the privation of the occupation regime, Lehonos contracted typhus and died; he was buried in Lokawei cemetery.

#### FINAL TOUCHES

In autumn 1937, the poorest Russians still residing in the northern districts beyond Suzhou Creek, fled to the foreign settlements to escape Japanese attacks on the city – only to be further distressed by the escalating rents. By 1938, they were moving en masse back into Hongkou and Yangpu, taking any space they could find – houses, garages, even ruins.<sup>72</sup> ‘Russians are deterred neither by seclusion, absence of street lighting nor bad communication,<sup>73</sup> marvelled the China Press columnist. ‘Even in houses lacking lighting, glass for windows and half their original structure they manage to create tolerable living conditions.’ Old buses taken off their wheels were seen with ‘For rent’ signs on their windshields in Russian and Chinese.<sup>74</sup> A temporary Orthodox church was set up in a rented building on Wayside Road, while the restaurant in front of it began to function as a second Russian Club.

The artist and interior decorator **Vasily Zasiipkin** (1886–1941) – who had worked as an architectural draftsman for L.E. Hudec – moved his studio from Avenue Joffre to the cheaper Wayside just before the bombardments began. His workspace was pulverised, together with all of his paintings.<sup>75</sup> Zasiipkin left for Singapore, working as a teacher and running an arts society for western expats. His largest commission in Singapore was the interior design of the Cathay Cinema, Café and Roof Garden, on Handy Road. Many other Russians emigrated to the west; every week, Shanghai newspapers announced another notable member of the community moving abroad and promising not to sever ties with the remaining compatriots.

For some, war created opportunities. The architect **Nicolas Sokolovsky** (1897–1958) received a commission from the French Mission du Kiangnan to restore a block of Chinese shops and residences on East Seward Road (now Dongchangzhi Road), gutted by the Japanese bombs; he transformed the site into a three-story shopping mall with residences in the top floors. In the 1920s, Sokolovsky worked as a construction supervisor for Leonard & Veysseyre and had his own studio on Route Grouchy. His architectural credentials came by mail. Back in Saint Petersburg, the 1914 draft had interrupted his studies at the Architecture Academy, so he completed the architecture course in Shanghai, at the International Correspondence School. Sokolovsky was attracted to the philosophic aspects of architecture and art; he published theoretical essays in two languages, gave public lectures on design and perspective, and taught architectural drawing well into the 1950s.

The Russians' return to Wayside coincided with the arrival of about 15,000 European Jewish refugees. By the end of 1938, German signage prevailed over the Russian, announcing new shops, bars, restaurants, cabarets, pharmacies as well as shoemakers, electricians, and carpenters workshops. 'Should we call it Little Vienna, Little Berlin, Little Germany or Little Palestine?' asked the readership of the North-China Herald.<sup>76</sup> Some enterprising Russians took advantage of the acute demand for housing. In July 1939, the architect William A. Kirk was brought to court for defrauding 50 Jewish refugee families of \$10,000 in advanced rentals and deposits, promising to refit and furnish war-damaged houses on Tangshan Road. Luckily for Kirk, his former employer, the renowned architect C.H. Gonda, testified the houses were nearing completion, so Kirk was only found guilty of

intimidation.<sup>77</sup>

This was not Kirk's first criminal conviction – nor was Kirk his real name. **Vsevolod Kirkor** (1901–after 1952), from Harbin, a pharmacist's son and a scout instructor with unknown qualifications, practiced architecture in Shanghai under an assumed name Wm. A. Kirk and achieved surprising success. In 1934, he completed the Belmont Apartments, a six-story reinforced concrete building with 18 units and separate garages, which stands to this day. He also publicised designs for a 23-story office tower, an apartment house for the French Concession, a railway reception hall for the Peiping-Liaoning Railway and a large hospital for Tianjin; the latter was built and functions to this day.

In 1935, Kirk formed a partnership with the Dutch architect G.Th. Ubink and convinced the Russian Orthodox Confraternity to finance the construction of a new hospital. The Confraternity signed a 25-year lease on a lot at the corner of Route Pershing (Wuxing Road) and Avenue Joffre, and in November 1935, ground was broken and Bishop John blessed the project.<sup>78</sup> The five-story hospital – blocky and additive in shape like all Kirk's designs – was to have three wings 'equipped with all the latest in the field of medicine and surgery.'<sup>79</sup> Before the construction could progress, however, the project was rescheduled, revised and scaled down to three floors. Then the architect disappeared. In June 1937, he was arrested in the USA and extradited to face the court in Shanghai on multiple charges of fraud. Several contractors and suppliers accused Kirk of taking advances and commissioning materials without payment.<sup>80</sup> Kirk was found guilty and sentenced to an 8-month imprisonment; the Russian hospital was never built.

The Japanese occupation triggered a dramatic halt to city building. The removal of China's capital from Nanjing to Chongqing and the dismantlement of the Land Bureau convoluted the procedure for land deals. A new Japanese-controlled Land Bureau introduced different building regulations and demanded that British firms comply with them; many projects in the Japanese-controlled areas were halted.<sup>81</sup> The Japanese-led Special Municipality prohibited foreigners from owning and buying property in Chinese territories and threatened to void earlier deals going back decades. The shortage of imported and provincially sourced materials crashed the construction market. There was little work for architects, and the Shanghai Municipal



Council slashed most architectural positions from its Public Works Department,<sup>82</sup> while private firms began to relocate their business abroad.

Stateless Russians had nowhere to go from Shanghai, but this bleak period saw an unexpected flowering of their architectural practices in the West French Concession. That zone, to the west of today's Xiangyang Road, had thus far remained only partially developed, except for standalone apartment buildings and a scattering of private villas. At the end of 1938, the French Municipal Council designated this area for the residential use, and the subsequent years saw an emergence of a number of small and stylish apartment buildings, authored by the Russians. One of the most prolific builders was **Alexander Kooklin** (1903–1977), who aside from designing several apartment buildings in Shanghai, supervised the construction of water reservoirs in Lushan and was chief consultant at the Chinese commission for the preservation of ancient architecture.<sup>83</sup> Prominent on the board of the Russian Engineers' Society, he received a medal of St. Vladimir from the Peking Orthodox Mission for his technical consultation during the construction of the Orthodox Cathedral.

In 1942, Kooklin's four-story Pershing Apartments were built on Avenue Joffre. He was the general contractor for the Hanray Mansions (1939), designed by Davies, Brooke & Gran. He also built a five-



**Figure 9:** A. V. Kooklin (left) and workers on the roof of Hanray Mansions; the Orthodox Cathedral is on the right. Kooklin family archive



story apartment building on Route Mercier designed by Leonard, Veysseyre & Kruze (1941), the Delastre Tenement by his colleague I. Tomashevsky (1941) and the Doumer Apartments by G. Rabinovich (1941). In 1941, a *troika* of Russian buildings rose on Route Pere Huc (today's Yongfu Road): the Friendship Apartments designed by Nicolay Emanoff at No. 68, an apartment house of Kooklin's design at No. 70 and a building designed by I. Tomashevsky at No. 72.

The designs of **Ilarion Tomashevsky** (1909–1970) were at the base of many Kooklin's projects. Tomashevsky's architect-father had killed himself because of lack of career success, but the son did better, working for Palmer & Turner for more than a decade and then practicing independently. In his designs he realised his favourite concept of 'midget apartments' – compact multi-family buildings fitted into small irregular lots, characteristic of the West French Concession, where many streets intersected at sharp angles.<sup>84</sup> Among his works are the Delastre Apartments (1939), Delastre Tenement (1941) and Georgette Apartments (1941). For his own house, he designed an elegant two-family townhouse on Kangping Road, managing to fit five rooms and a small garden on a confined lot. The functionalist exterior of a villa on Wukang Road that Tomashevsky designed in 1941 concealed multiple secret luxuries – Japanese peach parquet, wood panelling, cosy English-style library with tall bookcases, beige and black marble fireplaces and murals specially painted by V. Podgoursky.

**Nicolay Emanoff**, another architect from the same circle, also began his career in the architecture firms of C.H. Gonda and Palmer & Turner. Having joined Davies, Brooke & Gran, he was closely involved with the design of the Development Building (1935). Parallel to his architectural career, he practiced furniture design and interior decoration, collaborating with his wife who operated Cathay Handicrafts. In 1940, he formed the firm Associated Architects, together with Ernst Gindper, which authored several buildings, among them, a Mediterranean-style villa at 1917 West Nanjing Road, a strikingly asymmetrical residence at 370 Wukang Road and the Friendship Apartments – one of the Russian *troika* – at 68 Yongfu Road.

#### MOVING HOUSE

The war, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution caused grievous damage to architectural legacy and public art in Shanghai.

The occupying Japanese forces hunted the city streets and buildings for scrap metal; after one such raid in 1944, the bust of the poet Pushkin disappeared from its pedestal. The scrap metal was never shipped to Japanese factories because of the American naval blockade. In autumn 1945, a Russian schoolgirl Nusia Boormistroff searched the Wayside scrapyard dumps trying to find the stolen bust. Among the ripped out radiators, garden fences and street lamps, she found pieces of the bronze statue of the Victory Angel, pulled down from the War Memorial on the Bund in 1943 – but no Pushkin.<sup>85</sup> In 1947, a new bust was made in Moscow by the Soviet sculptors, and E. Gran participated in its reinstallation.

By the time the second Pushkin's monument was vandalised by the Red Guards, Emmanuel Gran was already in New York. Having left China in 1948, he joined the Hilton International as head of the department of architecture and built forty-five hotels around the world. He admitted: 'I may not be the best architect in the world, but I am the fastest. Hardly a day passes that I don't get a set of plans proposing another hotel in another country.'<sup>86</sup> Boris Krivoss moved to Chile and settled in Santiago in 1947, running a bohemian hotel and building low cost housing.<sup>87</sup> Nicolay Emanoff went to Brazil in 1948; Wladimir Livin-Goldenstaedt moved to New York in 1956.

Those who chose to repatriate to the USSR – out of conviction or for lack of other options – had far less prestigious careers. Ilarion Tomashevsky no longer designed boutique apartments or worked with expensive materials. He built factory dorms and bus depots in the industrial towns of East Siberia until his death in 1970. Victor Podgoursky with wife and son also returned to the USSR, where his son was arrested and given a lengthy prison sentence. Podgoursky taught art at the Kazan Art School and his legacy was only rediscovered after his death in 1969. He was remembered fondly by his students, whom he introduced to the works of Van Gogh, Gauguin and Matisse, sharing his large collection of art books from Shanghai.<sup>88</sup> Fate caught up with the entrepreneurial Vsevolod Kirkor (William A. Kirk) in 1951. He was employed as a designer at a copper mill in Sverdlovsk, when he was arrested and sentenced to ten years in the labour camps.<sup>89</sup>

The establishment of Communist rule in Shanghai saw the bulldozing of nearly all foreign cemeteries and the subsequent destruction of their monuments.<sup>90</sup> Gone is the solemn memorial to the Russian merchants, created by Isabella Karsnitsky, as well as the

rest of her works; only the collaborative sculpture on the General Post Office remains. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), mosaics, frescoes, icons, murals and stained glass were systematically gouged out, broken, painted over and smeared with concrete; carved mouldings and sculptures were hacked and smashed. The Red Guards destroyed Commerce, Economy, Industry and Progress – the four Lehonos-designed sculptures on the Denis Apartments. The only remainder of his twenty years as a decorator is a pair of stained glass panels on the fourth floor of the Hotel Tiny (1928), cracked and sooty. The Orthodox Cathedral is an empty shell, whose interior has been gutted save for a ring of small icons under the dome, which proved too difficult to pry off.

The rebuilding of the recent era made an unrecognisable stump from the New Ashkenazi Synagogue, and now only exterior walls and the buttresses remain. After many permutations, St. Nicholas Church hosts a bookstore styled like an animal cage, with plaster mouldings and faux-renaissance paintings installed in the 1990s by a restaurant.

There are still questions regarding Russian architectural output in Shanghai. Alexandre Hrenov, the chief architect of St Isaac's Cathedral and the author of more than forty buildings in Saint Petersburg, spent six years in Shanghai practicing architecture, yet next to nothing is known about his works. It is only in broad strokes that we know the



**Figure 11:** Stained glass window designed by J. Lehonos, at the fourth floor of the former Hotel Tiny. Sam Braybon



careers of W. A. Fedoroff, Vladimir Dronnikoff, Boris Petroff, Trofim Scrill and dozens of others. Yet almost seventy extant buildings by more than twenty Russian architects and builders have been identified. Below is a selection of surviving buildings, in order of construction. The full list and architects' biographies can be found on the website Building Russian Shanghai: <https://sites.google.com/view/russianshanghai>

**COMMERCIAL AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS:**

Kincheng Bank (Yaron, 1925; 220 Middle Jiangxi Road)  
Ohel Moshe Synagogue (Rabinovich, 1928; 62 Changyang Road)  
Hotel Tiny (Livin, 1928; 741 Yuyuan Road)  
D.G.M. Aronovsky's Godown (Yaron, 1929; 687 Dongdaming Road)  
Blue Hospital (Krivoss, 1930; 157 South Wulumuqi Road)  
Recoletos Procuration (Yaron, 1932; 6 Xiangshan Road)  
Joffre Arcade (Krivoss, 1934; 542 Middle Huaihai Road)  
St. Nicholas Orthodox Church (Yaron, 1934; 16 Gaolan Road)  
Development Building (Davies, Brooke & Gran, 1935; 181 Middle Jiangxi Road)  
Russian Orthodox Cathedral (Lehonos; 1937; 55 Xinle Road)  
Pushkin's Monument (Podgoursky, Pavlovsky, Kichigin, Gran, Livin; 1937; 1947; corner of Yueyang Road and Taojiang Road)  
Magnet House (Gran, 1939; 49 Middle Sichuan Road)  
New Ashkenazi Synagogue (Gran, 1940; 102 South Xiangyang Road)  
Sino-Soviet Friendship Center (Soviet and Chinese architects, 1955; 1000 West Yan'an Road)

**APARTMENT HOUSES:**

King Albert Apartments (Livin, 1931; 151–187 South Shaanxi Road)  
Bishop Apartments (1932, Yaron; 55A Xinle Road)  
Nesthouse Apartments (Krivoss, 1932; 30 Nanyang Road)  
Lafayette Court (Davies, Brooke & Gran, 1933; 1248 Middle Fuxing Road)  
Astrid Apartments (1933, Livin; 294–316 South Maoming Road)  
Yue Tuck Apartments (Davies, Brooke & Gran, 1934; 69 North Wulumuqi Road)  
Victor Court (Davies, Brooke and Gran, 1934; 56 Shaoxing Road)  
Belmont Apartments (Kirk, 1934; 240 South Xiangyang Road)  
Dufour Apartments (Fedoroff, 1934; 176 South Wulumuqi Road)

Bridge House (Rabinovich, 1935; 85 North Sichuan Road)  
Derring Apartments (Rabinovich, 1935; 82 Chongming Road)  
Koffman Apartments (Rabinovich, 1935; 230–232 Hunan Road)  
Irene Apartments (Livin, 1935; 182 Kangping Road)  
Hanray Apartments (Davies, Brooke & Gran, 1939; 1154–1170 Middle  
Huaihai Road)  
Delastre Apartments (Tomashevsky and Dronnikoff, 1939; 238  
Taiyuan Road)  
Friendship Apartments (Emanoff and Gindper, 1941; 68 Yongfu Road,  
91, 93 West Fuxing Road)  
Georgette Apartments (Tomashevsky, 1941; 32 West Fuxing Road)  
Apartments on Route Pere Huc (Kooklin, 1941; 72 Yongfu Road)  
Doumer Apartments (Rabinovich, 1941; No. 43 Lane 56 Donghu  
Road)  
Persing Apartments (Kooklin, 1942; 1706 Middle Huaihai Road)

#### LANE COMPOUNDS, VILLAS AND RESIDENCES:

Linda Terrace (Yaron, 1924; 833 Middle Huaihai Road)  
Wang Boqun's residence (Yaron, 1931; No. 31 Lane 1186 Yuyuan Road)  
Residence for Z. Y. Woo (Davies, Brooke & Gran, 1933; 618 Wanhangu  
Road)  
Architect's residence (Tomashevsky, 1940; 103 and 105, Kangping  
Road)  
Residence (Tomashevsky, 1941; 274 Wukang Road)  
Residence (Emanoff and Gindper, 1941; 370 Wukang Road)  
Residence (Emanoff and Gindper, 1941; 1917 West Nanjing Road)

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# A FOREIGN ARTISTS' GROUP IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY SHANGHAI: THE SHANGHAI ART SOCIETY (1883–1889)

BY FANG-MEI CHOU AND THOMAS E. SMITH

## ABSTRACT

*The Shanghai Art Society (SAS), established in 1883 by a group of expatriate amateur artists in the Shanghai International Settlement, organised 33 exhibitions and three conversaciones in six seasons from 13 November 1883 to 21 June 1889. Led primarily by women but featuring several prominent men, the SAS included foreigners of all nationalities and at least one Chinese photographer, who participated in the joint exhibition of the SAS and China Camera Club on 20-21 June 1889, which was the last SAS activity before its dissolution. Participants were not limited to Shanghai residents: artists in Hong Kong, Beijing, Fuzhou, and Xiamen also sent their works to SAS exhibitions. By researching the lives of leading SAS members and the content of the exhibitions, we can better understand the nature of artistic activities in the 1880s Shanghai International Settlement, the personal connections among the members, and perhaps the cross-influences of visual culture at this time.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Shanghai Art Society (SAS) was an organisation led primarily by women in the Shanghai International Settlement during the 1880s. Its existence has been noted in earlier literature,<sup>1</sup> but no one has explored its membership, its activities, or its impact, probably for the simple reason that apart from the reports of its activities in the *North China Herald (NCH)* and *North China Daily News (NCDN)*, there is little information to be found about it. As far as we have been able to determine, none of the artworks shown in SAS exhibitions have survived to the present, and only one of the known members left a written record that sheds more light on the organisation – and that only describes what preceded its formation. There are no records of it in Chinese that have come to light at the time of writing. The only way to explore the SAS, then, is by tracing the lives of its members and examining what else they may have accomplished in the artistic line. Although SAS appears not to have had a broad impact, it was an

unusual organisation in its time in terms of gender participation and leadership, and it led some of its members in later life to accomplish greater things in art-related fields. In its own day, it enjoyed an excellent reputation.

Reports of the artistic activities among Shanghai's foreign residents are scarce compared with reports of their hunting and sporting activities, since fewer of them regularly engaged in artistic or musical pursuits than in sporting ones, but the emergence in the 1870s and 1880s of the Flower Show Committee, the Amateur Dramatic Club (ADC), and Shanghai Art Society (SAS), as well as the increasing quantity of news in the *North China Herald's* (NCH) 'Amusements' section, was undoubtedly related to the swelling population of the International Settlement, and especially the increasing presence of women. A 'critical mass' of art-lovers had been reached. From 1876 to 1890, the number of Shanghai's foreign residents (excluding residents of the French territory, naval personnel, and sailors) grew by a factor of roughly 2.28, from 1,673 to 3,891, while the number of women grew by a factor of 3.42, from 296 to 1,011.<sup>2</sup> Church groups, reading groups, and branches of men's and women's organisations popular in the West were also set up in order to satisfy foreign residents' demand for educational or social activities. In 1886, one NCH commentator specifically identified the Flower Show, the Ladies' Benevolent Association, and the SAS as three of the primarily women's volunteer groups that were contributing the most toward the improvement of life quality in the International Settlement.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE FORMATION OF THE SOCIETY

The NCH report on the first SAS exhibition is the only source that ever lists the names of the SAS officers and Hanging Committee members (by husband's surname only for the women, and by first initials and surnames for the men)<sup>4</sup>. Many of these members soon left and the SAS underwent several reshuffles in later years. During the organisation's first years, the names of participating artists were also kept discreetly hidden. These factors have made their identification difficult, but we can now list the full names of the founding SAS officers and Hanging Committee members as follows: Alice Smith (née Byas, 1850–1944, British), Judith Eleanor Low (née Motley, 1841–1933, American), Alice Coutts (née Deacon, d. 1905, British), Anna 'Abbie' Drew (née Davis, 1851–1932, American), Elizabeth Mary Bell (née Mackrill

Smith, ca. 1848–after 1906, British), Annie Lyman Hitch (née Delano, 1849–1926, American), Margaret ‘Maggie’ J. Lind (née Douglas, d. 1891, British), Rev. Alfred John Bamford (1849–1929, British), Albert Robson Burkill (1839/1841–1913, British), Jacques Auguste Charles Mouillesaux de Bernières, (1848–1917, French), and Herbert Wythe Daniel (1846–1901, British). Active members who joined later included Edith Louisa Allen (née Wedgwood, 1854–1935, British), and Henry William Goodenough Hayter (1862–1915, British). The SAS leaders and founders were mostly women but also included a number of prominent businessmen, a Customs official, and at least one clergyman. As all SAS members were ‘amateur’ artists, their names, with the noteworthy exception of H. W. G. Hayter, who later achieved fame as a cartoonist, are generally unknown to art historians.

Regarding Hayter, who first drew attention to his art through the SAS, one of us has recently published a separate article on his accomplishments,<sup>5</sup> so we shall provide here only a brief summary of his career. After arriving in Shanghai in 1882, Hayter worked as a tea taster and agent for his father’s firm. By 1886, his cartoons were attracting notice in the SAS, and in 1888, he also published a multi-panel cartoon in the *London Illustrated News* explaining the steps of the tea trade. In 1889, he made the acquaintance of J.O.P. Bland (1863–1945) and soon illustrated the latter’s *Lays of Far Cathay* (1890), *Lays and Relays* (1894), and humorous magazine *The Rattle* (1896–1897, 1900–1902). He became the publisher and leading cartoonist for *The Eastern Sketch* (1904–1909) and *Quack* (1912). Although most of his output was comic, Hayter was arguably the first person in China who dared to lampoon the imperial family through his political cartoons. The other SAS members, however, remained amateurs and did not depend on producing art for their livelihoods. Sometimes they could apply their artistic skills in the practice of their profession; for others it was simply an extension of their social lives or a way of beautifying their homes. Nevertheless, a few SAS members had extensive artistic training and were capable of producing and exhibiting works of professional quality. The main focus of SAS exhibitions was on drawing and painting, but it also included photography and handicrafts (especially needlework). Its activities attracted a roughly equal participation in terms of gender. Art could also transcend geography, since members could send their works from other cities, and it was always considered a perfectly ‘respectable’ activity. We shall



see, however, that the leading SAS members invariably came from relatively well-to-do backgrounds.

To explore the SAS's origins, we must first focus on Annie Lyman Delano Hitch and Alice Byas Smith, in that order. Hitch is the only SAS member whose correspondence from this period is preserved, at least in part. Although her letters do not mention the SAS, she does describe SAS-like gatherings before its formal organisation. They provide a precious window into the rather cloistered life of foreign women in Shanghai during this period.

Annie Hitch was the daughter of Warren Delano, Jr. (1809–1898) and the elder sister of Sara Ann Delano (1854–1941), who later became the mother of Pres. Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Her father was an executive of Russell & Co., at that time the leading American firm in the China trade (opium). Through most of her teen years, the time of the American Civil War (1861–1865), her family lived in Hong Kong, during which time they also visited Guangzhou and Shanghai.<sup>6</sup> In 1877, she married Frederick Delano Hitch (1833–1911) in Newburgh, New York, and the couple arrived in Shanghai in February 1878, where Frederick worked as a partner of Russell & Co. The couple and their young children returned to Newburgh in 1884.<sup>7</sup>

Annie Hitch's letters reveal that her main artistic pastime was actually musical; she practiced the piano regularly and had a fairly advanced skill level; playing, for instance, Beethoven sonatas, accompanying on a Beethoven violin sonata, and meeting occasionally with other women to perform trios. In these early years, if the foreign residents wanted music, they usually had to make their own. However, three months after arriving in Shanghai, she confided to a friend that she had become interested in watercolour, which she practiced alone, using *A System of Water Colour Painting* (1850) by Aaron E. Penley (1806–1870) as a guide. She shared her interest in this pastime with her friend Isabel Clarke Forbes (ca. 1841–1931).<sup>8</sup> In December of 1878, she went to visit Isabel, who had moved to Chefoo (Yantai), and made her first attempts at sketching from nature. The two women also took several weeks of lessons on 'the uses of guache for sketching rapidly beautiful sunset or cloud effects' from Sidney Thomas Bridgford (1836–1897), a civil engineer with the Royal Marine Artillery and son of the British painter Thomas Trussel Bridgford (1812–1878).<sup>9</sup> During the next two years, Annie Hitch was frequently 'ailing', even bed-ridden at times, and seldom went out. However, in June 1880 she

reported that she had resumed her practice of watercolour, which she found to be a much greater challenge than the piano, to fill long days of loneliness.<sup>10</sup> For her Christmas and birthday presents that year, her husband, appreciating her new artistic interest, gave her a copy of Jennie J. Young's *The Ceramic Art: A Compendium of the History and Manufacture of Pottery and Porcelain* (1878), with 464 illustrations, and an oil painting of Hong Kong harbour at sunset by the American artist Winckworth Allan Gay (1821–1910).<sup>11</sup> In March 1881, she reported:

Mrs Low [i.e., Judith Motley Low] has a Sketching Club which meets at her house every week. Each fortnight a subject is given out. I was away when they had "Home" & "Moonlight", but last Thursday was "Sunset" & I did a small one from a little sketch I made in the Inland Sea in Japan. Some of the Club did very good things which I quite envied, & Major Bridgford came & gave us the benefit of his criticisms & suggestions. It will be a good thing even if it only helps us to work with some thought & seriousness.<sup>12</sup>

In April, as her music-related and other activities increased, she stopped attending Mrs Low's Sketching Club in order to join the Flower Show Committee with Mrs Coutts (i.e., Alice Deacon Coutts).<sup>13</sup> Annie Hitch makes no further mention of her artistic activities until July 1883, when she mentions taking painting lessons from a female teacher, whom she does not name.<sup>14</sup> The record is frustratingly incomplete, as not all of her letters were preserved.

Nevertheless, it suffices to demonstrate that before the formation of the SAS, the women in this rather small, select group had been meeting regularly for artistic or musical activities, and that Judith Motley Low had organised an informal Sketching Club that would meet weekly at her home, with new assigned topics issued fortnightly. Maj. Bridgford was their 'critic' or advisor during this preliminary phase.

The catalyst for establishing a more formal organisation was undoubtedly the arrival of Alice Byas Smith in Shanghai in 1883. The daughter of William Byas of Leyton, Essex, she had used the grand drawing room at her father's house each summer from 1878 to 1882 to serve as the venue for sizeable annual exhibitions, the last with more than 400 works, for a group named the Society of Amateur

Artists, Leyton. The later exhibitions had attracted the participation of artists from all over southeast England. Alice Byas was one of its chief organisers, and her own works earned special praise from the reviewer of the 1882 show for being ‘far above the usual amateur standard.’<sup>15</sup> She is also reported to have lent Paul Delaroche’s (1797–1856) *The Virgin and Child* (probably her own copy) to the Industrial and Fine Art Exhibition at Walthamstow in April 1882.<sup>16</sup> We have not been able to determine where she received her artistic training.

At the age of 33 she married Rev. Frederick Robert Smith (1848–1931), in Leyton on April 12, 1883.<sup>17</sup> The couple immediately travelled to Shanghai, where Rev. Smith took up a new three-year position as Incumbent at Shanghai Holy Trinity Cathedral. Alice Smith thus became SAS President only a few months after arriving in Shanghai. On May 27, 1886, just before Rev. and Mrs Smith were to return to England, a farewell reception was held for them at the Deanery. The *NCH* here reports in great detail about Rev. Smith’s services to the Shanghai foreign community and includes in full the text of some of the speeches made; a parting monetary gift had also been collected.<sup>18</sup> He and his wife were clearly well-liked and respected, and many years later Alice Smith’s painting skills were still fondly remembered in the Shanghai foreign community.<sup>19</sup>

In our view, Smith arrived in Shanghai just when a sufficient number of skilled foreign amateur artists had become resident there. She could draw upon her earlier experiences in England running a large amateur artists’ society and organising regular exhibitions when she and the others established the SAS. Furthermore, she came at a time when amateur artists’ societies were increasingly in vogue around this time both in England, especially around London, and in America.<sup>20</sup> Hence, we may infer that as soon as she established contact with the other artistically inclined women in Shanghai, and they became aware of her skills, they looked to her to take their society to an entirely new level. Her departure, and, as we shall see, the departure of many of the other founding members, caused the SAS to lose momentum and eventually disintegrate.

We have not been able to find or identify any of the works that she displayed in Shanghai. However, one of her works, a pencil and watercolour copy of *The Flower Girl* by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618–1682), was sold in 2006 in Christie’s London Sale 4044 (Lot 649). Because this Academic-style painting is signed ‘Alice Byas’, it was

probably completed before her marriage. Judging from the quality of the fine detail in this work, it is not difficult to see why her painting skills won such high praise.<sup>21</sup>

As for Annie Hitch, her association with the SAS was a brief one, and considering her other social activities it is unlikely that she had much time to devote to it. She participated in the Flower Shows, and was still listed as one of its 'Lady Judges' in May 1884, just before she left Shanghai.<sup>22</sup> She had also been a member of the Shanghai Ladies' Benevolent Society, and until January 1882 she was the superintendent of its Needlework Department, which she had set up in 1880.<sup>23</sup> Her interest in sewing and needlework is amply reflected in her letters, so her contributions to the SAS were probably in watercolour and needlework.

#### **OTHER FOUNDING MEMBERS**

The specific contributions of several of the other SAS founding members, such as Alice Coutts, Anna Drew, Elizabeth Mary Bell, and Albert Robson Burkill are unknown, so we shall not go into detail about them here. As for Margaret Lind, we have determined only that she had attended Aberdeen's well-regarded West-End Academy, and then the Aberdeen Mechanics' Institution School of Art, where she had received a prize for excellence in freehand and a pass in model drawing in 1873.<sup>24</sup> She and her husband left for Hong Kong in 1886. Other members' contributions, however, were more substantial.

Judith Eleanor Motley Low, the SAS Honorary Secretary, achieved significant fame in later life as the founder of the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture, Gardening and Horticulture for Women, thus becoming a pioneer in efforts to open these fields professionally to women.<sup>25</sup> She was a great-granddaughter of Benjamin Bussey (1757–1842), who bequeathed a large plot of land with buildings to Harvard University; title was transferred to the university upon the death of his granddaughter, and the property became Harvard's Arnold Arboretum. As a child, Judith often played at the beautifully landscaped estate with her cousins, and she attributed this experience to her lifelong interest in horticulture and landscaping.<sup>26</sup> Her husband Edward Gilchrist Low (*ca.* 1838–1895) came from a distant branch of the Low family, which had long been involved in the China trade.<sup>27</sup> After arriving at Fuzhou in 1862, he joined the American firm Augustine Heard & Co. Eventually he settled in Shanghai, became a

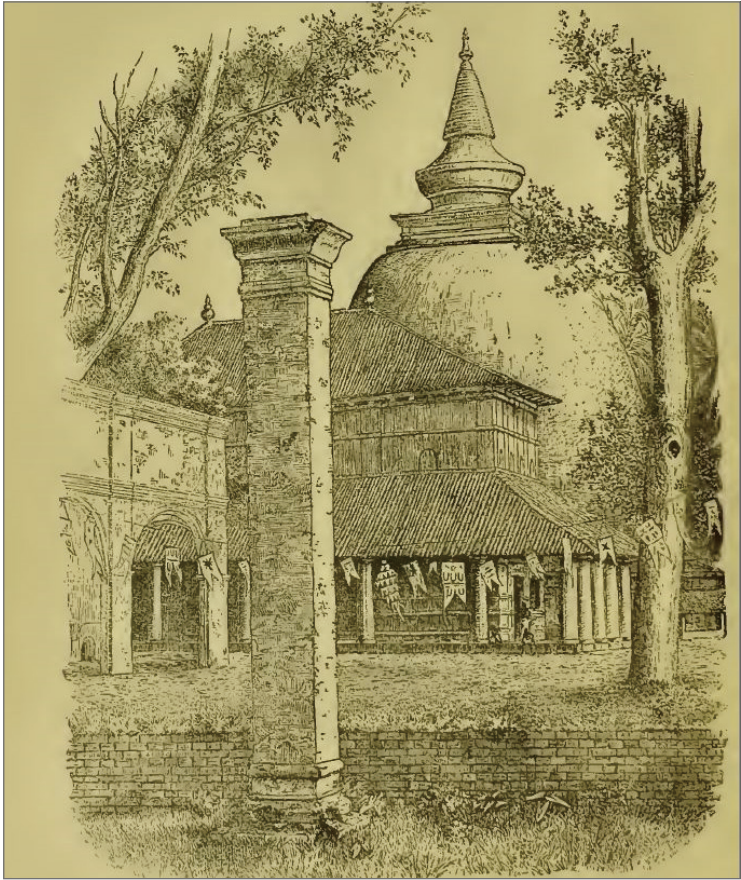
successful businessman and set up Fearon, Low & Co.<sup>28</sup>

Judith Low did not participate in all of the SAS exhibitions. However, in the May 13, 1884 exhibition, several of the members dedicated an album of their works to her as a token of respect. In the last SAS exhibition in June 1889, her painting of the heavenly bamboo won praise from the *NCH* reviewer.<sup>29</sup> During the same period, she usually served as committee member for the annual Flower Show.<sup>30</sup> Shortly before September 18, 1892, when Mr and Mrs Low left Shanghai and moved back to Boston, members of the Shanghai Club presented a memorial gift to Mr Low. Since it was an all-male club, Mrs Low could not be present, but in their speeches they expressed admiration for her 'gracious and courteous manner' and 'highly cultivated mind.'<sup>31</sup> Thus, during her many years in the International Settlement, Judith Low further developed her artistic and horticultural skills, which she put to use after her husband died in 1895.<sup>32</sup>

Rev. Alfred John Bamford received a B.A. in animal physiology in 1872 from the New College, London, where his training probably included scientific illustration; his earliest preserved artwork is an album of animal drawings completed in 1865. After graduating he joined the London Missionary Society and spent the rest of the 1870s in Calcutta. (Fig 1)

During his brief stint in Hong Kong, the London Missionary Society invited him to serve as the pastor of a new church it was building in Shanghai, the Shanghai Union Church, and he moved there in 1882. After construction of the church was completed, he resigned on January 31, 1887, and moved back to England with his family.<sup>33</sup>

During Rev. Bamford's stay in Shanghai, he published a theological tract, *The Christian Basis of Temperance*, and in 1888, when he returned to England, he published *Turbans and Tails; or, Sketches in the Unromantic East*, including some of his own illustrations, in which he wrote at length about his impressions of India and China. He twice mentions purchasing works of what people today would call Chinese folk art, the kind that could be purchased cheaply in street markets, and he devotes an entire chapter to a description of an illustrated Chinese book on life in Shanghai in which, oddly, all foreigners were given haloes. Rev. Bamford found such things both fascinating and amusing because of the relative unconcern for proportion and precision, especially with regard to the depiction of animals.



**Figure 1:** A. J. Bamford, 'Buddhist Temple and Dagoba at Kelaniya, Ceylon,' reproduced from W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic* (Calcutta and Simla: Thacker, Spink & Co. 1882), p. 226.

After retiring, he became one of the first people to move into Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, the world's first planned 'garden city', where he devoted himself to painting. Seven of his oil paintings remain in the North Hertfordshire Museum. Each of these skilful, Academic-style works with sylvan or pastoral themes demonstrates that he was especially adept with dappled light effects.<sup>34</sup> His preserved works reflect strong interest in nature and the precise depiction of living things. The works Rev. Bamford exhibited in Shanghai would not have varied too far from this style.

Jacques Auguste Charles Mouillesaux de Bernières, who worked for the Imperial Maritime Customs Service (IMCS) from 1867 to



1901, always appears in the *NCH* reviews of the SAS exhibitions whenever he showed artworks. In 1871, he was ennobled by the French government, which authorised him to add 'de Bernières' to his name.<sup>35</sup> In June 1885, he moved to Beijing when he was appointed Chinese Secretary under the IMCS Director-General Sir Robert Hart in Beijing.<sup>36</sup> In 1886, he and Yu Guan published *Leçons progressives pour l'étude du chinois parlé et écrit: cent chapitres ou les usages de la Chine sont sommairement décrits* to very positive reviews, and it soon became an important Chinese textbook. In 1896, when Li Hongzhang (1823–1901) visited France, Mouillesaux de Bernières accompanied him there as his secretary and interpreter, and it was through him that gifts from Dowager Empress Cixi and Li were delivered to President Félix Faure. After he resigned in January 1901 from his Customs position as Commissioner, he returned to France, where he resided at Le Manoir de Villeseptier in Rochecorbon, Indre-et-Loire.<sup>37</sup> One of his daughters studied under Rodin and became the sculptor known as Marie Bernières-Henraux (1876–1964).

Besides being an amateur photographer, Mouillesaux de Bernières was skilled in watercolour landscape painting and drawing as well. The bridge in this quick watercolour sketch of a Suzhou scene appears to be the small footbridge that approaches one end of the famous Wumen Bridge at an approximate right angle. Judging from the perspective, the artist would have been sitting in a houseboat on the river in the space between them.



**Figure 2:** Jacques Auguste Charles Mouillesaux de Bernières, *Suzhou*, watercolour, ©Société de Géographie, Paris.



The gracefulness of Women Bridge and the way it combined with the view of the river and the city wall made it a favourite painting and photography subject among foreigners. After he left Shanghai in 1884 for posts in Jiujiang and Beijing, Mouillesaux probably continued sending his works to the SAS for exhibition, because works depicting Jiujiang and Beijing scenery are reported to appear in the later SAS exhibitions. Hundreds of his watercolour landscape sketches are now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and await further study; others have appeared in auctions.

Herbert Wythe Daniel, one of the SAS's most active members, missed only a few of the exhibitions. According to his *NCH* obituary, which provides a summary of his career, Daniel arrived in Shanghai around 1871 and joined the British firm Gibb, Livingston & Co. A few years later he began working for the American firm Fearon, Low & Co. After Mr and Mrs Low returned to the United States in 1892, he replaced Mr Low as partner, and the company was renamed Fearon, Daniel & Co. He returned home from Shanghai in 1900 due to a heart condition and died on or just before June 26, 1901.

Mr Daniel was long a fixture in the Shanghai foreign community's athletic, hunting, and cultural activities and enjoyed a wide circle of friends. The obituary reports: 'He had great talent as an artist, and for many years painted the scenery for the A.D.C. [Amateur Dramatic Club], while the walls of many houses here bear testimony to his skill and taste as a water-colourist.'<sup>38</sup> In 1898, he was the ADC's president and still a Flower Show participant, horse racer, rower, etc.<sup>39</sup> One year after Mr Daniel died, fellow SAS member H. W. G. Hayter remembered him with a caricature.<sup>40</sup> (Fig. 3)

Edith Louisa Wedgwood Allen, a great-granddaughter of the English potter Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795), married Clement Francis Romilly Allen (1844–1920) of the British Consular Service in 1877. The couple went to Shanghai in 1878, where Mr Allen became Vice-Consul, and in 1880 he



**Figure 3:** H. W. G. Hayter, 'The Prophet', reproduced from H. W. G. Hayter, *Caricatures* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, Oriental Press, 1902), p. 10.

became Consul in Beihai (Pakhoi), Guangxi. After 1881, he was sent to Ningbo, Xiamen, and other cities.<sup>41</sup> Since Shanghai was a port of call for many passenger ships at the time, Mr and Mrs Allen and their children often appeared among the lists of passengers on incoming or outgoing vessels.

In 1886 and 1887, Mrs Allen illustrated two of her husband's books, the first a collection of verses for children, *John Chinaman's Bamboo Tree* and the second, *Some of the Analects of Confucius*. (Fig. 4) The cartoon-like illustrations of the latter cast a humorous or ironic light on Confucius through depictions of modern life in Shanghai, especially interactions between Chinese and foreigners.<sup>42</sup>

Mrs Allen's artistic skills were once pressed into diplomatic service as her husband interacted with Chinese officials. In 1887, for example, one intendant (*daotai*) in Xiamen (Amoy) surprised the British when he asked for two fans painted by Mrs Allen. He then:

[...] sent through her husband his thanks for her gracious transformation of two worthless fans into most valuable objects which all his friends envied. Soon afterwards he arranged a very pleasant picnic for eighteen official and non-official foreigners, including Mrs Allen and other wives.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 4:** Edith L. Allen, reproduced from Clement F. R. Allen, *Some of the Analects of Confucius*. Illustrated by Mrs Clement F. R. Allen (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1887), n.pag.

Although Mrs Allen was no longer living in Shanghai in 1887, she still participated in each of the last four SAS exhibitions. The reviewer always had very high praise for her work.

#### THE EXHIBITIONS

From *NCH* and *NCDN* announcements of upcoming events and exhibition reviews, we can determine that from November 13, 1883 to June 22, 1889, the SAS held 33 exhibitions and three *conversazioni* (Table 1).

Table 1: List of SAS Exhibitions and *Conversazioni*

Exhibitions	1	2	3	4	5
Date	13-14 Nov 83	11-12 Dec 83	15-16 Jan 84	12-13 Feb 84	11-12 Mar 84
Location	Deanery	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall
Source	<i>NCH</i> , 14 Nov 83, p. 563.	<i>NCH</i> , 12 Dec 83, p. 659. <i>NCDN</i> , 12 Dec 83, p. 563.	<i>NCDN</i> , 17 Jan 84, p. 55. <i>NCH</i> , 16 Jan 84, p. 72 and 23 Jan 84, p. 86.	<i>NCH</i> , 13 Feb 84, p. 161.	<i>NCH</i> , 12 Mar 84, pp. 299-300 and 19 Mar 84, pp. 316-17.

6	7	8	9	10	11
8-9 Apr 84	13-14 May 84	10-11 Jun 84	13-14 Oct 84	11-12 Nov 84	9-10 Dec 84
Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall
<i>NCH</i> , 9 Apr 84, pp. 423-24.	<i>NCDN</i> , 12 May 84, p. 439. <i>NCH</i> , 16 May 84, pp. 559-60.	<i>NCDN</i> , 10 Jun 84, p. 539. <i>NCH</i> , 13 Jun 84, pp. 675-76.	<i>NCH</i> , 22 Oct 84, pp. 456-57.	<i>NCH</i> , 12 Nov 84, p. 541.	<i>NCH</i> , 10 Dec 84, pp. 660-61.

12	13	14	15	16	17
8-9 Jan 85	12-13 Feb 85	12-13 Mar 85	9-10 Apr 85	7-8 May 85	4-5 Jun 85
Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall
<i>NCH</i> , 14 Jan 85, p. 43.	<i>NCDN</i> , 12 Feb 85, p. 143. <i>NCH</i> , 18 Feb 85, p. 201.	<i>NCH</i> , 18 Mar 85, p. 322.	<i>NCDN</i> , 9 Apr 85, p. 327. <i>NCH</i> , 18 Apr 85, p. 443.	<i>NCH</i> , 8 May 85, p. 540.	<i>NCH</i> , 5 Jun 85, p. 652.

18	19	20	21	22	23
12-13 Nov 85	14-15 Jan 86	11-12 Feb 86	11-12 Mar 86	8-9 Apr 86	13-14 May 86
Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall
<i>NCDN</i> , 11 Nov 85, p. 459. <i>NCH</i> , 18 Nov 85, p. 580.	<i>NCDN</i> , 15 Jan 86, p. 47. <i>NCH</i> , 20 Jan 86, pp. 54-55.	<i>NCH</i> , 17 Feb 86, pp. 180-81.	<i>NCDN</i> , 11 Mar 86, p. 227. <i>NCH</i> , 17 Mar 86, p. 294.	<i>NCDN</i> , 8 Apr 86, pp. 323. <i>NCH</i> , 17 Apr 86, p. 403.	<i>NCH</i> , 14 May 86, pp. 512-13.

24	25	26	27	28	29
10-11 Jun 86	11-12 Nov 86	9-10 Dec 86	13-14 Jan 87	17-18 Feb 87	9-10 Jun 87
Temperance Hall	Studio of William Thomas Saunders (photographer)	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall
<i>NCDN</i> , 10 Jun 86, p. 535. <i>NCH</i> , 11 Jun 86, p. 622.	<i>NCDN</i> , 29 Oct 86, p. 415 (announcement). <i>NCH</i> , 17 Nov 86, p. 534.	<i>NCH</i> , 15 Dec 86, pp. 645-46.	<i>NCH</i> , 19 Jan 87, pp. 67-68.	<i>NCDN</i> , 17 Feb 87, p. 151. <i>NCH</i> , 23 Feb 87, p. 203.	<i>NCDN</i> , 8 Jun 87, p. 527. <i>NCH</i> , 10 Jun 87, p. 637.

30	31	32	33
15-16 Dec 87	14-15 Jun 88	6-7 Dec 88	20-21 Jun 89
Temperance Hall	Temperance Hall	Philharmonic Hall	Philharmonic Hall
<i>NCH</i> , 22 Dec 87, pp. 678-79.	<i>NCH</i> , 15 Jun 88, p. 779.	<i>NCH</i> , 07 Dec 88, p. 633.	<i>NCH</i> , 22 Jun 89, p. 775. <i>NCDN</i> , 21 Jun 89, p. 571.

Conversaciones	1	2	3
Date	16 Jun 85	1 Jul 86	9 Jun 87
Location	Masonic Hall	Masonic Hall	Temperance Hall
Source	<i>NCH</i> , 26 June 85, p. 738.	<i>NCDN</i> , 16 Jun 86, p. 555. <i>NCH</i> , 2 Jul 86, p. 15.	<i>NCDN</i> , 8 Jun 87, p. 527. <i>NCH</i> , 10 Jun 87, pp. 637-38.

Each exhibition lasted two days. In the first, the works put on display were divided into seven categories—drawings and paintings of figures, landscapes, still life, drawings in black and white, copies of all kinds (often from prints in British catalogues), decorative art, and amateur photographs—and there were plans to add needlework and wood-carving later.<sup>44</sup> The exhibitions were first held monthly, with a summer break, and the artists' names were kept secret. Starting in

February 1886, the Society began publishing small programs listing the artists and their works, and from February 1887, the exhibitions became semi-annual, with the artists' names displayed along with the works at the venues and reported in the *NCH* and *NCDN*.

In each of the reviews, the always anonymous reviewer goes into considerable depth and detail about the works on display, pointing out strengths and weaknesses through an assessment of the artists' technical mastery of scene-selection, composition, coloration, and so on, so that despite the lack of illustrations, the reader still gains a general idea of the nature and relative quality of the works. His tone and the critical standards reflected through the reviews show that he favoured the Academic style and disliked the emerging Impressionist style, which he never mentions by name. For example, in one exhibition, he praises H.W. Daniel's carefully finished paintings, as well as the trees in one entitled *Shottesbrooke Park*, but 'the lawn in the last was impossible, and the sky not so carefully done as Mr Daniel's generally are'.<sup>45</sup> His reviews focus mainly on the paintings and drawings on paper or canvas. The reviewer writes several times that although his criticisms were not favourably received, he felt this was his way of spurring members toward their objectives.<sup>46</sup> When the number of displayed works suddenly decreased in the Society's third year, the reviewer even criticised the SAS founders for being overambitious: the members were being made to paint in oil prematurely, and as a result some had withdrawn in frustration.<sup>47</sup> One review spurred a reader to send a letter expressing a different opinion. The letter-writer worried that the younger artists might try to tailor their art to the *NCH* reviewer's standards, and he/she also took the reviewer to task for praising one drawing as the best, when it was in his own view the worst, due to faulty perspective.<sup>48</sup>

The article for the first exhibition reports that the SAS had originally planned to require at least one new artwork from each member for each exhibition, on pain of a penalty, but they decided to relax this rule and welcome non-exhibiting members. Starting from the January 1884 exhibition, each exhibition had a competition around a set theme; viewers voted for the best work, and the artist would win a modest prize. Although the SAS originally planned semi-annual public shows, they soon decided to make them annual events instead. Hence only three public shows – the *conversazioni* – were held. Each of these evening events began with a classical music program. The

Hanging Committee selected only the best works of the previous year for these grand events and took great pains in beautifying the venue, thus drawing the participation of ‘most of the ladies and gentlemen’ of the Foreign Settlement. They were considered major social events in their time.

The most important developments and changes that took place during the 33 SAS exhibitions, based on the *NCH* and *NCDN* reports (referenced in Table 1), may be summed up as follows.

In the third exhibition (January 1884), the reviewer describes works depicting scenes from Yantai (Chefoo), Paris, Nagoya, and Yokohama, as well as a painting of a ‘Satsuma incense burner, Japanese fan and Japanese box.’ The incense burner, moreover, was completed with gilding in the Japanese manner. There were also copies of well-known artworks and decorative screens based on woodcuts appearing in *Harper’s*. The artists had thus used a combination of personal experience and things they had seen only in books and magazines when creating their work. In addition, since the Chinese Lunar New Year was approaching, there was a competition to design New Year’s cards, and viewers voted for a winner. First prize was won by a card depicting a cluster of bamboo berries and leaves (i.e. nandina or *Nandina domestica*, a common Chinese garden plant) over a snowy landscape. The reviewer commented, ‘The drawing is exceedingly good, and the general effect is very pretty, though there is nothing strikingly original in the design.’

The fifth exhibition (March 1884) showed fewer but higher-quality works. The reviewer recommended that the Hanging Committee continue to exercise its discretion in selecting works worthy of display, but he also defended his criticisms of inferior works: if a work is displayed, the artist must be willing to accept unfavourable criticism. He also encouraged the SAS to make its exhibitions open to the general public. Judging from later developments, the first year’s exhibitions probably included some of the SAS’s best works, because the original founders were all present and members still showed enthusiasm about contributing works every month. The works shown were extremely diverse in terms of medium and subject matter or scenery, both Chinese and Western.

The SAS had nine exhibitions during its second season, from October 1884 to June 1885. This was the only year in which the SAS managed to hold each exhibition on schedule. The quality of the

works in the year's first show was disappointing, but there were fewer copies, indicating that the members were building the courage to try creating more original works. For the November and December 1884 and April 1885 exhibitions, an artist with professional-level skill sent a series of large oil paintings of Hong Kong scenes: Lei Yue Mun Strait (Lyeemoon Pass), Cape D'Aguilar, and 'Chiu Wan passage'. The first two subjects were popular among export paintings of that period. In late 1884, the SAS began offering a sketching class that met every Tuesday, and its students presented their work in the January and February 1885 exhibitions. The class is never mentioned again after this.

The SAS's third season, which began in November 1885, had only seven exhibitions; there was no December exhibition. The reviewer expressed regret about the frequent absence of some of the more capable artists. The first exhibition included several oils, displayed on easels, 'of a very high order of art for amateur work', including a portrait of which he said, 'For delicacy and effectiveness of treatment it would have done no discredit to an exhibition at home of very much higher pretensions than the Shanghai Art Society can lay claim to.' The same exhibition included sketches not only of Chinese scenes but various other locales in the Far East, including Seoul and Nikko. Throughout the year, the number of works on display was relatively low, but the final show of the season, in June 1886, stood out for the quantity and quality of works, which to the reviewer, indicated that there were still plenty of art-lovers in the Foreign Settlement who were willing to invest time and energy to produce and show works of art.

There were only five exhibitions in the SAS's fourth season, and the number of works shown in each was relatively low. Only 18 works were displayed in the fourth show, in February 1887. Fortunately, Edith L. Allen and her husband – the reviewer here breaks with precedent and identifies the artist – had returned to Shanghai from Amoy and contributed enough pictures that the show could go on. At the same time, some SAS members who were also members of the Amateur Dramatic Club (H.W. Daniel was probably one of them) were busy producing its props, costumes, scenery, and so on.

Due to the sudden decrease in participants during the fourth season, the SAS decided to switch to biannual exhibitions in the fifth season. These were held in December 1887 and June 1888. Despite the reduction in the number of exhibitions, the SAS still could not display



as many works as it had before.

The sixth and final season's exhibitions opened on December 7, 1888, and June 22, 1889. For the December exhibition, there were 50 paintings or drawings by only 14 participating artists, of whom 12 were from Shanghai and its vicinity; all but two, H. W. Daniel and a certain 'Mr Heath', were women. The reviewer does not say anything about the needlework, photography, decorative art, or wood carvings, so it is hard to say whether works from these categories were present. Most likely he thought of them as having less importance and therefore not worthy of mention. Despite what he thought was the relative meagreness of the exhibition, he still declared it 'one of the best the Society has ever given.' By the time of the June 1889 show, however, the number of working members had decreased to six or eight persons, and the reviewer decried the fashion, especially among the women, for executing their paintings on household objects like 'gipsy tables and newspaper racks' instead of canvas and paper. He reviewed only the latter. Even so, some new names still appear, which indicates that Shanghai newcomers or 'griffins' were still interested in showing their work. The *NCH* does not mention the SAS or its activities again after this exhibition, and we may assume that it formally closed.

For the last exhibition the class of photography appeared in a separate subsection of the exhibition, under the name of a new, though short-lived, society called The China Camera Club, not to be confused with a later club of the same name established in 1925. What motivated this reorganisation is not clear, but perhaps the members felt they would receive more attention if they organised a separate group. The reviewer reports that the number of photographs was low but the quality high. The photographed scenes included sites around Shanghai, the Three Gorges, and Taiwan. Of particular note, however, is that one of the participating photographers was Chinese, named Chan Chin-tung (characters not known). The reviewer praised Chan's portrait of Li Hongzhang and his family using the bromide process. This indicates that this offshoot of the SAS was attracting the participation of at least one Chinese amateur photographer. Whether Chan had participated in the earlier SAS exhibitions cannot be determined.

## CONCLUSION

The exhibition reviews indicate that a large number of the displayed

paintings were *plein air* paintings, sometimes done during houseboat journeys, and many others depicted local plants and flowers, often in still life arrangements. The latter category's prominence was due to the gardening and scientific interests of several of the members, particularly Judith Motley Low and Rev. Bamford, and it also reflected the nineteenth-century drive among British naturalists to discover and research Chinese flora and fauna.<sup>49</sup>

The inclusion of a Chinese photographer among The China Camera Club's founding members suggests that ordinary SAS members were a more diverse group than the SAS leaders. The extent of Chinese participation in the SAS, however, is still a mystery. A separate but related issue is the extent to which Chinese people were able to view the sometimes high-quality works by foreign artists that went on display in the SAS exhibitions. Considering the connections that some members had with the church and its expanded 'institution-building' efforts in the 1860–1900 period, it would have been possible for the later SAS members to invite high-status or church-affiliated Chinese friends and acquaintances to view the works.

While the main impact of the SAS was on the later careers and achievements of Low, Bamford, and Hayter, Western art was already very widely available to urban Chinese. Besides the Western-style religious paintings and sculptures produced by the orphans trained in the Jesuits' Tushanwan (T'ou-Sè-Wè) academy, there were oil paintings and prints sold at auctions frequently advertised in the pages of *Shenbao*. One literatus published a *zhuzhici* ballad poem that describes viewing Western (possibly Indian) erotic paintings in a foreigner's mansion.<sup>50</sup> In this context, therefore, the emergence of the SAS was further evidence of a Shanghai art scene beginning to flourish from the increasing interaction of East and West.

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**Key words:** Shanghai Art Society, Shanghai International Settlement, Alice Byas, Judith Eleanor Motley Low, Auguste Mouillesaux de Bernières.



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# ‘OUT THERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FUN’

## A HISTORY OF CARLETON COLLEGE IN CHINA, 1900–1936

BY EVAN TAYLOR

### ABSTRACT

*This essay examines the relationship between Carleton College, a liberal arts school in Northfield, Minnesota, and a Congregationalist Mission Station in the city of Fenyang, Shanxi between 1903 and 1936. In 1903 a pair of Carleton students proposed that the college sponsor a mission in China, and from 1910 to 1922 a group of largely Carleton alumni missionaries helped organise and run a hospital and set of schools in the city. In 1922, Carleton College began the Carleton-in-China program, sending over current students or recent graduates to teach English at the mission’s Ming Yi Middle School. Focusing on the years prior to the Japanese invasion in 1937, the essay looks at the Carleton-in-China program in the context of the larger US-China education relationship in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the changing role of American missionary activity in China an increasingly secular pursuit focused on activities such as education and medical work. While the history of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century US-China education relationship is well known through institutions like the Christian Colleges and the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship, smaller programs like Carleton’s show that the building blocks of the US-China relationship included rural participants in both countries, and that the reach was broader and deeper than generally supposed.*

### INTRODUCTION

The American teacher is a familiar figure on the school grounds of China today. Usually in their twenties, some with prior knowledge of China and some without, full of excitement for a foreign culture but with little intention of making a full-time commitment, they can be found in classrooms, sports fields, and drinking establishments from Harbin to Kunming. Of course, a few of these teachers find themselves forming permanent bonds, and the position is often the bottom line on the resume of US China scholars and journalists. It is probably impossible to count the number of Americans who have worked as teachers in China in recent decades, but the number is undoubtedly in the tens of thousands, although certainly in decline over the past

few years.<sup>a</sup>

Today's stereotypical teacher is also a good symbol for the overall prominence of education in forming the bonds of the present day US-China relationship. Over the past decades, hundreds of Chinese and US educational institutions, from big to small, have formed partnerships and exchange programs. These include fourteen full branch campuses of US universities in China, where the US institute is supposed to control curriculum and the hiring of an international faculty. Some of these partnerships are built on well-known institutions, like New York University-Shanghai and Duke University-Kunshan. But others are run by smaller bodies, like Fort Hays State University – a state college in Kansas that offers degrees through two different Chinese campuses, in Zhengzhou and Shenyang.<sup>1</sup> Despite the global turmoil of 2020, a Tianjin campus of the famed Julliard music school opened in the fall of 2020. Another official program, known as 1+2+1 program, has since 2001 allowed Chinese students to get joint degrees from both a US and Chinese college, with 40 US universities and 107 Chinese universities participating.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese Ministry of Education website list over 200 joint institutions or programs between higher education institutions in the two countries.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, millions of Chinese undergraduate and graduate students have been enrolling in colleges outside of China, many of them in the United States, where recent news reports put the number of Chinese nationals on student visas at 360,000.

As US-China relations have darkened in recent years, these international programs and scholars have faced numerous questions about their operation, from curriculum and ideology to national security and safety. In fact, the prominence of politicised news headlines about student visas, international funding, and faculty investigations shows the deep-rooted place of education in the overall US-China relationship.

However, the story of today's US-China education relationship is not one with a recent beginning, as these very same connections between the US colleges and universities and Chinese schools were being built a century ago, when an education partnership between the US and China was at a previous zenith. The fruit of these connections

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a News reports put the figure of foreigners working (both legally and illegally) in the Chinese education industry at 400,000 as of 2017. As Americans have made up the second largest groups of expats in China, and schools are known to prefer native English speakers as teachers, one can guess that a significant portion of those 400,000 were Americans

are well known today, through top universities in China, such as Tsinghua University and the Peking Union Medical College (PUMC), as well as prominent China studies centres at US universities, such as the Harvard-Yenching Center and Yale-in-China. Many of these have their origin in this early period of US-China cooperation, broadly from the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 to the Communist Revolution in 1949.<sup>4</sup> On the US side, this originated as a missionary led movement, but soon morphed into a broad drive connecting US universities and colleges to Chinese schools. On the Chinese side, this collided with a post Imperial China and the competing ideas of modernity that divided the country for the decades that followed.

But just like today, bridges between the two countries were built not just in capital cities and Ivy League towers, but also in more unexpected locations, both in the US and China. This essay will focus on one such program, Carleton-in-China, which between 1922 and 1948 sent twenty one student teachers from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, to the Ming Yi Middle School in the city of Fenchow, in North China's Shanxi province. The creation of the Ming Yi school itself was assisted by Carleton alumni, beginning in 1903 with a group of students at the school planning a "Carleton Mission" in China, organised under the Congregationalist Church and the American Board of Foreign Missions. By the nineteen-teens, the mission station came to include a large hospital and a set of schools, and served as a central node for a group of Carleton alumni who lived in China, most working as missionaries and educators.

The official beginning of the Carleton-in-China program in the 1920s only cemented this relationship. This was a popular program on the Carleton Campus, and the college's relationship with China was a point of pride and interest among its peers. The mission activities were also popular in Fenchow, where the hospitals and schools were mostly Chinese run, well attended, and desired by the local population. In both Minnesota and Shanxi, the relationship shows one example of the bricks and mortar that made up the close US-China ties in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This essay originated with a database of over 2800 photos taken between 1936 and 1939 by two of the Carleton students teaching English in China at the time, published online by Carleton College in 2020.<sup>5</sup> For when the Japanese blew down through Shanxi in the fall of 1937, the Carleton-in-China program was not suspended, but instead

became an active point of connection among the turbulence of war. These two students, John R. Caton and Paul Clifford Domke, spent their time in China as refugee teachers and wartime tourists, travelling all across the country as the Ming Yi school was forced to relocate away from Japanese occupied Fenchow. They moved from Shanxi to Xi'an, then yet further inland to Hanzhong, and Chengdu. But they were more than just teachers. Caton and Domke were avid travellers and informal diplomats, meeting with journalists and officials from the US government, Kuomintang (KMT), and even taking a previously never before discussed trip to visit the Chinese Communist Party's wartime capital of Yan'an, where they interviewed Mao Zedong. One of these students, Paul Clifford Domke, later returned to Yan'an in 1944 as an Army official, part of the Dixie Mission, a US military liaison mission stationed at the CCP capital at the end of World War II. As someone who had helped edit a documentary collection on the Dixie Mission, I was surprised to find that Domke had previously visited the city and met Mao, a fact not included in the volumes of debate surrounding the mission and the US wartime experience in China.

But as 1937 connected to 1945, and I traced the exhaustive travels of Domke and Caton, it became clear that their journey was part of a larger and more longstanding network connecting the US and China. More than just a wartime adventure story, the experience of the two students was part of a larger social history of international education



**Figure 1:** Jack Caton and other Ming Yi teachers

movements. What had brought these two Minnesota farm boys to China, and why were they so devoted to a cause that put them in the middle of a war? Who and what facilitated their widespread travel around the country? What titles were they assuming in their various roles in China? Hence a prior study was needed of the origins of the Carleton-in-China program.

### **OBERLIN IN CHINA – 1881–1900**

To understand the origins of an American missionary presence in Fenchow, we must start in a different college town in the American Midwest, Oberlin, Ohio, home to Oberlin College. In January 1881, during the cold Ohio winter, Martin Luther Stimson wrote to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (the American Board), alerting the Board that he had twelve Theological Seminary students who desired to work together as part of an “Oberlin Band” and that they proposed to open a mission station in China.<sup>6</sup>

Headquartered in Boston, the American Board represented Congregationalist Missions across the globe, and in the 1880s they were eager to set up mission stations in the interior regions of North China. American Congregationalist missionaries, including the first president of the Royal Asiatic Society North China Branch, Elijah Bridgman, had been active in coastal regions of the country since the early part of the century, but their work in the interior was lacking. As part of the treaty settlements following Britain’s defeat of China in the two opium wars, select coastal port cities were legally opened to missionary activity in 1842, then the entire country in 1860.

The American Board was already well acquainted with Oberlin, a small liberal arts college in Ohio that had been a hotbed of progressive religious thinking since its founding in 1833. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century Oberlin broke barriers in regards to education for women and African-Americans, and produced hundreds of missionaries who served around the world, alumni of its separate graduate Theological Seminary.

In its work in China (and elsewhere in the world), the American Board was in competition for converts with other missionary societies. Shanxi province, in particular, was untapped ground for the Americans, as only a small number of western missionaries had been allowed to open stations in the province in the 1870s, in order to provide relief after a bitter famine. In 1877, the British run China

Inland Mission established a presence in Taiyuan, the provincial capital, followed shortly after by the British Baptist Missionary Society.<sup>7</sup> Catholic missions were also established at this time, and had a larger presence than the Protestants, with a dozen priests and 20,000 converts in the province by the 1880s.<sup>8</sup>

By 1882, the Oberlin Band had decided on two locations for its mission stations in Shanxi. The headquarters were to be in Taigu County, 45 miles south of Taiyuan, while a secondary station was planned for Fenchow, another 30 miles south. Between 1882 and 1900, over thirty Oberlin graduates cycled through the two mission stations, and a school and hospital were established in Taigu.

Both cities sat on the Taiyuan plain, a mountain plateau at 3000 feet sandwiched between the Taihang and Lüliang mountain ranges. Fenchow, near the banks of the Fen River, was a walled city, with a history dating back over 2000 years. At this time it was a prefectural-level city, given the title Fenchowfu (the name would officially change after 1911 to its current title of Fenyang County, although the missionaries continued using the name “Fenchow” into the 1930s). Its 19<sup>th</sup> century population of 50,000 made it the second largest city in the province, after Taiyuan. The main city was one mile on each side, guarded by large walls—fifty-four feet tall and fifty feet thick at the base. Large suburbs extended in every direction, also surrounded by walls. Atop the north gate of the city wall were two large bustard bird sculptures, which featured frequently in student phototgraphs.<sup>9</sup> The city was also famous for its booze, Fenjiu, still found throughout Northwest China today.

Beginning in 1884, the Oberlinites set up the first workings of a mission compound in Fenchow, buying and renovating a property to use for church services, schooling, housing, and other activities. They also purchased a mill property five miles out of town in the more mountainous village of Yu Tao He, to be used as a summer retreat. These were the Lüliang foothills, covered in Black Locust and Ailanthus trees, and famed for hunting of wild boar. But life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanxi towns was tough, and as Brandt wrote, ‘death and disease were constant.’ Over a dozen of the missionaries’ children died of disease, as did only a slightly lesser number of the adults, enough to start a small foreigner’s graveyard in the city.

Additionally, members of the Oberlin Band were ill-prepared to work in China, and the American Board had done little to prepare or

educate its China missionaries. Their policy had long been to provide almost no orientation to the Americans sent out into the field, such as relevant cultural, social, and historical information on the locale they were planning to work in. Until they created the North China Union Language School in Beijing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American Board did not even provide language training for its missionaries in China, expecting them to hire a local tutor.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the Oberlin Bands' ideas were unaligned with Chinese reality and their practices unconvincing in winning over masses of local converts. The situation of Shanxi Province compounded these problems, as it was exceedingly poor and neglected by the Qing state in this period, walled in by mountains and racked with opium addiction. Charles Price, a Congregationalist missionary, reported that in a village near Fenchow, 490 out of 500 residents smoked opium.<sup>11</sup> As a result many of the Oberlin missionaries began to express a vocal dislike for Chinese customs and individuals, as well as the poverty of everyday life.

In the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this quickly souring experiment reached a bloody end during the Boxer Uprising, which saw members of the *Yihequan* rise up and attack foreign interference in China, heavily targeting missionaries and their Chinese parishes. The situation reached a boiling point in the summer of 1900, when the Qing court backed the Boxers in their attacks on foreigners, leading to rampant destruction of foreign property and killings in Beijing and Tianjin in June, as thousands of foreigners and Chinese stuffed themselves into the protected legation areas.

Boxer groups had only begun popping up in Shanxi in May 1900, but the movement spread quickly through the province, and episodes of violence against missionaries occurred sporadically in June. Then, in July, gruesome rumours started emerging of a bloodbath in Taiyuan, where in a mythologized episode, 45 foreigners were killed in the magistrates compound.<sup>12</sup> On July 31st, the Boxers moved down to Taigu, where a group of 300 surrounded the Oberlin Mission Compound as some of the missionaries fired down on them from the roof. All the missionaries present were beheaded, their bodies burnt and the heads shipped back to Taiyuan as proof of conquest. Two weeks later, the Fenchow Missionaries were exiled from the city by the local magistrate, and summarily executed on the road out of town by their assigned guards. All members of the Oberlin Band in Shanxi that summer were killed, as were what they estimated to be half of



their Chinese parishioners. In the whole province, 180 missionaries (both Protestant and Catholic) were killed that summer, along with over 2400 Chinese Christians.<sup>13</sup>

In August, the European Imperial powers, along with Japan and the US, finally brought a military end to the Boxers and the Qing forces supporting them. What was called the ‘Eight National Alliance’ invaded and occupied Beijing as the Empress Dowager fled to Xi’an. Over the next year, the foreign powers negotiated with Beijing the debt owed for the Boxer episode and basing rights for foreign troops in Tianjin and other areas.

#### **A NEW MISSION: THE POST BOXER REVIVAL OF MISSIONARY ACTIVITY IN CHINA AND THE CREATION OF THE CARLETON MISSION**

The Boxer Rebellion was front-page news in the US, and no doubt followed closely by anyone interested in China. From the June siege of the Legation through the foreign response, the entire affair was what Jeffrey Wasserstrom has labelled a ‘global media event.’ Far from turning missionaries away from work in China, the Boxers had instead reinvigorated them. From the first reports of the killings, Protestant missionaries placed the events into a framework of Christian salvation and martyrdom in China, and wrote of the disaster ‘as something that would serve to regenerate Christian evangelism in the future.’<sup>14</sup> In fact, by 1906, the number of Protestant Missionaries in China reached 3500, an increase of 700 from the pre-Boxer totals in 1900. By 1920 this number had reached 6250, and by 1925, 8150.<sup>15</sup> Much of the missionary work undertaken in this period can be linked back to the Boxer killings, and even the programs that had a secular focus, like education, were implicitly tied in the Boxers and their martyred victims. As will be discussed below, the successful scholarship program for Chinese students to study in the US was funded by the Qing debt from the episode, and named as such (Boxer Indemnity Scholarships), as was the revived Oberlin program (Oberlin-in-Shansi *Memorial* Association), both discursively prolonging the Boxer moment decades into the future.

One place where the Boxer Rebellion was undoubtedly discussed was on the campus of Carleton College, in Northfield, Minnesota. Northfield was a farming community, and like other areas of Minnesota, its population of European settlers (many Scandinavian) had grown quickly in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Along with

the farmers came a desire for higher education, and the General Conference of Congregationalist Churches chose Northfield as the site for a college. In 1866, Carleton opened as a prep school, and in 1874 graduated its first university class. By the turn of the century, Carleton College was growing into the progressive, worldly institution that it is today. Among its alumni in these first decades was the great sociologist Thorstein Veblen, class of 1880.

Two Carleton students that were touched by the China story were Percy T. Watson and Watts O. Pye, both members of the Carleton class of 1903. Watson and Pye belonged to the campus YMCA, and were particularly inspired by the Y's global missionary program, known as the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM). The SVM recruited American college students to work as missionaries abroad, and was widely popular from its founding in 1886 until World War I. Both before and after the Boxer Rebellion, China held a particular fascination for the SVM members, and as a student-oriented project, education became one of the natural fields of collaboration. Terrill Lautz, in digging out the motivations for the student volunteers, suggests that the SVM movement, especially in its work in China, was successful because it matched together complimentary social values between the two countries. Its American volunteers were children of the Progressive Era, hailing from campuses where debates on political, social, and religious change were becoming the norm. Meanwhile the Qing Dynasty was on its last legs, and calls for reform and revolution were coming from myriad directions across Chinese society. 'Despite their religiosity,' Lautz writes 'the student volunteers were not fanatic or dogmatic, but curious, naïve, and open to new ideas. In China, American advocacy of education for moral leadership resonated with traditional Chinese values and contributed to the success of the Christian schools and colleges. At the same time, the experiences of Americans in China left an indelible imprint on many US campuses.'<sup>16</sup>

As Watson and Pye were entering their final years at the college, they were gripped by the idea of opening an overseas Carleton Mission, with China as their main focus. Following their graduation in May 1903, Watson and Pye set about planning the Carleton in China mission. When the college resumed in the fall of 1903, Watson and Pye formally proposed to college president William Sallmon the idea of a China Mission. The following month the senior secretary of the American Board visited Carleton and approved of the idea, and

by October 1903 a mission constitution had been published. When the Board of Trustees held their final meeting of the school year in June 1904, the Carleton Mission had their first official meeting. Here, they voted to approve a three part plan, sending a Carleton alumni to work as a tutor for the children of Chinese nobility, enabling Pye and Watson to raise funds to send the first Carleton Missionary to China, and nominating Miss Hannah E. Hall, ('03) as the first missionary candidate.<sup>17</sup> That fall, a notice appeared in the *Carletonian* newspaper that Miss Mary Reynolds had been 'appointed by an imperial decree' as a tutor for two grand nephews of the Empress Dowager.<sup>18</sup>

#### THE LARGER CONTEXT OF US-CHINA EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Carleton College was not alone in developing a relationship with China at this time, for, as is well known, the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century featured a great surge in educational programs tying together the US and China. Since their inception, these programs have been bound up in debates about imperialism, modernisation, and nationalism—a debate that continues to the modern day US-China educational relationship. One often discussed program was the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Fund, which transferred the debt China owed to the US for the Boxer Uprising into a program for Chinese students to study in the US.<sup>19</sup> Another development, related to the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship, was the creation or upgrading of major Chinese universities on a western model, often in partnership with an American university or institution, or in many cases as a religious institution. Most famous is a trio of institutes in Beijing: Tsinghua University, created in 1911 as a preparatory school for the Boxer scholarship recipients; the Yenching Institute at Peking University, opened in 1915 and tied to Harvard University in the mid 1920s, and Peking Union Medical College, first created in 1905 by a union of missionary societies, then extensively upgraded at the beginning of 1915, on the model of the Johns Hopkins Medical School.

A third type of relationship blossomed at this time as well, the creation of bilateral institutional relationships between US Universities and Chinese educational and medical facilities. These took the form of "University-in-China" groups, and while usually tied to mission stations, they quickly moved past proselytising activities and towards secular pursuits. A large portion of these university programs were

started at Ivy League Universities, for the most part all old elite private campuses close to or in major Northeast metropolitan centres. Yale University started a mission station in Changsha in 1901, and in 1914 began upgrading this to a hospital, middle school, and college, known as Yale in China (whose library helped to educate a young Mao Zedong). Princeton University began a Princeton-in-Peking program at this same time, soon tied to Yenching Academy, as did Dartmouth University, where a “Dartmouth-in-China” program was connected with a mission station in Baoding, Hebei. Cornell had a “Cornell-in-China,” as did Brown and Penn.

However, equally as active in engaging with China were the many universities and colleges stretched out across the American West. Of this type, the Oberlin-China program is perhaps the most famous. In 1903 Oberlin relaunched its Taigu station, a study abroad program that continues to exist to this day. The relationship between Smith College, a women’s school in Massachusetts and the Ginling Women’s College in Nanjing was examined by Ellen Widmer, as was the development of a China exchange program at Pomona College in Southern California by Dong Wang.<sup>20</sup> But many more programs, including Carleton’s, have gone unexplored. As Charles Bright argues in his study of an American missionary in Hangzhou, the YMCA targeted these types of liberal arts colleges in recruiting missionaries and educators to work in China, “small denominational colleges of the near Midwest,” like Oberlin, Grinnell, and Beloit.<sup>21</sup> Indeed Grinnell had its own “Grinnell in China” program from 1916 to 1930, connected to a mission station in the city of Technow, in Shandong Province. Dickinson College, in Pennsylvania, established a “Dickinson in China” program associated with the West China Union University in Chengdu from 1921–1936. Wesleyan, in Connecticut, had a Wesleyan-in-China. Larger land grant universities like Syracuse, Penn State, and Nebraska also began similar programs. Many more colleges, although lacking a formal relationship, followed events in China through publication of news from missionary alumni.<sup>22</sup>

In light of this larger context, studying programs like Carleton’s provides a different view into the window of US-China educational relations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These colleges often drew in rural students or those otherwise far from the milieu of the Ivy League, and likewise publicised China related news in these otherwise isolated communities. Of the Carleton students who went to China, most grew

up on farms, and reported having no knowledge of China in their youth. The situation in China was similar; many of the partner missions were in interior provinces and cities, separate from the well-known foreign presence in the main coastal treaty ports. As the operations of these mission stations were largely Chinese-run, they demonstrate local efforts towards modernisation in less studied locales. Another factor worth considering is that these colleges included female students, who made up over half the Carleton alumni and students in China in the early years of the program – Ivy League schools like Yale, Princeton, and Harvard still refused to admit women at this time.

### **CARLETON-IN-CHINA: 1904–1915**

Shortly after leaving Carleton, Pye enrolled at the Oberlin Theological Seminary and Watson at the Johns Hopkins Medical School. In the spring of 1907, Pye completed his religious training at Oberlin, and was ordained as a foreign missionary, appointed to join the American Board Mission in Shansi (Shanxi), which Oberlin had restarted in 1903. He had made it to Fenchow by November 1907, where he would serve for the next eighteen years.

Two years later, Percy Watson, now Dr Percy Watson and married to his Carleton classmate Clara French, met Pye in Fenchow. In 1910 they were joined in Fenchow by Gertrude Chaney, the daughter of a Carleton professor, who in 1915 would marry Pye. Together, the Pyes and the Watsons made up the nucleus of a mission station that would go on to impact thousands of Shanxi residents through its schools and hospitals.

The Fenchow station was also the core of a larger Carleton network among American missionaries in China at this time. Harry S. Martin and his wife Rose G. Lombard, also both of the class of 1903, would soon take charge of the American Board's well regarded set of schools in Tengzhou, in the suburbs of Beijing. Roland Cross, class of 1910, would also move to Beijing in 1917 with his wife Adelle Tenney (also a Carleton graduate), and assume control of the American Board headquarters in the city. His sister, Laura B. Cross, class of 1917, would soon join him in Beijing, where she worked as a teacher and principal at the Bridgman Academy for over twenty years. Dr Max J. Exner, class of 1895 and brother of a Carleton professor was the director of the Shanghai YMCA. In December 1910, Chaney wrote back to Carleton after arriving in Fenchow, to announce that she was the president of a

new Carleton-China alumni club, and had already located seventeen eligible members currently in the country. These connections date back to their college experience, where the future missionaries interacted in numerous college societies such as the YMCA, YWCA, and the college literary magazine. Among other things, the network facilitated the transfer of promising students from Shanxi to Beijing and in some cases the US for university or post-graduate degrees.

#### **THE FENCHOW HOSPITAL**

Under Dr Watson's lead, the main mission activity in Fenchow was medical work. In its first decade, the mission compound housed a few rooms for patients, as well as a dispensary. However, this would soon greatly expand: following Watson's US furlough in 1915, the mission bought a new plot of land, just south of the compound, to house a separate hospital. He had large ideas for the expansion, and consulted with architects in Beijing and the US. The firm in Chicago they consulted was the same one that would later design the Carleton campus.<sup>23</sup> Watson also raised money in the US. He estimated \$15,000 was needed for the hospital construction. \$4,000 of it came from Carleton College and the Congregationalist church in Northfield. It took until 1924 for the hospital to be completed, but its design was grand: a large U shaped building, its central wing 200 feet long and five stories tall, equipped with a telephone system, electric lights, and hot and cold running water, all powered by its own power plant and boiler system.<sup>24</sup> Watson later recorded that they shipped a large pane of glass from Tianjin to serve as the operating room window. 'The large window allowed friends and relatives of the patients to watch the operations and this they did with noses pressed against the lower portions of the glass...anyone who wanted to could come to the window to watch.'<sup>25</sup>

The hospital's doctors and nurses had been trained at the Peking Union Medical College and Shandong Christian University. Its first lead Chinese doctor was Dr Ma Wen Chao, who had been trained at PUMC, and would later move back to a surgeon position there. It was also a teaching hospital, with English as its teaching language, which Watson claimed was easier than negotiating the wide range of Chinese dialects the medical students spoke. While the hospital was run at the top by a series of American missionary doctors, it was primarily a Chinese operated enterprise. At its peak, the hospital had a staff of 164

Chinese, and there were only four or five Americans working there at any one time. Its staff included agriculturalists, pharmacists, and a Russian engineer, who could easily communicate with the dozen or so Chinese doctors also conversant in Russian. It had an anaesthesiologist on staff, Wang Hsing, whose son also became a doctor at the hospital.

The Fenchow hospital soon acquired a reputation as a high-quality medical centre, and it had an open clinic at all times, attended by patients from all across the province. Watson recounted that the Shanxi residents presented with tumours, corneal ulcers, tuberculosis, and late stage cancers. A separate building housed infectious disease patients. Bubonic plague was a problem in the province, including a major outbreak in 1917. Based on his treatment of these plague outbreaks, Watson and a Shanxi government official co-authored a book in Chinese, *Rules for the Control and Suppression of Bubonic and Pneumonic Plague*, and was considered an expert in the subject by the Chinese government. The hospital received enough distant patients that they built a guest hostel to house them and their families, which included electric lights and a telephone connection.

A hospital of such a large size, however, presented a problem. 'It was a White Elephant,' stated Dr Walter Judd, Watson's successor in Fenchow. Watson was 'a great surgeon, a great dreamer of dreams, had the ability to raise money,' as Judd put it, but 'he built a hospital complex which was too elaborate [...] This was the thing for Americans to do. The idea was not to see what they could do on the Chinese scale, but, oh, we'll do something impressive like the Rockefellers.'<sup>26</sup> Alma Roisum, a young secretary from Northfield who accompanied Pye back to China in 1925, described the hospital and the church as 'what German castles look like to us [...] it may have been too grandiose from the point of view of the people who lived in the street.'<sup>27</sup>

#### EDUCATION AND THE MING YI MIDDLE SCHOOL

Educational work was the second main pursuit of the Carleton Mission. Both the mission station in Taigu and in Fenchow developed well-regarded Middle Schools (used in the Chinese sense, meaning educating students between primary school and University). In Taigu was the Ming Hsien Middle School and in Fenchow the Ming Yi Middle School. Of the two, Ming Hsien was better known, both at the time and in the historical scholarship, due to its direct connection with H.H. Kung, the longtime KMT Minister of Finance and husband



of Song Ailing, the eldest daughter of the powerful Song family.

Kung, born in 1881, was the scion of a prominent Taigu banking family and attended the Oberlin Bands' primary school and then the American Board's middle school in Beijing. Kung also secretly converted to Christianity during this period. He was nineteen years old when the Boxers began gaining steam in Shanxi in the summer of 1900, home on vacation from school in Beijing. He reportedly tried to intervene and offer his support to the Oberlin Mission, but was kept at home by his father. Among the hundreds of missionaries and thousands of Chinese Christians killed in Shanxi that summer, were his friends, classmates, and primary school teachers.<sup>28</sup>

Due to his family's stature, Kung involved himself in the Boxer Indemnity negotiations that followed, bringing relief to Shanxi, and winning for himself a foreign passport and permission for study abroad from the Qing court. An American teacher at the Tengzhou School arranged for him and a Chinese teacher, Fei Ch'i-hao, to enrol at Oberlin. Both graduated from Oberlin in 1906, and then went to Yale for a master's program in economics. From New Haven, Kung returned to Taigu in 1907, where he became the principal of the newly reconstituted Oberlin Mission Middle School, Ming Hsien. Although Kung left Taigu in 1913, he kept up a close connection to Ming Hsien school and Oberlin as he rose up to the very top of the KMT power structure. Besides political and symbolic support, Kung was also a source of funding, as he and Song Ailing acquired one of China's largest fortunes in the Republican Era.<sup>29</sup>

While the Carleton Mission in Fenchow may have lacked the sponsorship of a top KMT official, it still developed a well-rounded and well attended set of schools. In its early days, the mission operated a primary school for around 40 boys, educating them to the end of 4<sup>th</sup> grade. This was largely the product of local Chinese agency, wealthy Fenchow residents who donated property for the school and parents' groups who organised the students. Watson later wrote that:

The school was operated on a cooperative basis between the parents of the boys and the Mission. A committee of parents kept a careful accounting of all costs and decided on what food should be provided. The Mission provided the teachers. Many a permanent mission enterprise started because Chinese leaders loaned part of their own

courtyards to house the beginning of schools. This also was the foundation on which many churches were started.<sup>30</sup>

Soon after Watson arrived, he and Gertrude Pye worked with a local businessman, Mr. Y.K. Chang, to establish a girls school as well. By the fall of 1919, the girls school, named the Lydia Lord Davis Girls School, had around 100 hundred students, half of whom boarded at the school, and half of whom were city residents and commuted daily. Almost all were primary school students, but there were seven girls continuing through to high school.<sup>31</sup> The school's namesake was one of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Oberlin missionaries who taught in Fenchow and whose husband had been executed in 1900. Davis herself returned to China in 1924, where she saw the school under her name.<sup>32</sup> In 1924, the boys school, now under the title of the Ming Yi Middle School, had an enrolment of 160 students.<sup>33</sup> Speaking at Carleton in the fall of 1925 while on furlough, Dr Watson reported that the mission station included a boys middle school, girls middle school, a school for married women, a Bible school for men, a grammar school, a primary school, and a kindergarten, all separate institutions.<sup>34</sup> Clara Watson supervised the industrial school, and managed to sell Fenchow embroidery projects back in the US

By the mid 1920s, the mission had also attracted a group of dedicated American women who would continue teaching at the various schools until the 1937 Japanese invasion and beyond. Josie Horn, a Carleton graduate of the class of 1911, settled in Fenchow in 1915 and would run the girls school until 1938. Mary McClure, an Oberlin graduate, was likewise an educator at the school and Bible Institute from 1918 to 1942.<sup>35</sup> Emma Noreen, from the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, moved to Fenchow in 1925, and managed the nursing program along with Gertrude "Buddy" Kellog, staying through the Japanese occupation of the city in 1938. The unmarried women lived together in a separate building, where they had a portable Victrola phonograph player and a household staff.

The educational program and the hospital soon began to work in conjunction, as the schools were producing students bright enough to be recruited to top universities in China and the US, who would then return to work at the Fenchow hospital when their training was complete. One such student was a Mr Feng, who became an expert parasitologist, and after 1949 a top provincial health official in Shanxi.

Dr Flora T'ien was another success story, one of the first girls to enrol in the mission's primary school, who then progressed all the way through Shantung Christian University to a surgical resident position at PUMC, and then to a fellowship at the University of Chicago. After all that, Dr T'ien returned to Fenchow, where she assumed a top position at the hospital.<sup>36</sup>

#### CARLETON COLLEGE AND THE MISSION

Carleton College played a key role in pushing this education program forward. In 1922, what became known as the Carleton-in-China program was initiated, funding a current Carleton student or recent graduate to teach at the various mission schools in Fenchow for a two year term. This position, given the amorphous title of "representative", was a paid position, at \$1000 a year, although the students were then responsible for their own expenses. From 1922 until 1939, there were at least one and usually two Carleton students teaching in Fenchow at all times. A similar program was started at Oberlin at the same time, sending their students to the mission station at Taigu.

From the letters and interviews that remain, it is clear that the majority of Carleton students who were selected were motivated by a sense of adventure and world service, more so than an interest in China or teaching specifically. The YMCA's Student Volunteer Movement was still active at this time, but while the Fenchow station continued to be sponsored by the American Board as "missionary activity", many of the Carleton students were only in part driven by the religious fervour that title implied. Their participation is evidence of the growing secularisation of overseas missionary work at this time, towards a focus on activities like general education instead of religious education. This was part of a larger shift in American religious thinking in the interwar period, what Michael G. Thompson has labelled as "Christian Internationalism." Led by individuals like Sherwood Eddy and his magazine, *The World Tomorrow*, this movement sought to realign the actions and thoughts of American Protestants along international lines, away from nationalist conceptions of Christianity, and towards a holistic critique of problems like imperialism, war and racism.<sup>37</sup> As part of Eddy's global work, he organised a series of ecumenical international conferences to discuss these new ideas, and the first major one was the meeting of the World Student Christian Federation in Beijing in 1922, where the major point of discussion was

about racism and the unfulfilled promises of Wilsonian idealism.<sup>38</sup>

Although there is little evidence that the later Carleton students who went to China were direct participants in this movement, the shift in discourse clearly percolated down to them. As Bright argues of the generation of missionaries that began working in China in the 1920s and 1930s, ‘the brash cultural supremacism that had set out to “occupy” China in a single generation gave way to a more relativised message, one that recognized Chinese realities more clearly and embraced a socially conscious gospel of reform.’<sup>39</sup> Sarah Beach, the Carleton-in-China representative from 1925–1927, later remembered this exact shift during her time in China. By the 1920s, the Congregational Church Missions and particularly the Carleton Mission, she believed, ‘were liberal in their ideas, and they had the Chinese be [...] the heads of organization.’ In contrast to earlier missionaries, ‘who were so tense about getting these people to be Christian [...] it was very relaxed in our mission [...] they were people and we were people. There wasn’t this awful urge [...] to be sure they believed the right thing, and they weren’t going to heaven if they didn’t, all that stuff.’<sup>40</sup>

In 1926, tragedy struck the mission when Watts O. Pye died unexpectedly from a heart attack on January 9th, having just returned to Fenchow from a furlough in the US. He was survived by his wife and his young son Lucian, who had been born in Fenchow in 1921. Although the Carleton mission station had lost its founder in Pye, its presence remained solid through the turbulence of Chinese politics in the 1920s.

Shanxi at this time (and for all of the Republican Era) was ruled by Yen Hsishan (Yan Xishan), a governor of contradictory and complex political ideas. Given the title in the press of a “model governor”, Yen undertook a wide-ranging array of infrastructure and educational projects meant to modernise the province. Most beneficial to the mission station was a large road, rail, and telephone network built in the province in the 1920s and 1930s, which allowed the Fenchow hospital to serve a much larger population. Yen also directly supported the Ming Hsien school, in Taigu, speaking at their graduation ceremony on multiple occasions and funding churches in the city. Although Yen was a professed follower of Confucius, he was open to religious ideas from Buddhism to Christianity. He was a supporter of the American missionary efforts in Shanxi, and as Donald Gillin wrote in his classic biography of Yen (for which he was able to interview Yen extensively

in Taiwan) 'attributed to Christianity much of the strength enjoyed by peoples of the West and felt that only by fashioning out of their own tradition a religion equally as inspiring could the Chinese acquire enough vitality to overtake the foreigners.'<sup>41</sup>

Yen's rule, however, was threatened on multiple occasions. One such time was in 1927, when the KMT began its move northward from Guangzhou, led by Chiang Kai-shek, known as the Northern Expedition. Initially US officials, business interests, and missionary groups were fearful of the KMT and its National Revolutionary Army, marching under a patchwork banner of nationalism and communism. The US Marines sent a large contingent of troops to Shanghai and Tianjin. The American Board was also worried, and ordered all of its stations in North China to retreat to Beijing, and then Korea.

Only Dr Watson remained at Fenchow to run the hospital. In Shanxi, the Northern Expedition was matched by a push for control by General Feng Yuxiang. Feng and the other military bosses of China had spent that past decade battling it out and switching sides to see who could grab control of the post-Imperial state. In 1926 he had come up on the losing end of a series of wars over control of North China, and his *Guominjun* army had retreated to Shanxi. When the KMT began moving northward, Feng allied his troops with Chiang's, and Governor Yen acquiesced in allowing Feng's armies to occupy the province.

In April 1927 these soldiers marched into Fenchow. Watson wrote a letter on April 30<sup>th</sup> to the mission evacuees, describing a 'publicity department straight from Russia. They are putting anti-foreign posters up all over and putting paper men in the streets, which are supposed to be the spirits of people killed by foreigners, and they are organizing labor unions.'<sup>42</sup> Soon, Feng's soldiers were directly targeting the hospital and Dr Watson, marching thousands past the hospital gate and burning an effigy of the American.<sup>43</sup> However tensions soon calmed, and the Fenchow leaders made it clear that the hospital was to be protected, and moreover that the soldiers were welcome to use it for treatment. Soon Watson's clinics were full of Feng's soldiers, suffering from gangrenous feet and a melody of infectious diseases. This treatment warmed relations between the Carleton station and the army, and by July 1927 all the other foreign residents of the compound were invited back. That October, Sarah Beach wrote back to the college that 'here in Fenchow it is perfectly peaceful...the welcome I

have received here upon coming back is most warm and hearty. I feel that I have some real friends here, and I do enjoy them very much.<sup>44</sup> Feng himself would visit Dr Watson in Northfield on a visit to the US after the war.

The piecemeal recruitment of Carleton students soon became a problem for continuity at the school, and in 1929, the mission board put in place new plan, where one new student would be sent every year for a two year term, such that the two students would overlap in Fenchow, and a new arrival would always have an experienced student there to help. They also began focusing on current Carleton students as representatives, ideally ones between their junior and senior year, such that they could return to the Northfield campus and proselytise for the program.<sup>45</sup> They also mandated that the student be a male, so that he could teach in the boys' school, which had a greater need for teachers. If these new rules blocking female students caused a controversy at the time, it did not get recorded. Every January Carleton solicited applications, and from around a dozen candidates, a committee made up of students and faculty would select the representative. Additionally, this committee would publicise the China program throughout the school year and hold a fundraising drive every fall, where the Carleton student body made pledges to support the \$2000 in salary needed to support their two fellow students in China.

Through the early years of the 1930s, the Ming Yi Middle School continued to expand. It had 273 students in the spring of 1933, and a rigorous curriculum. Stanley Stevens, in Fenchow from 1931 to 1933, wrote that, 'the course of study is not unlike that offered in American high schools except that the students are required to carry more hours of work. Every middle school student must study English for six years by national law. The Carleton teachers carry twenty hours or more of teaching and their classes average about thirty students.'<sup>46</sup>

In 1934, as the world struggled through the Great Depression, Carleton failed to raise enough funds to cover the following year's student. In May 1934, as the school planned for its May Fete celebration, the Carleton-in-China committee posted a notice that no student would be departing for Fenchow that summer.<sup>47</sup> But just in time, one student, Justus Geist, offered to pay his own way over to China. In 1935, another Carleton student, Bea Brown, also paid her own way to China, as did Bill Stafford in 1938. Haldore Hanson, who graduated from Carleton in 1934, also went to China soon after

leaving Northfield, working as a teacher in Beijing before become a reporter.

Another group of Carleton students who went to China separately from the Carleton-in-China program were the Exner siblings, the children of Franz Exner, a Carleton graduate and Chemistry professor, and the nieces and nephews of Max Exner, the YMCA head in Shanghai. Franz Exner was an early proponent of the Carleton-in-China mission and advocated for it at Faculty and trustee meetings. The oldest of his children, Frederick Exner, went to China in the early 1920s to teach physics at PUMC for three years. While he was there, his sister, Emily Exner, moved to Beijing a well, where she taught at Yu Ying Boys' School. In China, she married a fellow teacher, Chi Shou-yu (Hilary Chi). The couple returned to Northfield where Chi studied leather chemistry at Carleton, graduating in 1932. They then returned to China, where Chi became the manager of the Lee Sheng Sporting Goods Company in Tianjin. The family stayed in Tianjin until Emily and their three children returned to the US in February 1941.<sup>48</sup> The youngest Exner daughter, Beatrice Exner, also moved to China in 1935, teaching English and French at the Women's Normal College of Hopei in Tianjin. There she met a Carleton alumnus, Mr. Wallace Hsing-Hwa Liu. In 1937, Exner and Liu were married in Peking, and would remain in China for the duration of the war.<sup>49</sup>

Of the official Carleton-in-China representatives in the 1930s, many came from the school's athletic teams. Jack Caton and Cliff Domke, the two Carleton students in China during the early war years, were both captains on the Carleton wrestling team. Domke reported that he had heard good words about the program from his football teammate, the former representative Bob Nugent. Carl Huber, another representative, was the star of the Carleton tennis team. In Shanxi, they continued their athletic pursuits, especially basketball and tennis, which were popular sports in China at the time. Rather than shear off their American collegiate interests such as sports, the Carleton-in-China representatives transferred their pursuits to their new Chinese environment. In a letter from Jack Caton, written in the tumult of wartime Wuhan, after Caton passes on the news he has heard about the Rape of Nanjing, he takes the time to copy out college football scores from the newspaper for his fellow Americans in Fenchow. In an Oral History, when pressed on letters showing that he had taught at a different school in China for a month due to communist activity



in Fenchow, Huber remembered none of the episode, but did recall travelling as a private tennis coach to the summer resort of Bei Da He, as well as leading the Ming Yi basketball team to compete against other schools in the province (Huber then became “Carl-in-China Huber” in the *Carletonian* reports of his tennis victories).<sup>50</sup> Nugent was also a basketball player, and when he won a college award in 1936 as the team’s top scholar-athlete, he noted that he hoped to eventually return to China and work as a doctor. These experiences help explain the way in which programs like Carleton-in-China helped build a bridge between the two countries on the level of everyday life. The US-China educational relationship was not only built by Harvard and Tsinghua men lecturing at the peaks of academia, it was also farm boys from Minnesota teaching farm boys from Shanxi the particulars of jump-shooting technique.

#### INTO THE WAR YEARS

In early 1935, Dr Watson finally returned to Minnesota for good, ending a 24-year missionary career in China. He was replaced at the hospital by Dr Walter Judd, who would later become a US Congressman and one of the loudest voices in support of the KMT in Taiwan during the Cold War. Although not connected to Carleton, Judd had previously been a mission doctor in Fujian province and in 1934 was completing a fellowship at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, not far from



**Figure 2:** Basketball game at Ming Yi

the Carleton campus. Later in his life, Judd recounted that he had been hired by the American Board of Missions to replace Dr Watson, who had lost his ability to successfully fundraise for his grand hospital during the Depression, and had also suffered a heart attack. 'This doctor broke down and the Fenchow hospital was going to have to close after it had been mistakenly the Congregationalist's number one advertisement,' Judd later recounted.<sup>51</sup>

When Judd arrived in Fenchow in October 1934, he cut down the size of the hospital, what he called 'a hospital built for America.' His prior experience had been in a much poorer village, and he thought it was pointless to have such a large hospital that the local residents couldn't afford to keep up, or staff. He fired a third of the staff and reduced the hospital bed capacity from 175 down to 125. He also dissuaded charity cases for patients, in sharp contrast with Watson. Judd believed people should pay for their treatment, but on a sliding scale, where the rich paid more and the poor paid what they could afford. Judd also wanted the hospital to be self-supporting, that is, supported by its patrons, the residents of Fenchow and Shanxi, instead of financed by donations from abroad.<sup>52</sup> The hospital remained popular under Judd's direction, and he stated they treated about 30,000 outpatients a year, on top of those who needed inpatient care.<sup>53</sup>

One final change in the Fenchow situation prior to the 1937 Japanese invasion was the entrance of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) troops into the province in 1936. The CCP had ended its Long March, fleeing from the KMT armies through western China, until they reached Shaanxi province in 1935, establishing a headquarters first in the city of Bao'an, then soon moving to their wartime capital of Yan'an. It was at Bao'an that the American journalist Edgar Snow first met the CCP leadership in the summer of 1936, writing down their biographies and stories for what would become his book *Red Star Over China*.

Once they had established a foothold in Shaanxi, communist armies soon crossed over the Yellow River into Shanxi. Gillin writes that the groundswells of support for communism had existed in the province for all the 1930s, greatly worrying Governor Yen. Yen had no illusions about the poverty and social problems that racked his domain. In the fall of 1935, small bands of CCP agitators crossed the river into southwestern Shanxi, where they were quickly able to establish a foothold in several districts. 'Yen admitted that the Communists enjoyed the

sympathy of 70 percent of his subjects and warned that if the Red Army entered Shansi, it could recruit well over a million men from among the poor peasants and the unemployed,' Gillin wrote.<sup>54</sup> In February 1936, the CCP sent a force of 34,000 soldiers into Shanxi, 'where they enjoyed what must have been massive popular support, because although outnumbered and ill-armed, within less than a month they succeeded in occupying nearly a third of Yen's domain.'<sup>55</sup>

Fenchow was part of this area, and some of the mission station personnel were briefly evacuated to Taiyuan. But it soon became clear that the Communists presented little danger to the mission station, and as the *Carletonian* stated in a front-page headline, 'C-in-C Heads Declare Chinese Scare Reports Exaggerated.'<sup>56</sup> Bob Nugent, who had just returned to Northfield from Fenchow, commented that 'I was quite worried over the first report, but now I wish I was were out there in the middle of the fun.' In fact, in recruiting for the C-in-C position for the following year, Dr Axel Vestling, the Carleton professor in charge of the program, wrote that while the question of safety in Fenchow was being raised, 'if I know students at all, I am sure that their motto is not, "Safety First." There are many of us older people who wish that we might have had such an opportunity as this.'<sup>57</sup>

While the spring semester of 1936 at the Ming Yi School was interrupted by the Communist invasion, the hospital remained open, and the mission soon developed a co-existence with the Communist



Figure 3: Paul Domke at a picnic at Yu Tao He

presence. In fact, Dr Judd noted that the city served as a stop on the Communist's "underground railway" from Yan'an to Beijing, and mission personnel helped ferry messages and people between the CCP's wartime capital and its future PRC capital. One of these underground messengers was Huang Hua, the future foreign minister of China, and at that time, a student at Yenching, who had been requested to serve as an interpreter for Edgar Snow during his 1936 reporting trip. According to Judd, the Carleton Mission helped both pass the message from Yan'an to Huang in Beijing, and then helped smuggle the student west to Shaanxi.<sup>58</sup> Following the Japanese invasion, many of the Ming Yi students would join the Eighth Route Army, who established a guerrilla headquarters near to Fenchow, and both Jack Caton and Cliff Domke would separately visit Yan'an in 1938 and 1939.

#### CONCLUSION

This is not a natural place for a history of the Carleton-in-China program to conclude, as the college continued to send students to China until 1942, then resuming in 1947, and the last western missionary remained in Fenchow until 1951. But the Japanese invasion of Shanxi in 1937 casts a convenient divide in the history of the program.

So how can we understand the relationship between Carleton and China from 1903–1936? For one, it further reinforces the thesis that the US and China formed close cultural bonds in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of which continued to see a direct legacy in today's world. What type of bonds these were has long been a subject of debate. The earliest views, those being argued as the movement was taking place, assigned the movement either bare criticism - missionaries as unwanted foreign imperialists in China – or hagiographic praise – the benevolent salvation of a heathen people.

Later critics painted the American global missionary movement (and hence the US-China education relationship) as a form of "cultural imperialism," a coercive imposition of American modes of thought and erasure of Chinese ones.<sup>59</sup> Mao Zedong made such a condemnation himself in 1949, as US-China relations entered its 20<sup>th</sup> century nadir. The occasion was the heated Red Scare debate in the US, over who "lost" China, and the State Department's publication of a 1000 page report on US-China relations. John Leighton Stuart, who had been since birth deeply involved in the missionary-educational world, was now the US Ambassador to China, and as Mao pointed

out, officials like Stuart ‘know what they were talking about’ when describing the impact of the US on China. But still, Mao criticised US Imperialism as a form of ‘spiritual aggression, extending from religious to philanthropic and cultural undertakings.’<sup>60</sup>

Recent scholarship has tended to move past this dichotomy between aggression and benevolence, and instead emphasises the connectivity of the various programs, analysing them along lines of bi-cultural, international, and transnational institutions. While still critiquing the problematic nature of these relationships, the missionary-based educational programs are now largely seen as operating in a space separate from, if related to, the more directly imperialist actions of the US business and political-military community in China. In Thompson’s analysis, the spirit of “Christian Internationalism” that pervaded the efforts was in fact directly critical and opposed to many of the problems of imperialism, including the very ontology of “the nation” itself. Moreover, the types of questions asked has moved towards understanding the relationship within a larger connected world, and delineating the numerous trans-Pacific connections that knitted together China and the US in this period.

The Carleton-in-China program fits squarely into this latest framework, serving as a crucible that illustrates both how American ideas moved from Northfield to Fenchow, and how knowledge of China moved equally back from Fenchow to Northfield. Both locales were relatively remote, rural areas, and yet through programs like Carleton’s, they were connected in an intimate fashion that sheds light on both the situation in China and in the US

It has long been accepted that depictions and imagery of China grew in popularity in the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the novels of Pearl Buck to the movie star Anna May Wong.<sup>61</sup> The Carleton-in-China program shows the brick and mortar side of how this knowledge base was created, at least in one small corner of Minnesota. More than just an abstract diffusion of popular culture, on the Carleton campus China became a tangible locale, physically connected through the current students in China, as well as symbolically through the larger legacy and status of the program. Carleton-in-China was a leading example of the college’s status among its peer institutions, and the representatives who went to China were popular campus leaders.

For some of the Carleton students, this knowledge of China became general, but no doubt made them sympathetic to the idea

of China as a dynamic country worthy of interest and empathy. For others, the Carleton-in-China program served as the root for intensive participation in the US-China relationship over the next years and decades. Of the official Carleton-in-China representatives, Domke had perhaps the closest connection: seven years after he left Fenchow as an English teacher, he returned to Shanxi as a military intelligence agent, part of the famed Dixie Mission, whose members served as official US liaisons and observers of the Chinese Communist Party. John Hlavacek, Carleton-in-China representative from 1939 to 1942, would stay in China and work for the international Red Cross, then become a foreign correspondent. Haldore Hanson was not a representative, but met and married one, Bea Brown, and the couple continued to live in China through the war as Hanson switched from journalism to working for the Office of War Information, then later became also became a career foreign correspondent.

Of the wider Carleton student body from 1903 into the war years, there were also of course the alumni who became missionaries in China, more numerous in the 1900s and 1910s. Many of these families had children, born in Fenchow or elsewhere in China, who would go on to attend Carleton and then play a large role in US-China relations. Rowland Cross's son Charles T. Cross was born and raised in Beijing, attended Carleton in the 1940s, and was later the first head of the American Institute of Taiwan as well as Ambassador to Singapore.<sup>62</sup> His best friend Lucian Pye, son of Watts O. Pye, was born in Fenchow, likewise attended Carleton in the 1940s, and would become a leading American sinologist as a professor of political science at MIT.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps the most influential Fenchow-born individual was Arthur Hummel, born in the city in 1920, although neither he nor his parents had a direct connection to Carleton, only the mission station. Hummel capped off a long diplomatic career as the US Ambassador to China from 1981–1985, then returned to his transpacific educational birthroots as the director of the Hopkins-Nanjing Center.<sup>64</sup>

As to the impact of the program on Fenchow, while the sources are not as easily found, a few things are clear. For one, although referred to for ease of reference as the “Carleton Mission”, it was in essence a Chinese institution. Chinese principals ran the school and Chinese doctors and nurses staffed the hospital. Any accounting of modernisation brought about by these institutions must take into account that it was largely the product of Chinese agency. As such, it

illustrates the way in which residents of Fenchow embraced the same ideas as those pushed by US missionaries, like scientific medicine and co-educational schooling. As Terril Lautz wrote of the symbiotic success of 20<sup>th</sup> century American Protestant Missionaries in China, the missionaries' idea of a progressive modernity easily matched to Chinese values and desires. Some of the Fenchow citizens maintained a long commitment and interest in the US, but many more used the schools and hospitals as stepping-stones to their own development and prosperity. The Carleton Mission was not alone in providing these modern institutions, and indeed Shanxi residents of means had their choice between the competing ideas for development proposed by the Provincial Government through Yen Hsishan, Ming Yi and other missionary schools, and after 1936, the institutions of the Chinese Communist Party. Far from being coerced by the Carleton Mission, the Fenchow activities were instead negotiated in a competitive ideological environment. And as the co-existence between the missionaries and communists show, the ideologies of the period were far more flexible than is usually assumed.

As the Carleton-in-China program headed into the war years, it was cushioned by an embedded network of US-China relations. Perhaps the greatest testament to the success of the program was its continued operation through the next twelve years of international and civil warfare in China. When Japan invaded China in full in the summer of 1937, both the Carleton students and university administrators faced the choice of whether to continue operating in the danger of a foreign war. Both the students and administrators decided to continue the program, a decision no doubt born out of the deep connection between the campus and China. Their enthusiasm was matched by the Chinese school leaders, who wanted the American teachers to stay in China. From 1937 to 1941, Carleton continued to send student teachers to China, although the school was relocated to Sichuan province in 1939.

Following the Pearl Harbor attacks in December 1941, the two Carleton students in China at the time switched to working for the International Red Cross and Friends Ambulance Unit. In the spring of 1947, Carleton briefly revived the program, sending Fern Larson to teach at Bridgman Academy in Beijing, the first "official" female representative since the 1920s. Another student, Philip Martin, joined her in 1948, but the two of them would leave the city on Thanksgiving



1948. Finally, following the 1949 Communist Revolution, Carleton switched its study abroad focus to Japan.

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# ALONE AND SURROUNDED: IGNATIUS TREBITSCH LINCOLN'S FINAL YEARS IN OCCUPIED SHANGHAI

BY GABOR HOLCH

## ABSTRACT

*In May 1941, Shanghai's German Consul-General wired Berlin to arrange a Buddhist monk's urgent transfer to Hitler's headquarters. The priest, the message claimed, might bring about the Third Reich's control of Asia. Prompting the dispatch was one of the most absurd careers in the history of interwar diplomacy: that of Ignatius Trebitsch Lincoln. Son of a prominent Jewish family from Hungary, former British MP and alleged agent for Britain, Germany, the United States, Russia, China and Japan, Trebitsch attracted attention from Shanghai's German diplomats through his friendship with perhaps the most notorious Nazi officer in Asia. Beyond examining his character, circumstances and contemporaries, this essay highlights persistent characteristics of expatriate existence in China: the amnesiac relationship with the past, the promise for new arrivals to wipe the slate clean and fill it with grandiose plans for the country, and possibly for humankind.*

## THE BUTCHER AND THE MONK

On 15 May, 1941, German Consul-General in Shanghai Martin Fischer wired an urgent request to the Foreign Office in Berlin to make travel arrangements for the Venerable Abbot Chao Kung, leader of a Buddhist community in Shanghai, to the Führer's headquarters. The Abbot would help Germany to victory in Asia, and perhaps globally, by broadcasting Nazi propaganda in Tibet and inciting pro-German revolt in India. Most importantly, in Berlin he promised to conjure three Tibetan magi into Hitler's office, a taster for the supernatural powers he could unleash in service of the Third Reich. In his telegram Fisher claimed to find Chao Kung's standing in China so impressive, 'and his personal qualifications such, that an order should be issued for his journey to Germany'.<sup>1</sup>

The correspondence is testimony to one of the most absurd partnerships in the history of Nazi Germany's foreign relations, and possibly of the European presence in Asia. Those in question were the

Venerable Chao Kung and Gestapo officer Josef Meisinger, unlikely associates since the beginning of the same year. Where the two had met is unclear – perhaps Chao Kung’s favourite restaurant, the *Hungaria*, the Shanghai Foreign YMCA, or the Italian Gestapo informant Albert Miorini’s mansion, to mention a few likely options. What we do know is that by the time of Fischer’s telegram, the two men had discovered in each other some similarities of life circumstances, character and goals that were too significant to ignore.

They both needed a break from the past. A hypothetical observer to their conversation could have hardly guessed that the uniform-clad giant of a Nazi and the silk-robed Abbot both harboured deep wounds caused by serial failures in their respective fields. Both had reached the Orient as fugitives, ostracised by their confidantes, communities and countries. Starting off as prodigious young men, poor decisions began to undermine their careers and eventually cast them into a downward spiral of missteps, mistrust and ultimately, persecution. Despite their carefully coiffed appearance,<sup>2</sup> their posture and hunted glimpses might have given away the sad truth: they were fellow pariahs in Shanghai’s perilous underworld of warlords, thugs, schemers, spies, criminals and charlatans. Even by the low standards of the time, the city was a bad place to be without friends.

Josef Meisinger was unaccustomed to that precarious position, having rubbed shoulders with the most intimidating people for the past two decades. Decorated in the Great War<sup>3</sup> and participant in Hitler’s 1923 putsch, he joined the SS and the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, henceforth ‘Nazi Party’) in 1933, and soon found himself under the wings of Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler. Befitting his famously rough nature, he received gut-wrenching assignments. Between 1934 and 1938, he led the Gestapo’s de-facto vice guard, hunting down abortions, extramarital affairs, prostitution, homosexuals and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews so doggedly that he nearly wrecked the Nazi Party itself. Persecuting Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg for marrying a former prostitute, General Werner von Fritsch for homosexuality and divorcing his own wife to marry Himmler’s mistress did not earn him much gratitude. The Schutzstaffel (SS) attempted to get rid of him by transferring him to Poland.

But as Deputy Commander of the Einsatzgruppe IV and later

Commander of the State Police in Warsaw, his misguided commitment kept him firmly in the alarmed attention of his mentors. Soon dubbed 'The Butcher of Warsaw' (one of two SS commanders by this name), his brutality threatened to lead him to imminent court martial.<sup>4</sup> On Himmler's intervention, in early 1941 he was clandestinely shipped by submarine to Tokyo.<sup>5</sup> From then on, he did the unwelcome job of reporting on the Reich's collaborators, German expatriates and Consular staff in Asia. No wonder Shanghai society, including compatriots, kept him at arm's length.

Not so the Abbot. Chao Kung thrived on people like the threatening but otherwise rather clumsy and gullible Nazi. His long and eventful career rested on powerful people with man-shaped holes in their psyche, voids he had eagerly filled under numerous aliases: he was Ignatius Trebitsch-Lincoln, former Christian preacher, British MP, German spy, code-breaker for the US Intelligence Agency and advisor to Chinese warlords. His names appeared in the correspondences of Winston Churchill, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Miklos Horthy, The Panchen Lama, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. Like Meisinger, talent and commitment set him off on an early career that seemed right until it went terribly wrong. Both men had an eventful history of being at the right place at the right time, doing the wrong thing.

In a city that promised to wash away all sins, or at least conceal them among new ones, Trebitsch and Meisinger plotted a redeeming break. Like many expatriates before and after them, they arrived in China out of necessity, but soon aspired to forge a new destiny for themselves, for China, Asia and the world. Meisinger was crafting grandiose plans to replicate the Third Reich's racial purification programme in Asia: among other schemes, turning Shanghai's Chongming Island into an internment camp for Jews and political prisoners. As for Chao Kung, he nurtured and published elaborate plans to bring about world peace by overthrowing the British empire and helping Japan and Germany to victory. In 1941, both felt their goals were within reach. In a few years, both would have fallen disgracefully.

The present essay is on the several identities, adventures and mistakes of Ignatius Trebitsch Lincoln, also known as Chao Kung. There were countless other adventurers of his ilk passing through the perilous streets of wartime Shanghai. But beyond outlining the tragic final years of this controversial figure of early twentieth-century political history, I will attempt to show that while the people and



places of old Shanghai have mostly perished, significant characteristics of expatriate existence in China have persisted ever since, and echo through today's multi-storey office towers and shopping malls. Now as before, China promises a clean slate to new arrivals. Now as before, expats tend to fill the resulting vacuum with grandiose plans. Now as before, they believe that China scripts the future of the world. Like any human experiment, records of 1940s Shanghai are partially about our tendencies to repeat history with our own lives.

#### **PAST LIVES OF THE VENERABLE CHAO KUNG**

By the time the man known as Chao Kung met with Josef Meisinger, he had inhabited a surreal array of incarnations, and claimed to have died twice. He was marked for a spiritual vocation from the beginning: his wealthy transportation entrepreneur father raised his son to become a rabbi. But Young Ignác, born in the Hungarian town of Paks in 1879, was restless and deceitful. By his mid-twenties he had failed at traditional Jewish education, the Budapest Drama Academy and even at being a criminal, having been arrested for theft. He left for England to witness Queen Victoria's 1897 Diamond Jubilee and never lived in Hungary again. His relationship with his homeland remained troubled, cloaking his native identity with fiction and obfuscation, while repeatedly attempting a triumphant return.

His ambitions at spiritual leadership remained, albeit in different forms. In London he joined a Presbyterian charity for forsaken young men, received an education and was baptised in Germany on Christmas Day, 1899. With characteristic pragmatism, in January 1900 he switched to Lutheranism for better prospects as a missionary, and went to Canada soon after this. Thus, the young Hungarian who had become Ignatius Trebitsch at baptism began a promising religious career. Despite failing the classics-based missionary test, his oratorical skills, zeal and recent marriage to the daughter of a retired German ship captain, a Christian, soon catapulted him into a position beyond his expectations. His appointment as a preacher, and later head, of a Montreal mission converting Jews to Christianity could have set him up for life. Instead, in 1903 he returned to England, accused of financial mismanagement and despised for his intrigues among Canada's budding Christian community.

By his early twenties, a struggle between his enviable powers of persuasion and an increasingly tainted reputation had become a

theme in Trebitsch's life. The former landed him in the good graces of mentors, sponsors and creditors. The latter eventually undermined his prospects. On his return to England, friendly Christians accommodated him until they saw some of their valuable earthly possessions vanish. In 1903, the Archbishop of Canterbury offered him the parish of Appledore-with-Ebony, where he endlessly complained of the climate and surroundings, and improvised unnerving sermons in a thick Hungarian accent.<sup>6</sup> The parish did not have to suffer him for long: within a few years, chance would liberate Trebitsch from his assignment and elevate him to the elite of British society.

One of many contradictions in Trebitsch's character was wavering between abstinence from alcohol and hedonistic partiality for expensive wines. Shortly after an inheritance from his suddenly deceased father-in-law rescued him from Appledore in 1906, he applied for a propagandist job for the newly established Liberal government's nascent abstinence movement. Instead, he gained a secretarial position with cocoa magnate and industrialist Seebohm Rowntree, a proponent of the movement. Rowntree's resources, connections and faith in Trebitsch's potential opened doors to the highest circles. He travelled the Continent in search of documents for his mentor's book *Land & labour: lessons from Belgium*.<sup>7</sup> In 1910, the volume was published, but Trebitsch's future was already secured. Rowntree sponsored his naturalisation as Ignatius Trebitsch Lincoln and got him a seat in Parliament.

Trebitsch's Parliamentary career was brief: within a year, the Liberal government collapsed and he was dismissed, but it was during that period that his attention first turned towards Asia thanks to a fellow MP, a certain Sir John Backhouse. 'Sir Johnathan's son, Edmund,' writes Trebitsch's biographer, 'black sheep of this otherwise respectable and influential family, was at the time resident in China. Like Trebitsch, the younger Backhouse had been a member of the National Liberal Club, but he was expelled following a financial scandal.'<sup>8</sup> Whether the two ever met is uncertain, but 1910 was the year that Sir Edmund Backhouse published his now infamous *China Under the Empress Dowager*.<sup>9</sup> The similarities between their talents in languages and adventure could hardly have gone unnoticed.

Was it under Edmund Backhouse's indirect influence that Trebitsch's clerical career started blending with a fictional identity as a secret agent? In any case, the heightened atmosphere that would



Figure 1: Ignatius Trebitsch Lincoln, circa 1915

eventually lead to the Great War caused suspicions about him. He briefly worked as a censor at the British Intelligence in London, but his allegiance to the Empire, as opposed to his native Hungary or his wife's German homeland, was questioned. More precipitously, his addiction to prestigious Continental circles degenerated into the habit of falsifying the introductions he could not honestly acquire. In 1915, the former MP set sail for New York, penniless and a fugitive from forgery charges.

If early 20<sup>th</sup>-century America promised a clean slate, she did not deliver. Despite the administrative nightmare of extradition between the United States and the British Empire, Scotland Yard applied enough pressure on American authorities to keep Trebitsch incarcerated during the procedure. In Brooklyn Jail for a year, he escaped custody twice and had a jolly good time in-between. In a series of articles and then in his first book *Revelations of an International Spy*, an impressive feat of confabulation, he presented his earlier work for Seebohm Rowntree as a deceitful cover to actual endeavours as a freelance secret agent.<sup>10</sup> Eager to portray himself as a double-crossed spy rather than a common criminal, in *Revelations* he defamed everybody he had met in Britain, including Rowntree himself.

#### FICTIONAL LIVES AND DEATHS

From prison, Trebitsch convinced American authorities that he could help crack German spy codes if he were allowed a daily commute to the nearby Brooklyn Federal Building. Then, he bribed the accompanying jailers into daily stops at a fashionable restaurant on the way to Brooklyn Jail. As his deadline approached and he was no closer to breaking the codes, Trebitsch escaped through the mens bathroom window. He was captured days before his extradition case came to a conclusion: in 1916, a Scotland Yard officer and a Pinkerton agent escorted him back to London, where he remained in jail until 1919. The self-proclaimed

international spy had missed the most tumultuous period in modern European history and emerged a broken man determined to rebuild his fame, fortune. He declared in his *Revelations*, that he would topple the British Empire that had disgraced him.<sup>11</sup>

The Empire fought back, and Trebitsch's plans backfired. Moving to Germany, he joined the 1920 Kapp Putsch, in which he became the new German Republic's chief censor, but this republic collapsed in weeks. The oil businesses he started in the Balkans imploded just as spectacularly. The White Internationale, a right-wing conspiracy to restore monarchies in Europe, placed him in the crosshairs of secret services all over Europe. Gyula Gömbös, who would eventually become Hungary's Fascist Premier, rejected him after a brief initial acquaintance. His attempt to sell the secret archives of the White Internationale added a lawsuit and outraged thugs to his troubles. In 1921, hoping to end it all, he announced the news of his own death in Bucharest. He was arrested in Vienna shortly afterwards.

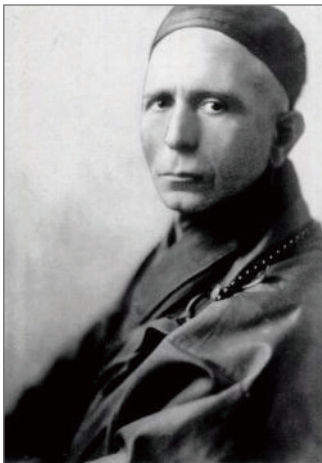
Contemporary diplomatic correspondence suggests that Trebitsch was released from Austrian jail in the hope that he would leave Europe for good. By then, intelligence services had tired of tracking his multiple aliases, plots and fiascos. At a search of his Trieste hotel room, authorities found six passports issued for just as many names and nationalities. His political leanings were equally perplexing. 'Lincoln is probably of superior ability to any member of the Communist Government and he might easily become a sort of Lenin of Central Europe,' Sir Basil Thomson wrote in 1919, fearing that he might join the newly announced Soviet Republic in Hungary.<sup>12</sup> 'As a Hungarian Jew he got into the confidence of a clique consisting exclusively of anti-Semites of the most virulent type,' the Daily Telegraph commented on his role in the Kapp putsch in 1920.<sup>13</sup> International secret services representing opposing nations worked together to keep Trebitsch away from their territories. 'American missions in Europe had been warned to refuse him a visa,' reads J. Edgar Hoover's correspondence months before he got himself arrested in New York in January 1922.<sup>14</sup>

A bail of a thousand dollars was accepted from a benefactor when the authorities learned he was in New York on his way to China. But Western intelligence services could not rid themselves of Trebitsch for long. Riding his characteristic luck, within weeks he was among guests at the Chungking (Chongqing) mansion of Harry Steptoe, a British businessman, consular official and intelligence agent in the

centre of several contemporary spoke wheels of influence. Probably through acquaintances he made there, Trebitsch soon joined the entourage of General Yang Sen, ally to one of Republican Era China's most influential warlords, Wu Peifu. A year after he was considered safely out of sight, in September 1923 he disembarked in Italy with a Chinese military delegation seeking investment for the exploitation of natural resources in Wu's territories.

Beyond a path to high circles of power, Trebitsch must have hoped for a triumphant return and redemption from the injustices he had suffered at the hands of European authorities. Once again, he was disappointed. Consulates all over the continent remembered him and adamantly kept him away from their jurisdictions. Most countries on the delegation's list of destinations refused him a visa, including Hungary. His collection of fake passports proved of limited use, and he was briefly detained in Switzerland. The risk of entering Germany or Hungary was simply too high even for his taste: he cooled his heels in friendlier lands while the delegation visited places that considered him *persona non grata*. Budapest, the city that was meant to be his grand finale, flatly refused to receive the Chinese delegation.

Judging from the chronicles of his successive years, the failed mission undermined not only Trebitsch's plans to restore his status at home but also his reputation in China. In New York, where he travelled under yet another fake identity, he published a series of



**Figure 2:** Trebitsch's best-known portrait in his tailored silken Buddhist robe in the early 1930s.

articles in which he claimed to be Wu Peifu's right-hand man. In a public proclamation, General Wu denied ever having known him. It was on his way back to an unwelcoming China that he encountered European and American followers of the Theosophical Society, an occult movement, and identified Buddhism as his next spiritual calling. 'In the Astor House Hotel in Tientsin, I made the great renunciation, I quitted the world... I forced the doors of the lunatic asylum open and walked out,' he wrote about his 1925 conversion.<sup>15</sup>

### REINCARNATIONS AND OPERATIONS

For the next several years, it appeared as though enlightenment had reunited him with his luck. He explored China, India, Ceylon and Tibet. In 1933, a Shanghai Buddhist society officially initiated him, and he assumed the name Chao Kung. By then, he had published two books and several articles, and recruited over a dozen followers, mostly foreigners. His mission was generously funded through the personal savings of new converts, and contributions from the illustrious members of Shanghailanders society. One was Baroness Alexander de Soucanton, widow of Silas Haroon and herself a Buddhist initiate, another was Dr Walter Fuchs of the German Consulate-General.<sup>16</sup>

“Chao Kung” embarked on teaching tours in Canada, the United States and the European countries where he could safely travel. Trebitsch was by no means a lone pioneer on that journey. At his Shanghai initiation ceremony alone, a dozen foreign and several times as many Chinese converts received initiation, turning the occasion into a social gathering featuring the Soviet Ambassador and Chinese government officials.<sup>17</sup> Being just one of a gaggle of expat sages did not fit Chao Kung’s ambitions. ‘I have gone further in associating myself with the Chinese People than any foreigner before; I have a Chinese name; I wear constantly Chinese clothes; and am the first foreigner to have been admitted into the age old order of Buddhist monks in China,’ he had written already in 1931.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 3:** Chao Kung with his disciples in Shanghai in the mid-1930s

It was inevitable that sooner or later, he would once more declare himself the key to momentous historical events. The chance came in December 1937, when the Panchen Lama died, and the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama had not been found since his 1932 passing. For the first time in history, Tibetan Buddhism was leaderless. Unconcerned with obvious technicalities, Abbot Chao Kung proclaimed himself the reincarnation of both the Dalai and the Panchen Lamas.<sup>19</sup>

His megalomaniac act coincided with the reappearance of his old European cronies in China. Years earlier, he had met Kapp Putsch co-conspirator Colonel Max Bauer, then Chiang Kai-shek's industrial advisor. Bauer died in 1929, but not before he introduced Trebitsch to Austrian-born American adventurer-informer Hermann Erben and notorious Spider Club Gang boss Albert Miorini. Many familiar figures of once fragmented monarchist and revisionist plots had by then united under the strengthening Nazi movement. Erben and Miorini were both entangled with the German secret service, which must have influenced Trebitsch whether or not the conspirators actually involved him. Most importantly, all of them were drawn to the vision of one man: Adolf Hitler, another fateful near-encounter in Trebitsch's saga. In January 1934, shortly after his Shanghai initiation, he addressed a condescending letter to the Führer, in which he introduced himself as a fellow German putschist who once underestimated him but now admired Hitler. He also requested a German visa, which was duly rejected.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, the Führer had already known and despised him from a previous life. Back in 1920, jubilant over the toppling of the Weimar Republic by Kapp and his conspirators, Hitler hurried to Berlin aboard a small plane piloted by his friend, right-wing poet and journalist Dietrich Eckhart. That was Hitler's first aeroplane ride, but what awaited him in Berlin was even more nauseating. In the lobby of the building that served the Kappist headquarters, a man descending the stairs was pointed out to them as the propaganda chief of the new government. It was Trebitsch, whom Eckhart instantly identified as a Jew.<sup>21</sup> They let him pass, and thus the future Chao Kung missed the man who would soon rewrite world history. Had he known that, Trebitsch might have added the Third Reich to his list of hostile empires.

The petition to Hitler was part of Trebitsch's ambivalence towards China. On one hand, he claimed to have found spiritual salvation there, to be deeply embedded in its society and drew his newly chosen



identity from it. On the other, he bombarded worldwide authorities for visas that would allow him to leave for one of the familiar scenes of his previous lives. Having received Hitler's rejection, he petitioned his native Hungary, this time in more elaborate terms but with much less gratitude to China. In late 1937, against the backdrop of mounting incidents between occupying Japanese and local Chinese forces, like the tragic 'Black Saturday' when Chinese air force accidentally killed over two thousand citizens in a botched air-raid, Chao Kung commissioned a disciple, Margaret Markuse, alias Tao Lo, to approach Hungarian Governor Miklos Horthy. Tao Lo arrived in Budapest and approached the Hungarian Foreign Minister in summer 1938. The tone of her correspondence, obviously suggested by Trebitsch, is a far cry from the self-assured visionary who addressed the Führer a few years before.

'I arrived in Budapest on June 20 on instructions of my Master Chao Kung, formerly known as Trebitsch Lincoln, to ensure his speedy escape from Shanghai and the Far East,' reads her petition. 'It seems inconceivable to me that one should passively witness as a white man of Hungarian birth is forced to remain in such a place until he might perish in the midst of a conflict among the yellow races set out to annihilate one another.'<sup>22</sup> The document described Chao Kung's predicament as a stateless refugee in a racially hostile war zone. But Horthy and his Cabinet had known Trebitsch as a representative of the failed White Internationale, and an unwelcome envoy of Chinese warlords. The scheme backfired in multiple ways. His visa application was rejected, and Trebitsch would never set foot in his native land again. Tao Lo never returned to Shanghai. Chao Kung became an outcast, lodging at the Shanghai Foreign YMCA. In a desperate and characteristically surreal attempt at Christmas 1939, his open letter called for the resignation of all governments of the world except Japan. He also petitioned the United States Consulate for a visa, offering to discuss world peace with President Roosevelt. His application was rejected.<sup>23</sup>

#### **BAD KARMA, BAD COMPANY**

Trebitsch met Josef Meisinger at that darkest hour in early 1941. It is unknown what brought them together: almost certainly they met through Erben, probably at the Miorini villa that hosted Shanghai's secret service community and occasional celebrity visitors like

Hollywood movie star Errol Flynn.<sup>24</sup> Encouragingly for Trebitsch, freshly appointed Gestapo commander Gerhard Kahner and Meisinger also frequented those gatherings.<sup>25</sup> Zeitgeist seemed to be on his side too. For decades, Shanghai had encouraged surreal notions and behaviours in cultures and subcultures that defied contemporary reality. The French, British, Americans, Russians and Japanese collaborated to keep the International Settlement afloat. Americans were allowed to drink, Germans and Russians did business with the Jewish community. A plurality of identities was not only tolerated but actively integrated at all levels of the Chinese state apparatus, from top-notch advisers like Colonel Bauer to reformed thugs like Morris “Two-Gun” Cohen, Sun Yat-sen’s bodyguard with an officer’s rank in the Chinese Republican army.<sup>26</sup>

For someone wanting a new identity and nurturing earth-shattering notions, 1940s Shanghai was the right place and time. We can picture how enthusiastically Chao Kung promoted his master plan to stir pro-Japanese revolt among China’s Buddhists, to turn Tibet to Germany’s side and undermine the British Empire’s existence in Afghanistan, India and beyond. We can imagine how welcome such visions were with Meisinger, an overzealous Nazi in a metropolis run by Jews, Russians and what he saw as inferior yellow races. To each man, the appearance, experience, connections and notions of the other must have appeared heaven-sent. Meanwhile, as so often had occurred in their respective careers, their orientation was fatally aimed at the eye of a global political hurricane far beyond their competence. But the prospects seemed too prestigious, the possible benefits too redeeming.

Germany had long hoped to attack Tibet as the weakest link between East and West. Chao Kung and Meisinger envisaged a lethal triad of victorious forces. Meisinger would wield the political and military power of the Gestapo, the SS and his direct bosses, Reinhard Heidrich and Heinrich Himmler. The German diplomatic mission in China would add technological expertise, primarily apparatus for broadcasting propaganda and intelligence. Finally, Chao Kung would provide access to supportive popular forces.<sup>27</sup> Once Tibet was secured, they would proceed to bigger things. Meisinger would settle the racial issue in Shanghai by turning Chongming Island, today a popular weekend destination off the city’s coast, into a concentration camp. Trebitsch hoped to restore his administrative status and reputation in

Europe, and re-join the now successful right-wing power circles that had stranded him so many times before. In reality, however, all three stilts supporting their strategy were already sinking into the muddy political ground of Shanghai.

Starting with the least obvious, the technical apparatus that the conspirators were hoping to use was subject to convoluted political brinkmanship. German telecommunications technology was far ahead of its time, and firms like Siemens and Telefunken had supplied Asia's major cities with electrical and communication equipment for decades. When the war disrupted shipping routes and regular mail, German businesses, diplomats and intelligence services wielded considerable advantage in communication. In late 1940, the Abwehr, Germany's military intelligence, established an agency in Shanghai lead by Theodor Siefkin, an officer with field experience in Europe and Africa. One of Siefkin's first orders was to acquire radio transmission equipment from Germany, which he installed in two locations in Shanghai.<sup>28</sup> Within a year of his arrival, the agency known to Shanghailanders as Bureau Siefkin had become a fully equipped regional intelligence centre. Its radio technicians, photographers and a network of agents reported military, commercial and political intelligence from all over Asia. Meisinger and Trebitsch aspired to use that infrastructure of hi-tech espionage.

But Siefkin's undertaking soon revealed gaps in the cooperation between newly proliferating agents of the Third Reich in China. Theoretically, all intelligence operations were attached to the German Consulate in Shanghai, but Bureau Siefkin with its extensive military and commercial network soon found ways to circumnavigate nosy diplomats. On paper, Siefkin's team operated within clearly confined parameters: they were free to exchange military and commercial intelligence through their Peking and Asia-wide agents, but anything political or intended for Berlin had to go through the Consulate. Typically for technocrats, Siefkin's team complied but did not cooperate: the local political intelligence they forwarded to the Consulate was encrypted with codes shared only with Berlin.<sup>29</sup> As the flow of indecipherable Bureau Siefkin reports increased, mistrust and complaints grew in proportion. Although few people outside of the inner circle were aware, this was an inopportune moment to entrust a Eurasia-wide strategy to those footloose agents.

Not that either the Consulate or Bureau Siefkin would seriously

consider a proposal of that magnitude from Meisinger. The conspiracy's second pillar, the political leverage that the Gestapo and the SS could have provided, was already wavering. Actually, it had been shaky from the beginning. The appearance of officers from the Reich's most notorious agencies at a city that prided itself for openness and diversity unnerved German diplomats like Martin Fischer.<sup>30</sup> They predicted, quite correctly, that committed Nazis like Kahner and Meisinger would suspect subversion not only among Shanghai's expatriate population, but also among the German diplomatic community itself. They dreaded to transmit encrypted messages directly to the Berlin War Office, possibly containing reports about themselves or their collaborators. The fact that Meisinger and his fellow Gestapo officers reported directly to Himmler and Heydrich terrified them.<sup>31</sup> Within months of their arrival, reports began to reach Berlin on the growing schism between German diplomats and Siefkin, Meisinger and other local Gestapo officers.<sup>32</sup> If Trebitsch hoped to throw Germany's political weight behind his masterplan, Meisinger was not the man to provide the necessary leverage.

Finally, the assumption that Abbot Chao Kung would smuggle radio equipment into British-held Tibet and start a popular uprising must have sounded ludicrous to anyone in possession of the basic political facts. The Abbot boasted a dwindling dozen disciples, mostly foreigners. He was a *persona non grata* in British-controlled territories, his aliases were well-known to law enforcement and intelligence agencies worldwide, and entry by foreign nationals into Tibet was as closely controlled back then as it is today.<sup>33</sup> Trebitsch spoke no Tibetan and little Chinese, and had no friends in the kingdom or among the Tibetan diaspora. But having all of those in place might still not have convinced the Reich's authorities. First, he was a known Jew. Second, Meisinger's poor judgement was common knowledge thanks to errors like his association with Richard Sorge, a Soviet spy in Tokyo from whom he hoped to gather intelligence, while in fact meaningful information went almost exclusively the other way to Moscow.<sup>34</sup> For all intents and purposes, Trebitsch and Meisinger were conspiring in a political vacuum.

#### CAUGHT BETWEEN PARTY AND STATE

By the spring of 1941, all three key elements of the stratagem plotted by Trebitsch and Meisinger had become futile without them even knowing

it. German intelligence services would not provide the technical equipment needed to incite Tibet against the British. Meisinger would not have the political capital to gain the Reich's support, and Trebitsch would not be able to turn his spiritual leadership into the influence he had always yearned. Fatally for them, the conspiracy also mutated into a showdown between powers beyond their control: a rivalry between the German state and the Nazi Party. In a way, Trebitsch's would soon realise his fantasies of taking centre-stage in the history of Asia. Of course, his eventual role was significantly different from his ambitions.

By 1941, the conflict between different German intelligence agencies had become critical. Diplomats with local connections developed over decades of hard work felt suffocated and threatened by the vaguely defined responsibilities, arrogance and narrow-mindedness of zealots and adventurers appointed by the Abwehr, the SS and the Gestapo. Officially, the latter was not even supposed to be in Asia: its Shanghai head, Franz Huber, carried a title of Police Attaché at the German Embassy in Peking.<sup>35</sup> Neither was the conflict confined to Shanghai or even the Far East. Back in Berlin, friction grew between Himmler and Heydrich about supporting Meisinger: Huber and others close to the Party apparatus on one side, and Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop defending state-appointed diplomats on the other. The prospects of Chao Kung's proposed visit to Berlin, along with other issues like the future of Bureau Siefkin, fell in-between the gigantic wheels of an intercontinental political showdown.

In May 1941, when Meisinger instructed German Consul-General to Shanghai, Martin Fischer, to wire his urgent request for an audition between Chao Kung and Hitler, Fischer acted like a true diplomat in a precarious position. Theoretically, Meisinger was part of the diplomatic corps, which granted the Consul-General the authority to dismiss his dispatch. But doing so would have exposed him to the wrath of a notorious Nazi watchdog. On the other hand, the content of Meisinger's proposal made it practically impossible to relay it to Foreign Minister Ribbentrop as a serious dispatch. After all, it repeated Chao Kung's claims, 'the instant he was alone with the Führer, three of the wise men of Tibet would appear out of the wall, this would be the best proof of the supernatural powers at the disposal of the supreme initiates.'<sup>36</sup> In true diplomatic spirit, Fischer did send the telegram to the Berlin Foreign Office, but with annotations to the effect that Meisinger's judgement could not be trusted.<sup>37</sup> He must have hoped

that would mark the end of the proposal, and hopefully Meisinger himself.

Unsurprisingly, Fischer heeded the winds of change more attentively than either Meisinger or Trebitsch. The ministry official receiving the dispatch on Ribbentrop's behalf, Martin Luther, was sufficiently familiar and infuriated with Trebitsch to present the news in the spirit that Fischer intended.<sup>38</sup> In addition, an unexpected development settled the telegram's fate together with the State-versus-Party rivalry itself. On May 10, 1941, before Fisher's dispatch but still unknown to anyone in Asia, Deputy Führer to the Third Reich Rudolf Hess had escaped in his self-piloted plane and landed in Scotland. Hess had been the main inspiration behind the Führer's interest in the occult. He maintained a strong interest in popular spiritual movements of the time like Anthroposophy, whose Camphill community had been established in Aberdeen only a few years before. Crucially to Chao Kung's fate, British intelligence officers who searched Hess's plane found, among a wide array of lucky charms, holy water vials from Tibet. Word of this soon reached the Führer, who strictly forbade any further mention of magic among his leadership.<sup>39</sup> Bad luck had blown yet another elaborate plot right back into Trebitsch's face. His proposal never even reached Hitler.

If an ominous lack of response from Berlin did not convince Chao Kung of the futility of his efforts, he would soon witness his masterplan's key characters tear one another to bits. By late May, Ribbentrop's victory over Heydrich in the Asian intelligence rivalry was well known in Shanghai.<sup>40</sup> 1942 saw Siefkin dismissed on charges of homosexuality, Meisinger's trademark accusation.<sup>41</sup> Replacing him was Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig Eisentraeger who arrived in Shanghai under the alias Ludwig Ehrhardt, whose job was to dismantle Bureau Siefkin and establish a properly aligned Abwehr agency.<sup>42</sup> Erhardt Bureau, as it became known, would report to German Embassies and Consulates in China and Japan. The use of its radio apparatus was subjected to approval from the Japanese command, the de-facto government after Pearl Harbour and the resulting full occupation of Shanghai.<sup>43</sup> The rivalry that had started between Fischer and Kahner ended with the appointment of Ehrhardt. For the time being, the mingling of nationalities, races, ideologies and interests would continue in the streets, restaurants and offices of Shanghai.

That also signalled the end of Meisinger's plans, who became part

of the consular staff reporting to Tokyo—a disappointing development for Chao Kung. He may have taken some pleasure from witnessing the destruction of the last remaining British Navy vessels on the Huangpu River shortly after the Japanese army marched in. But as Shanghai became isolated from the outside world, mail ceased, bank accounts were frozen, most foreigners departed and many were interned by the Japanese, he must have ruminated on the true meaning of his earlier words: being a white man in the midst of a conflict among the yellow races set out to annihilate one another. Depression peeled away his Buddhist sage identity. Witnesses and informants saw him take long daytime walks with his remaining disciples, but at mealtimes and nights his earlier vices resurfaced. He ate meat, drank wine and frequented the restaurant Hungaria, whose proprietor, self-proclaimed Gypsy socialite Stella Szirmay, might have become his lover.<sup>44</sup>

#### THE FINAL CUT

Deprived of the plan that was supposed to redeem him, in his final year Trebitsch rewrote his life story with almost pathological intensity. In 1943, he published reflective articles on his days as a member of British Parliament, businessman, spiritual leader and agent of victorious right-wing politics. He envisaged plans to save himself, China and humanity, but his writing sounded increasingly bitter and outlandish, devoid of reality. In yet another futile letter to Hitler, he claimed to possess documentation on Germany's 'secret weapon' and demanded an end to the extermination of Jews. He would wait for a while for the Führer's reply, he told Stella Szirmay, then offer the plans to Britain.<sup>45</sup> Interviewed by a local Yiddish newspaper at Shanghai's Foreign YMCA where he lived, he described his proposal to settle Jews in China.<sup>46</sup>

Without a viable plan himself, the mysterious circumstances of his death in October, 1943 suggest a plot might have been in the making against him. On one hand, in the summer of that year he mentioned to Stella and others that he was fearing for his life, a suspicion that his friends seem to have dismissed. But in the meantime, reports and correspondence confirm that his lingering presence in occupied Shanghai had become an embarrassment to the Chinese, Japanese and German secret services. His Hungarian birth technically granted him protection as citizen of a country allied with Germany and Japan. But his British, European, American and Chinese affiliations made



him a liability, not to mention his well-documented reputation as a turncoat. Most expats in his position would have fled, by obtaining passage aboard a ship to a friendly port. As for Chao Kung, nobody wanted him anymore.

It seems that at the end, the identity that survived all metamorphoses was the one that nurtured him to life: being a Jew. Nostalgia for his origins twinkles through his last public proclamations including his last letter to Hitler and the YMCA interview. Having repeatedly defied it by converting to various religions and affiliating himself with notorious anti-Semites, his life came to a sad full circle when one day in October, Japanese authorities transferred him to Shanghai's Jewish ghetto in Hongkew. There, Stella Szirmay, who was his companion to the end, saw him for the last time when she brought a requested treat of chicken soup, Hungarian goulash and Tokaji wine to the ghetto's hospital. Under his breath, he repeated his suspicions that he had been poisoned by secret agents. In days he was dead, officially of food poisoning. Contemporary newspapers reported his burial at the Buddhist section of the Shanghai Municipal Cemetery, attended by friends and acquaintances of various nations.<sup>47</sup>

His death, however, did not conclude his meandering story. Whether Ignatius Trebitsch Lincoln was killed by secret agents or died of food poisoning has been subjected to speculations ever since. For decades, historians visited witnesses of his adventurous life, Margaret Markuse and Margaret Trebitsch Lincoln, who opted out of her husband's troubled lifestyle in 1925, and lived a long but eventless life in her native Germany.<sup>48</sup> Sadly, none of those who knew him well witnessed his last years, and those who did had bigger worries.

In less than two years, Japan surrendered to allied forces. In the absence of a unified Chinese government, the Japanese command was stuck with the ongoing responsibility to run the cities they had lost, including Shanghai. In the ensuing chaos, collaborators and evidence vanished.<sup>49</sup> Josef Meisinger surrendered to American forces in Japan in the autumn of 1945, as did several fellow Nazis, but interrogators failed to dispel the mystery surrounding the presence and purpose of SS and Gestapo officers commissioned to the Far East.<sup>50</sup> For years, newspapers circulated accounts of enigmatic German communities existing side-by-side with occupying American forces.<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile, a personal mythology was in the making around Ignatius Trebitsch Lincoln. His infamy and slanderous publications

made him an embodiment of shameless deceit by the time he reached China. Around the time that he met Meisinger, a struggling young writer in Hungary, who published under the pseudonym P. Howard, immortalised him as ‘The Real Trebitsch’, the only thing many Hungarians know about his name. Some connoisseurs of early twentieth-century China associate him, together with his indirect mentor Edmund Backhouse, with characteristics that, though absurdly blown out of proportion, define expat existence in China even today. As we are entering another turbulent period in China’s relations with the outside world, Trebitsch’s two decades there may offer lessons about the mindset of foreigners who reside in China.

One is an essentially amnesiac approach to the past. Like today, many foreigners in Trebitsch’s time settled in China with a hope to start life with a clean slate. Turning the pages of memoirs and reports from nearly a century ago, one notices recurrent narratives among China-based expats. Some take refuge there from failed careers, some hope to start a new chapter using the spoils of a successful previous adventure. Some seek closure to painful experiences, some expect rejuvenation from the culture shock. Then, as now, many foreigners in China were busy re-engineering their identity free from the constraints of the past. Helping their cause is an environment where many are in schizophrenic denial of the past, therefore tolerant of newcomers’ distortions in historical narrative. Despite the nation’s attested history



**Figure 4:** Trebitsch, alias Chao Kung, at a religious conference in Berlin in 1932

of thousands of years, the past is visibly absent in many parts of modern China, and popular ideologies come and go as frequently as buildings. Foreigners in China may choose their own history.

Another intoxicating effect is China's ceaseless spirit of upward mobility. Ask China-based expats how they are doing and hear them describe imminent projects of daring and imagination, probably with life-changing consequences. Now, as in the 1930s, many of those prospective endeavours intend, as historian Jonathan D. Spence brilliantly titled his book, *To Change China*. Harry Steptoe, Max Bauer and Trebitsch fit neatly into a centuries-long tradition of foreigners labouring on the rejuvenation of China's wise traditions by fusing them with modern learning, technology and a sense of destiny imported from their native lands, a movement brilliantly chronicled, in *To Change China* by Jonathan D. Spence, among others.<sup>52</sup> Many find followers among ambitious locals on a corresponding mission to make China great again, or fellow expats eager to play a part in a gigantic saga. Now as before, no proposal is too eccentric for China's expat crowd and their local circles.

Finally, expats on their quest to change China have been convinced that by doing so, they are forging the future of humankind. Nearly a millennium ago, Marco Polo proposed China as a role model of harmonious life and government to his flabbergasted Venetian compatriots. Centuries followed, and with them successive generations of resident foreigners who, having internalised the notions that China was after all the Middle Kingdom between heaven and earth, dreamt of a new global era rising in the East, with them as ambassadors of the future. Sixteenth-century patriarchs Matteo Ricci and Adam Schall hoped for the Catholic Church's redemption from Confucian social mores. Nineteenth-century Sinophiles including Sir George Staunton Junior and Sir Robert Hart envisaged a brave new world of public administration resulting from fusing China's traditional social stability with the West's advanced scientific methods. Today, networking events and corporate brochures featuring involvement with one of China's several global outreach projects echo the fervour of past expats.

As Ignatius Trebitsch Lincoln said:

There are great things happening at present and greater things are in preparation of which most people know nothing, and would scoff if they would. A new epoch is being ushered in, because the old order of things has become bankrupt. We shall presently be living in momentous days. I have been privileged to get a glimpse and initiation of things to come.<sup>53</sup>

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# ZHANG CHONGREN: A CHINESE SCULPTOR AND HIS PART IN HERGÉ'S TINTIN AND THE BLUE LOTUS

BY PAUL BEVAN

## ABSTRACT

*Much has been written about the Chinese artist Zhang Chongren 張充仁 (1907–1998) and his part in the production of Le Lotus Bleu (The Blue Lotus), fifth volume in the series The Adventures of Tintin. It is widely believed that Zhang, who became a close friend of Tintin's creator Georges Remi (1907–1983) – otherwise known as Hergé – provided the calligraphy and some of the additional artwork found in the book. An article written in the 1930s may call into question the full extent of Zhang Chongren's involvement with the production of The Blue Lotus, and whether perhaps Zhang was not the only Chinese student in Belgium to have assisted Remi in its preparation.*

## INTRODUCTION

A version of the received history of *Tintin and the Blue Lotus* tells us how, after an initial discovery of the history and culture of China through the reading of a variety of populist writings, George Remi was assisted in his research by three men, all of whom, to some extent or other, were knowledgeable about China.<sup>1</sup> First, Dom Edouard Neut (1890–1975) a local priest who had missionary connections with China. Second, Lu Zhengxiang (Lou Tseng-Tsiang) 陸徵祥 (1871–1949), a Benedictine monk and former diplomat who went by the name Dom Pierre Célestin. Third, a stalwart of Brussels' Catholic community, L'abbé Leon Gosset, chaplain for Chinese students at the Catholic University of Louvain. In addition to the information provided by these three religious figures, L'abbé Gosset may have introduced Remi to some Chinese students.

This essay focuses on two subjects that have some bearing on Remi's life and work: the important but somewhat neglected sculptor and painter Zhang Chongren, who trained in Belgium in the nineteenth-century French classical style, and the magazine article, 'Bilishi manhuajia Qiaozhi Leimi 比利時名漫畫家喬治勒彌 (The Famous Belgian Cartoonist Georges Remi)' and its significance to the history of the production of *The Blue Lotus*.<sup>2</sup>

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is said that L'abbé Gosset first made contact with Remi because he was concerned that he might be about to present the Chinese nation in a bad light to the Belgian public. Remi's latest Tintin story, which was China themed, was soon to be published in *Le Petit Vingtième*, the children's supplement of the Roman Catholic newspaper *Le Vingtième Siècle*, a magazine that was widely read by Chinese students in Belgium.<sup>a</sup> In order to make certain that Remi's research would remain within the realms of authenticity it is said that L'abbé Gosset introduced Remi to three Chinese students: Zhang Chongren, an art student who was studying at the *Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts* and two others (sometimes described as the Abbé Gosset's students), Arnold Chiao Ch'eng-Chih and his wife Susan Lin. Pierre Assouline, Hergé's biographer, convincingly suggests that Zhang Chongren was persuaded to assist Remi in his work out of respect for their mutual friend, Father Lu Zhengxiang and this does seem to be a likely scenario, as Lu was certainly someone whom Zhang greatly admired and was already an important contact for him in Belgium. For Chinese students studying in Europe, Lu Zhengxiang would have been a well-known figure, not least because of the central part he had played in the negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. As for Arnold Chiao and Susan Lin, they will be discussed below.

Through regular meetings with Zhang it is said that Remi learned about the nature of the Chinese writing system and was also introduced to a variety of other aspects of Chinese art and culture.<sup>b</sup> The importance of these meetings to Remi and his work is not in question and there is much source material, in the form of correspondence and other documentary evidence that attests to the extent of Zhang's support.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the character "Chang" a young boy who appears in both the *Blue Lotus* and *Tintin in Tibet* is most certainly based on Zhang Chongren, showing how much the young Chinese student really meant to Remi. In fact, so important was he to Remi that their meeting has even been reckoned to have been one of the four major events in his life.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, it must be understood that Zhang Chongren, Arnold

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a It appeared in *Le Vingtième Siècle* between 9 August 1934 and 17 October 1935 and was published in book form in 1936.

b Zhang is said to have spent every Sunday afternoon over the period of a year with Remi. See Benoit Peeters and Tina A. Kover, *Hergé, Son of Tintin* (John Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 75.

Ch'iao and Susan Lin were not the only Chinese students in Belgium known to Remi during the mid-1930s.

#### THE ARTICLE IN *YONGSHENG* MAGAZINE

Zhu Mei 朱梅 (1909–1991), author of the article ‘The Famous Belgian Cartoonist Georges Remi’ and onetime student of the brewing and wine making industry in Belgium, also got to meet the creator of Tintin, and Remi clearly made a deep impression on him. Zhu Mei’s article throws new light on this well-known Sino-Belgian collaboration. It is dated 25 February 1936 and was written whilst Zhu was living in Belgium.



**Figure 1:** Georges Remi and Zhang Chongren in 1935 (<https://www.smartshanghai.com/wire/shopping/the-first-official-tintin-shop-is-opened-in-shanghai>)

In Belgium, if the name of Georges Remi is mentioned, there will be almost no one who has not heard of him, and certainly, in that country there is not a child who does not adore the main character in his cartoons – Tintin. After I arrived in Belgium, people would frequently mention Remi to me, and I would often see his cartoon books on bookstalls. I really hoped that I would get the opportunity to pay a visit to this “Children’s Uncle”.<sup>5</sup>

Zhu did indeed get the opportunity to visit Remi and was pleasantly surprised to find him a youthful, attractive and friendly man:

Before meeting him I had imagined him to be a rather older man, as, generally speaking, those who are both young and famous are rarely seen in Europe. Who would have thought it! Contrary to my expectations, Remi is only about 30 years old. He has a long slender face, lively eyes and a warm and genuine manner. He is not in the slightest

bit aloof, so, even on first meeting, one gets the feeling that he is a close friend.<sup>6</sup>

Zhu's lengthy article introduces all the work of the Belgian cartoonist up to the time. The majority of this information is well known today and simply includes descriptions of his work and synopses of the Tintin stories thus far written. However, the first of many pieces of information that make this article of real interest to the historian is the fact that Zhu Mei states that he introduced two of his Chinese friends to Remi.

[...] The time when I saw him most and got closest to him was after I had returned to Belgium. At that time, because Mr. and Mrs. Jiao Juyin had come to Belgium in order to visit the theatres there, I made special arrangements to introduce them to him.<sup>7</sup>

“Mr and Mrs Jiao Juyin” are none other than the above-mentioned Arnold Chiao Ch'eng-Chih and Susan Lin. At this time Chiao Ch'eng-Chih (Jiao Chengzhi) 焦承志 (1905–1975), better known as Jiao Juyin 焦菊隱, and his wife Lin Sushan 林素珊 (?–1954), were visiting Belgium from Paris, where Jiao was studying for a PhD at the *Faculté des lettres de L'université de Paris*.<sup>6</sup> Even when he left China in spring 1935, at the age of 30, Jiao was a central figure in China's theatre world as a moderniser of traditional Chinese drama.<sup>8</sup> He went to Europe after taking the bold step of resigning from his job as the head of the prestigious *Zhonghua xiqu zhuanke xuexiao* 中華戲曲專科學校 (Chinese [Opera] Drama Training School), and putting his work as a filmmaker on hold.<sup>9</sup> Contrary to what is often suggested, neither Jiao Juyin nor Lin Sushan were studying in Belgium; nor were they under the pastoral care of L'abbé Gosset. Indeed, Zhu Mei clearly states that it was he who brought them together; the meeting having taken place after he ‘had returned to Belgium’ – that is, sometime after October 1935, at a time when Zhang Chongren had long since left the country. From what Zhu writes at the time, he was evidently quite close to Remi.

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c Jiao Juyin's PhD dissertation was entitled *Jinri zhi zhongguo xiju* 今日之中國戲劇 (Chinese Theatre Today) and was awarded in 1938.

Most recently he is in the process of publishing a detective cartoon. I made the suggestion that it would really be most appropriate to make a cartoon about the Italy-Abyssinia incident. He said he would think about it after he had finished the cartoon he was working on.<sup>10</sup>

The “detective cartoon” Remi was working on at the time was almost certainly *The Broken Ear* (*L’Oreille Cassée*), published in serial form from 1935–1937. It seems that Remi might not have completely ignored Zhu’s suggestion, as, although the main story revolves around South America, the original 1930s version of *The Broken Ear* begins with Tintin sitting in the bath, listening to a radio report about the Italian invasion of (what was then) Abyssinia, in which two conflicting versions of events are announced: the Italians, under General Pirelli, and Abyssinians led by Ras Zumba (both fictional characters), each claiming a major victory over their opponent.<sup>d</sup>

Zhu continues to show his admiration for Remi:

He is a bold and clever artist and his work is noble and humane, I hope that in the future someone will introduce his art to China, it would certainly be welcomed by China’s children.<sup>11</sup>

According to Zhu’s article, Remi was fascinated by Chinese culture and hoped to travel to China sometime in the future. However, Remi’s visit to that country and the official introduction of the Tintin books to Chinese-speaking countries was something that would have to wait for quite some time. It is interesting to note, though, that in 1939, not long after its first publication, a copy of *The Blue Lotus* came into the hands of the head of the Nationalist Party propaganda machine Hollington K. Tong (Dong Xianguang 董顯光) (1887–1971) who passed it on to Song Meiling 宋美齡 – Madame Chiang Kai-shek (1898–2003).<sup>12</sup> Song Meiling, was apparently so taken with the book that she invited Remi to China, though at this time he was unable to accept the offer due to the war and his publishing commitments in Belgium.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence Tintin did not become widely known in

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d This scene does not appear in the 1947 edition. Wikia: The Home of Fandom.  
[http://tintinandsnowy.wikia.com/wiki/The\\_Broken\\_Ear](http://tintinandsnowy.wikia.com/wiki/The_Broken_Ear)

China until much later in the century. In Taiwan, beginning in 1978, twelve volumes of the Tintin adventures were translated into Chinese and were published and distributed in collaboration with Casterman, the Belgian publishers. In 1980, in mainland China, small black-and-white pirated copies could be found in circulation (possibly based on the Taiwan versions) but the first “legal versions” were not published there until 2001.<sup>14</sup> The initial publication of the Tintin books in Taiwan followed a visit that Remi and his wife made there in April 1973.<sup>15</sup>

Back in the 1930s, in addition to his article on Tintin, Zhu Mei wrote a number of other pieces for Chinese magazines while he was abroad: one on the Brussels World Exposition of 1933 (perhaps written at the time, but not published until 1935) for the magazine *Xinsheng* 新生 (New Life), and others during 1936 and 1937 for *Qingnianjie* 青年界 (Realm of Youth), including a travelogue concerning his impressions on his return journey from Europe to China via Singapore.<sup>e</sup>

But what of the life of Zhu Mei, this young Chinese man who wrote about Remi and Tintin so early on? What little that can be pieced together of his background is as follows. He worked in Singapore in 1929 as a journalist for the newspaper *Kwong Wah Yit Poh* 光華日報 (*Guanghua ribao*) before leaving for Europe for the first time. From 1932–1934 he studied in Brussels at the *Guoli fajiao gongye xueyuan* and at the *Huangjia xiashi* brewery. At some point in 1935 he left Europe and after a three month sojourn in Singapore returned to China, where he began work as director of factory affairs at the Yantai Brewery (in what was then Cheefoo), Shandong province, and as Assistant Technical Manager of the Changyu Company.<sup>16</sup> By 1936, sometime before 25 February when he wrote his article on Remi, he had returned to Europe, and at the firm’s request, visited Italy, Switzerland, Britain, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, France and Belgium, in order to discover more about wine and beer making. At this time he also carried out research at the Pasteur Institute.<sup>f</sup>

An understanding of the life of Zhang Chongren, the main Chinese figure in this paper, is also of central importance for an

e Zhu Mei’s published articles include: “Bulu’ersai shijie zhanlanhui kaimu 布魯塞爾世界展覽會開幕 (The Opening of the Brussels World Exposition)” in *Xinsheng* 新生 vol. 2 no. 21 (15 June 1935), pp. 429–420; “Biguo yinxiang 比國印象 (Impressions of Belgium)” in *Qingnianjie* 青年界 (Realm of Youth) vol. 10 no. 4 (November 1936); and *Cong Bilishi dao Xingjiapo* 從比利時到星加坡 (From Belgium to Singapore), which appeared serially in *Qingnianjie* vol. 11 nos. 1–5.

f This account suggests that Zhu left Europe in the spring of 1935, whereas it is known from Zhu’s own writings that he remained in Europe (leaving Belgium for three months to stay in “a neighbouring country”) until at least the autumn of that year.

appreciation of how Zhang first got to meet Remi and the extent of their collaboration in the production of the *Blue Lotus*. It is possible to write his story largely because of the existence of a lengthy article by Fu Weixin that appeared in the Taiwanese magazine *Yishujia* 藝術家 (“Artist”) in two parts in 2002. To my knowledge, Fu’s article is the most comprehensive account of Zhang’s life to date, and was made possible due to the help of Zhang Chongren’s daughter, who supplied Fu with his diaries, letters, contemporary newspaper clippings and other documents.<sup>17</sup>

### ZHANG CHONGREN

Zhang Chongren was born into a Catholic family of traditional Chinese-medicine practitioners in 1907 and was christened Mathieu. For financial reasons Zhang’s father was compelled to turn to carving wooden panels and his mother to working as a seamstress, specialising in Suzhou-style embroidery. When he was about five years of age Zhang’s mother died. Thereafter, he attended the École Saint Louis, the Catholic primary school in Shanghai’s Xujiahui district, near to the family home. There he excelled in art and was later taught the French language. From the age of fourteen he attended classes in photography at the Tushanwan Studio at the Jesuit orphanage in Shanghai.<sup>18</sup> Since the mid-nineteenth century, the orphanage had been known for its art studio where instruction was given to students in various aspects of Western art (the first institution in China to have provided such a training).

By the early twentieth century the school was sending the artwork of selected students to be exhibited at international exhibitions in Paris (1900) and San Francisco (1915).<sup>19</sup> Zhang’s training at this institution was in the area of photography and print making techniques but at the same time he learned to paint and continued his studies in the French language.<sup>20</sup> In his painting studies he is likely to have followed the same strict regime of copying religious and classical subjects as the orphans in the studios, and this will have set him on course to becoming what he was in adult life – an accomplished artist in the academic style. Having graduated from school, at the age of eighteen, for a short time he designed stage scenery for a small theatrical troupe that performed the new *Wenmingxi* 文明戲 (Civilized Drama) – Western-style spoken drama introduced to China from Japan. After this, he worked as an artist in a film studio but finding it didn’t suit him, began work as

editor for the pictorial supplement of the Shanghai newspaper *Shibao* 時報 ('Eastern Times'). He then moved on to join the editorial board of *Tuhua ribao* 圖畫日報 (Illustrated Daily News).

In his spare time Zhang was a member of the *Zhonghua shiying xiehui* (Chinese Photography Association). He was able to gain the necessary introductions to those who would make his study in Europe possible due to the help of his friend and fellow association member, the prolific and pioneering photographer Lang Jingshan 郎靜山 (1892–1995). Zhang was introduced by Lang to the influential government official and amateur photographer, Chu Minyi 褚民誼 (1884–1946). Due to Zhang's position on the editorial board of *Tuhua ribao* he was able to get one of Chu's photographs published in the newspaper and as a return favour, Chu – who was among those responsible for the distribution of scholarships to Belgium – helped Zhang to apply for a scholarship.<sup>21</sup> He was further assisted in this by Wang Jingqi 王景岐 (Wang King-Ky 1882–1941), former ambassador to Belgium, and by a distant relative on his mother's side – the influential Jesuit priest and scholar Ma Xiangbo 馬相伯 (1840–1939) – who would also be an important contact for Zhang on his return to China in 1935.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that a little later Lang Jingshan's daughter, Lang Yuxiu 郎毓秀 (1918–2012) went to Belgium to study Western classical singing and may well have taken a similar route to the one Zhang took in obtaining her scholarship.<sup>22</sup>

Zhang Chongren left Shanghai on 18 September 1931. At the *Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts* in Brussels he initially studied oil painting under Alfred Bastien (1873–1955), winning several prizes before moving on in 1932 to specialise in sculpture, on the recommendation of Égide Rombaux (1865–1942). With letters of introduction from Ma Xiangbo he was introduced to two major figures in Belgium's Chinese community, the aforementioned Father Lu Zhengxiang, and the former ambassador to Belgium, Wei Chenzu 魏宸組 (1885–1942). It was apparently Lu Zhengxiang who suggested to Zhang that he keep a diary while in Belgium and he presented him with a finely bound journal to be used for that purpose.<sup>h</sup> Zhang's journal was found amongst his belongings after his death and was used extensively by Fu Weixin in the writing of Zhang's biography. As

g Ma Xiangbo was involved in the founding of the Catholic institutions Aurora University and Fudan University (both in Shanghai), and Furen University in Beijing. For more on Ma see Ruth Hayhoe and Yongling Lu (eds.), *Ma Xiangbo and the Mind of Modern China 1840–1939* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

h In return, Zhang gave Lu Zhengxiang a statuette of Saint Francis Xavier that he had sculpted.



mentioned above, it was another Catholic priest L'abbé Gosset who introduced Zhang to George Remi but Zhang is likely to have accepted the invitation to help on the *Blue Lotus* specifically out of respect for Lu Zhengxiang who was both a major figure in the Catholic community and a personal friend of Remi.

After graduating in June 1935, Zhang left Belgium on the first day of August, having sent his art work on ahead to China.<sup>23</sup> He toured Europe, leaving his final destination, Italy, on 11 October and arriving in Shanghai on 4 November. A one-man exhibition mounted in Shanghai was widely advertised in art magazines and newspapers and took place at the Alliance Française at 11 Route Vallon in Shanghai's French Concession from 22 February 1936 until 1 March.<sup>24</sup> It was organised under the auspices of Ma Xiangbo, who had helped him obtain his scholarship in the first place, and Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), formerly China's foremost educationalist (by then retired); as well as the Belgian Embassy, and the Sino-Belgian Friendship Association. Many luminaries in the 1930s art world attended the exhibition, including the ubiquitous Chinese Opera star Mei Lanfang, and the most celebrated of establishment painters Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 (1895–1953) and Liu Haisu 劉海粟 (1896–1994). Visitors such as these wrote calligraphic inscriptions in celebration of the exhibition and Zhang's achievements.<sup>25</sup> An inscription by Liu Haisu reads: 'Brother Chongren has the ability to express the anguish of mankind in marble, and in coloured pigment he can communicate the secrets of nature.'

There was not even a nod towards popular culture in any of the exhibits in Zhang's exhibition, or indeed in the work with which he was engaged following his return to China. This was despite the widespread popularity of cartoons and cartoon strips among all echelons of Shanghai society at this time.<sup>i</sup> Although Zhang Chongren's involvement with Tintin would have been the only work he would undertake in the field of popular art (with the possible exception of his work as editor of *Tuhua ribao* in 1928), he will almost certainly have been aware of cartoons all around him in Shanghai, partly due to the popularity of features such as the comic strip *Wang Xiansheng* 王先生 (Mr. Wang) by Ye Qianyu 葉淺予 (1907–1995), which began to appear in the magazine *Shanghai manhua* (Shanghai Sketch) as far

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i It is interesting to note that George Remi is known to have had been influenced by the American comic strip *Bringing Up Father* by George McManus, which had also been a major influence for Ye Qianyu and his *Wang Xiansheng* 王先生 (Mr Wang), some years before.

back as 1928. In China, the year 1934 had been dubbed *Zazhinian* 雜誌年 (The Year of the Magazine), due to the widespread publication of magazines (including many cartoon magazines), and the previous year, 1933, was known as *Youmonian* (The Year of Humour) – two reasons why the cartoon was particularly prevalent in Shanghai in the mid-1930s.<sup>26</sup> The exhibits in Zhang's exhibition showed no connection whatsoever to this widespread fascination with humour, but included traditional European oil paintings, watercolours and charcoal drawings, as well as sculptures in plaster and bronze. News items concerning the exhibition (most of which appear in magazines in the form of captioned images), show several of these works, plus medals for the prizes Zhang won during his time in Belgium.<sup>27</sup>

Zhang wrote to Remi in August 1937 to inform him of the success of the exhibition and his future plans for a studio that he had recently opened.<sup>28</sup> Zhang had established this teaching and work studio in April 1936 with the proceeds from his Shanghai exhibition. The opening of the studio was again endorsed by Cai Yuanpei and Ma Xiangbo, together with the Mayor of Shanghai, Wu Tiecheng 吳鐵城 (1893–1953). The studio, which ranged over three floors, was a considerable success and Zhang ran it continuously for thirty years, from 1936 to 1966, even throughout the period of the war (1937–1949).<sup>29</sup> He taught for two days of the week (Tuesday and Friday) and the remaining time he was able to devote to his own work. Zhang's second exhibition was held at the YMCA where a selection of his paintings and sculptures were exhibited alongside those of his students.<sup>30</sup> A small selection of his paintings from the exhibition appeared in *Liangyou huabao* in June 1941, even as the magazine itself was becoming more heavily weighted towards current affairs and politics as the war continued.<sup>31</sup> These paintings (reproduced in black and white) show European scenes, and may be further examples of the paintings he produced whilst touring Europe in 1935–36.

The selection of busts of famous figures that he sculpted during the period before the founding of the People's Republic (1949) is impressive, and includes those of: Ma Xiangbo; the "Christian General" and warlord, Feng Yuxiang; top political figures such as Yu Youren and Chiang Kai-shek (in 1945); the then US Ambassador to China, John Leighton Stuart (1947); Robert Jacquinet de Besange, the Jesuit missionary responsible for the establishment of the International Safety Zone in Nanjing during the 1937 massacre; and the artists Wu

Hufan (c. 1948) and Qi Baishi (1946).<sup>32</sup> After sitting for his bust, Qi Baishi, by that time eighty-six years old and one of the most respected painters in China, wrote a commemorative calligraphic inscription in which he refers to Zhang as a “Master Sculptor.”<sup>33</sup>

#### ZHU MEI MEETS GEORGES REMI

Returning to Zhu Mei’s 1936 article, armed with more knowledge as to who Zhang Chongren and Zhu Mei actually were, the story of Remi and the *Blue Lotus* continues. Perhaps the most important piece of information in Zhu Mei’s article concerns his first meeting with Remi, which took place just weeks before Zhang Chongren set off on his European tour and his subsequent return to China:

Last July [1935], by the most fortunate of circumstances, when my friend Mr. Zhang Chongren – who had been studying sculpture at the art academy – came to my house to say his farewells before returning to China, he asked me if I would help him with something. This was to take on the task in his stead of writing any Chinese characters that might be required in the story that Remi was in the process of writing, in which the main character in his books, Tintin, goes to China. I promptly agreed and the following day Zhang took me to Remi’s house[...]<sup>34</sup>

Having agreed to take on the task, Zhu Mei was obliged to leave Belgium for a while:

Most regrettably, not long after I met him, due to the vacation period, I had to leave Belgium, and stayed in a neighbouring country for more than three months[...]<sup>35</sup>

From Zhu’s account, and other available information, we can be sure of the following: Zhu Mei was introduced to Georges Remi by Zhang Chongren just before Zhang left Belgium for China, and was asked to assist Remi with the artwork in his latest book. This was also shortly before Zhu Mei had to leave Belgium for a period of three months, and, although he accepted the task offered to him by Remi, he was unable to carry it out. It was on his return to Brussels that Zhu Mei introduced the drama theorist Jiao Juyin and his wife Lin Sushan to Remi. With

all this in mind, one question that remains unanswered is who exactly assisted Remi in putting the final China-related touches to his latest story? Although it is vaguely possible that the ‘Tintin story Remi was in the process of writing,’ as related by Zhu, was not *The Blue Lotus* at all, but another story altogether, this does seem most unlikely, and it surely must be assumed that *The Blue Lotus* was the story being spoken of in the article. Nevertheless, there are three questions that still need to be answered. First, did Zhu Mei have any input into Remi’s work, either after their first meeting, or following his return to Belgium in late 1935? It seems from Zhu’s own account that this was not the case but there is still a slim possibility that he did get involved in some way or other. Second, due to the fact that Zhu could apparently not take on the task, was Zhang able to finish the work before the first day of August when he left Belgium? Zhang may have had as many as three or four weeks to carry out the required work and might have been able to find time to do it before leaving. Third, did Remi find another Chinese student, unnamed and at this stage of the research unidentifiable, to do the Chinese writing and related art work for him? There is a strong possibility that this might have been the case as there were many other Chinese students resident in Brussels. For example, the painter Wu Zuoren, who studied in Brussels, graduated the same year as Zhang Chongren; Zhang was also friendly with Wu Bochao (1903–1949), then a conducting student in Brussels<sup>36</sup> and Jiao Juyin and Lin Sushan remained in Europe until 1937/8 (although they didn’t live in Belgium); others, like the singer Lang Yuxiu (previously mentioned in connection with her father Lang Jingshan) even remained in Belgium until the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939.<sup>37</sup>

Questions as to who in Belgium’s Chinese community did what for the book, may in the end prove academic, as, whatever the history of the making of *The Blue Lotus* during the 1930s, it was to be extensively revised in the 1940s. Following the war in Europe – a turbulent time for Remi due to the accusations of Nazi collaboration that were aimed at him – the Tintin books were amended and in 1945 *The Blue Lotus* underwent extensive revisions. Remi was again helped by L’abbé Gosset who was able to recommend a “translator-illustrator” who apparently “corrected” the Chinese text on the posters, shop signs, walls, and shopfronts in the background. Furthermore, at this time the book was condensed from the 124 page black-and-white version to one of sixty-two pages and much of the beginning of the story was

entirely redrawn.<sup>38</sup> This information is crucial to our understanding and reception of the modern editions of the *Blue Lotus*. The different editions of the book show significant variation and both the 1930s and the 1940s versions contain some rather badly written Chinese characters. It is unlikely that Zhang Chongren, who had learned calligraphy in Shanghai from Ma Xiangbo as a youth – someone with such a fastidious painting style – would have rendered Chinese characters in such an unconvincing manner. Perhaps they had been copied and inserted into the cells by Remi or his Belgian assistants using tracing paper or other reproduction method. Complicating matters even further, several of the backgrounds Zhang is alleged to have helped draw for the 1930s version of the cartoon strip are not those that appear in the versions we read today. In these instances it is clear that at least one additional hand has been involved in the alterations, no doubt largely the responsibility of the stand-in brought in by Remi through L'abbé Gosset, although it is also possible that some changes were made by Remi himself, or by one of his team.

This is not the place for a complete analysis of the Chinese calligraphy that appears in *The Blue Lotus* but a few brief examples, illustrating some of the major differences between the two editions, will demonstrate just how much the modern edition and the 1930s originals differ from one another. Perhaps the most obvious differences are to be found in the three large-scale scenes of public places, full of shop signs, advertisements and other notices in Chinese, which are found on pages 6, 26 and 45 of the modern colour edition.<sup>39</sup>

#### **A cell showing Tintin in a rickshaw**

The brightly coloured shop signs seen in the later version do not appear in the black-and-white version and although the (fictitious) road name is the same in both: Pubin Lu 浦濱路 (Pubin Road), the content of the cells are markedly different.<sup>40</sup>

#### **A scene showing a queue of Chinese people having their identity papers checked by Japanese soldiers as they pass through the city gates**

In the original there are no Chinese characters to be seen (apart from those on Tintin's "wanted" poster on the wall), but, in the modern colour version, a large

number of notices and shop signs (some complete; some fragmentary) can be seen.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Thom[p]son Twins in Manchu costume**

The large number of fragmentary shop signs seen in the later version are not present in the 1930s edition (apart from three minute Chinese characters seen in the far distance).<sup>42</sup>

With all three examples it is likely that the Chinese characters, many of them rather incongruous in the context, were directly copied from other instances in the book where they appear, and then incorporated into the newer version by the “translator-illustrator” or other art assistant. In addition, there are even problems with some the characters in the early version, where in some instances the quality of the calligraphy is so poor that it must have been copied by someone with little, or no knowledge of how Chinese characters are written.<sup>43</sup>

A number of other additions appear in the later version that are not in the original at all. For example, the three characters on page 11 of the 1946 version *dian you hao* 電友好 (You Hao District Electricity) do not appear in the original, and a few cells further on, in a scene showing an ambulance careering through the streets, the shop signs in the background are only found in the later version.<sup>44</sup> Another example concerns the *duilian*, hanging scrolls, which appear in cells 1, 3, 8 and 9 of page 18 in the colour version. These characters, written in a version of “clerical script,” appear in the black-and-white original in a more fragmentary form and, in some cells, do not appear at all.<sup>45</sup> The characters in the more “complete” versions found in the 1946 edition were no doubt directly copied from previous cells in which they appear. They have been extremely poorly copied and contain obvious errors, again, this must be the result of an artist who had little understanding of Chinese calligraphy, using tracing paper or other method to copy them.

In short, there are many anomalies between the two versions and much of what is seen in the later version will have little to do with what may have been originally supplied by Zhang Chongren. The most likely scenario is that (rather than entering the characters into the artwork itself) Zhang may have supplied calligraphic examples to Remi who – either personally or by delegation – copied the characters

into the individual cells. It is of course a possibility that some of the original characters, as they appear in the earliest editions, were executed by Zhang, although perhaps it is safest to assume that Zhang taught Remi the principles of how to write Chinese characters and provided examples which were copied by Remi and his team. Apart from any practical help he might have offered, perhaps most crucially, Zhang's input was as a spiritual guide and inspiration, introducing Remi, however rudimentarily, to the principles of Chinese art, culture and philosophy. Perhaps it is this that should be seen as his main contribution to Remi's work.

Introducing an element of doubt into the received history of Zhang Chongren and *Tintin and the Blue Lotus*, two other Chinese figures known to Remi have been introduced in this paper: Zhu Mei and Jiao Juyin. These individuals became highly influential in their own fields of expertise on their return to China.

The drama theorist Jiao Juyin has entered Tintin mythology erroneously, as a student under the guidance of L'abbé Gosset. In the world of theatre Arnold Jiao Juyin became a major figure. After his return to China he directed plays by the giants of new left-wing theatre Xia Yan 夏衍 (1900–1995) and Cao Yu 曹禺 (1910–1996) and became deeply involved in *Huaju* 話劇 (Spoken Drama) – successor to the aforementioned *Wenmingxi*. At this time he wrote several books on the theatre and made translations of the novels of Maxim Gorky and Émile Zola. Jiao was also the first to mount a Chinese version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and later adapted *Romeo and Juliet* as a Peking Opera. Following the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Jiao became one of China's major drama theorists and directors, taking great inspiration from the Russian Soviet theorist Constantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938).<sup>46</sup>

Unlike Jiao, Zhu Mei has not previously been mentioned in Tintin studies. Having studied brewing and wine making in Europe, he became China's first and foremost wine expert. It is interesting to note that neither he, nor Jiao, appear in Fu Weixin's biography, the most comprehensive account of the life and work Zhang Chongren available to date.

#### THE WORK OF ZHANG CHONGREN

The story of Zhang Chongren's contribution to Remi's work has been much discussed in the past, but what is less known in the West is his

importance in the history of sculpture and academic art in China following his homecoming in 1935. Even by the late 1950s Zhang was evidently still proud of some of the work he produced during his Belgian period and books of his work published in later decades demonstrate this with the inclusion of a selection of his early work within their pages. Zhang is best known for his output as a sculptor, but one book of his work published in 1958 shows a selection of watercolours. One impressive example of his painting found in the book, *Weinisi shuixiang: Yidali fengjing* 威尼斯水巷：意大利風景 (Venetian Canal: Italian Scene) was a featured exhibit at his 1936 Shanghai exhibition and appeared in the publicity for the show. This had been painted by Zhang on the final stop-off on his European tour before his return to China.<sup>47</sup>

Zhang's early sculptural work is also represented in a dedicated volume published two years later in 1960. In this book can be seen a sculpture that was originally crafted in the strict French academic style, that in later years took on what might be described as more "Chinese" characteristics. Originally, in 1936, this work appeared as a depiction of a European female nude with the Chinese title, *Linfeng* 臨風 (Facing the Wind), but by the late 1950s it had undergone something of a metamorphosis. Now called *Qingxi* (Clear Stream), the nude had transformed into a figure with distinctive Chinese facial features, a rather more muscular physique, and the addition of a judiciously placed towel covering her nether regions.<sup>48</sup> The version in this book, and the other seen in a photograph in the magazine *Liangyou*, are both plaster studies but another version in bronze, cast in 1946, shows slight differences again to the two plaster versions, though already by this date the cloth and muscular physique can be seen.<sup>49</sup> When the nude appeared in *Liangyou* in 1936, nudity was widespread in Shanghai print media, often seen in the form of art photography features by both professionals and amateurs in magazines and newspapers, but during the war and certainly by the 1950s this had become anathema to the increasingly prudish Chinese authorities. Early on in its history, a photographic reproduction of the sculpture had made an appearance, even before the opening of Zhang's exhibition. In the December 1935/January 1936 issue of the magazine *Furenhuabao* 婦人畫報 ('The Women's Pictorial') a photograph of the sculpture appeared in an article about the new type of beauty to which the modern Chinese woman should aspire. Zhang is rightly credited as the artist in the magazine but the



title of the sculpture is simply given as “Sculpture – Human Body.”<sup>50</sup>

*Yufu zhi qi* 漁夫之妻 (The Fisherman’s Wife), another sculpture that appeared in a photographic spread in *Liangyou*, also finds a place in the later published *Selected Sculptures of Zhang Chongren* – over twenty-five years after it was first created during Zhang’s first years of study in Belgium. A number of other sculptures in the book, though, reflect the heavily politicised direction that art had taken since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and how Zhang had sought to adapt to it. The preface points out that most of Zhang’s early work, as seen in the book, was in the form of figures and portraits, but after “Liberation” in 1949, it proclaims: “with the boost given to the policy on art and literature by the Communist Party and Mao Zedong, Zhang Chongwen’s work underwent a distinct transformation and development from the point of view of both subject matter and creative methods.”<sup>51</sup> Although it has been said that Zhang was “very much out-of-step with the Communist art world”<sup>52</sup> it is clear that he made at least some attempt to conform to Communist Party ideals. His lack of success in this is no doubt the main reason he was to remain largely unrecognised during the first three decades of the People’s Republic of China. Sculptures by Zhang with typical Chinese themes of the period, such as *Jiefang* 解放 (Liberation) and *Fengshou* 豐收 (Abundant Harvest) – the latter ironically appearing in a book published during the three years of famine that were the result of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) – demonstrate Zhang’s nod towards overtly politicised themes. As mentioned by Julia F. Andrews, who interviewed Zhang in Paris in 1990, he had hoped to participate in the production of the Beijing Monument to the People’s Heroes in Tian’anmen Square but the commission went to the French-trained sculptor and establishment figure Liu Kaiqu (1904–1993).<sup>53</sup> An example of the type of work that Zhang might have produced for such a commission can be seen in his 1960 published collection with his *Youjidui yingxiong Sun Yuming* 游擊隊英雄孫玉敏 (Hero of the Guerrilla Unit, Sun Yumin) and a study for a large-scale memorial: *Wuchan jieji geming chuanzao zhonghua renmin gongheguo* 無產階級革命創造中華人民共和國 (The Proletarian Revolution Creates the People’s Republic of China).<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, in Fu Weixin’s account, the latter is given the title *Renmin yingxiong ji’nianta* (Memorial Tower to the People’s Heroes) and it is possible that this was the study Zhang originally submitted to the judging panel for the Tian’anmen

Square monument.<sup>55</sup> These heroic statues, heavily influenced by Soviet Socialist Realism, fit well into the call to combine Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism that was propagated in early 1958.<sup>56</sup> Zhang's training in the academic style was able to adapt itself well to this, although, following the founding of the People's Republic, he did not gain the recognition he deserved due to his lack of political engagement. It is clear that Zhang had at least made an attempt to adapt his style to the requirements of the new regime, but because of his lack of active engagement in politics he was frequently passed over in favour of others.

Having been highly successful in his career before 1949, after the founding of the PRC, Zhang Chongren began to fade into the background. In 1966, at the start of the Cultural Revolution, he suffered terribly at the hands of the Red Guard and the majority of his works were destroyed or confiscated as evidence of his crimes as an imperialist and capitalist reactionary. During this time he was sent to work in the countryside and was put to work as a cleaner in a steelworks. As was the case with so many of his generation, he was only rehabilitated following the death of Mao Zedong, which brought the Cultural Revolution to an end, and the opening up of China to the world, which followed at the end of the decade. Even then, he remained largely unrecognised in China and it was only after he began to receive recognition in Belgium and France that the Chinese authorities started to see his case in a different light.

It is ironic that an artist with such a prodigious talent, who had fallen out of favour following the founding of the PRC, should be resurrected in China only because of his fame in Europe and, even more so, that his fame in the West rested on his part in the production of a cartoon strip, something which he may well have seen as a minor part of his career – if he thought of his involvement with the Tintin story in those terms at all. It is indeed a great shame to think that in later years, recognition came to Zhang due to his part in something that actually had very little to do with his overall output as an artist. Whether or not one appreciates Zhang's sculptural *oeuvre* from an artistic point of view – with its somewhat conservative nature and the romantic flavour of his French-style academic training – it cannot be denied that he should be recognised primarily for this part of his output, rather than for the relatively minor part he played in the production of a comic book.

It was only after he had made the decision to take up residence in Europe later in life, where he was given recognition in France and Belgium for his contributions as a sculptor, that he was recognised in China. Furthermore, although Zhang's part in the production of *The Blue Lotus* is the achievement for which he is widely remembered globally, Chinese biographies of Zhang often do not mention this part of his life at all.

This essay has called into question whether Zhang was the only Chinese student to have been involved in the work on *The Blue Lotus* during the 1930s. Although much of the evidence points towards Zhang providing the artwork – or at least the material on which it was based – it is equally likely that another individual was responsible for putting the final touches to it in 1935. It is certainly the case that what we see today in the modern colour version is largely the work of another hand altogether, who was responsible for the revisions made following WWII. To my knowledge, in the 1980s, Zhang did not question the authenticity of the work said to have been produced by him in the 1930s, but this may not be all that significant, as it would certainly have been embarrassing for Zhang to deny the involvement he was being given credit for, and any such denial would certainly have put his friend Remi in a difficult position. A certain amount of uncertainty notwithstanding, the Chinese characters thought by many to have been written by Zhang Chongren in *The Blue Lotus* remain a constant source of fascination to the worldwide community of Tintin fans.

The larger story of Zhang Chongren and George Remi was one of many facets – a labyrinthine tale of two friends, who, having once collaborated on an iconic children's book, became separated geographically, by war and the political divide that separated Europe and China – during which time they continued to create their own very different forms of art before finally meeting again in Europe in the 1980s. This is a story that invites further and continued investigation, as a notable interlude in the history of Chinese art in the twentieth century, and as an example of an important transcultural collaboration that took place between China and Europe before the founding of the People's Republic of China.

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# REHAB FOR OPIUM: WAS THE “OPIUM PLAGUE” JUST A MORAL PANIC OR AN ADDICTION TO A NARRATIVE?

BY DANNY PARROTT

## ABSTRACT

*The notion that an opium plague brought China to its knees over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century is well established; it is one of few topics where academics and sinologists find themselves sharing views with the orthodox founding narrative of the CCP. Well ground views like this are usually ripe for some re-examination, so with the help of Frank Dikötter et al's revisionist polemic and analysis of a few key contemporary sources, I will discuss whether it is true that China was beset by an opium plague, or whether this whole notion is just a nonsense that has arisen out of nationalist mythologising, conservative protestant missionary anxieties and moral panic. I will discuss whether a moral panic has built up around this topic and explore what misconceptions may have arisen with regards to opium and why they have occurred.*

## INTRODUCTION

I decided to explore this topic earlier this year, after Professor Robert Bickers delivered a talk for RASBJ's Zoom series<sup>1</sup> about his work as the official historian of the Swire corporation/*hong*. In my experience, whenever one of the *hongs* comes up in conversation, opium is always on the tip of someone's tongue, so it felt inevitable that during the Q&A session that followed, Bickers would be asked what he thought about his patron's history as a drug dealer. Apart from the actual content of the question, it was an interesting one because it reveals quite a lot about the assumptions we make nowadays about opium and the history of China. Questions like this tend to feel rhetorical rather than inquisitive, there is always an element to them that could be paraphrased as '*Swire has sinned and needs to be shamed, we all know what happened, so how do you account for it as their employee?*' It was a tricky question for Bickers to address about his patron, but he handled it well, noting that while Swire wasn't a trader, their ships were equipped to carry opium because, as he said, back then opium was a "a normal commodity", and 'nobody in their right mind would design a



ship without opium/bullion safes'. Bickers then counterpoised, 'refined sugar consumption since 1880s has probably caused far greater than the damage ever done by opium. I wonder could this one day be as powerfully offensive as opium?'

Bickers' interesting argument and comparisons encouraged me to undertake further reading, and as I read around the topic I was fascinated to see how something that was once considered so normal, even promoted by leading medical thinkers in its day, could now be seen as such an offensive taboo topic. Any research into the history of opium makes it very clear that back in the day opium really wasn't deemed to be a problem by most people – in fact it was a commodity in such common circulation that it could be used as cash. Similarly, contrary to popular narratives, opium use was not a sudden development that emerged out of nowhere in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: it has so long been domesticated as part of human civilisations that its wild form has allegedly died out. Nor was opium peculiar to China, as is often assumed; in fact it was so globally available that contrary to what Lin Zexu<sup>a</sup> thought, it was even purchasable over the counter in British pharmacies! It soon became clear to me that everything we think about opium these days is perhaps flawed, and our understanding of it is wrapped up in the strictures leftover from unreconstructed moral panic promoted by conservative religious groups, and nationalist state builders at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### FRAMING THE DEBATE

As I read on, my doubts and questions grew. I felt that the opium narrative was full of holes and it left me with many unanswered questions. Some of these are:

- Is the Chinese opium plague a myth? Was China really worse affected than other countries?
- In a world where most countries had been using opium, why was China special?
- In a nation where opium has been consumed for millennia, why is it that we think something drastic occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?
- How do we reconcile the view of opium as a debilitating nightmare with the fact that most historical records show

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a Lin Zexu was Qing Dynasty official who was appointed Special Imperial Commissioner to deal with the Opium trade.

that generally people lead normal lives while using it? How could so many famous household heroes and opium users (to name a few: William Wilberforce, Graham Greene, Charles Dickens) be successful if opium's impacts were so terrible? Why was Hong Kong so successful and wealthy when nearly a third of her population were partaking?

- Modern studies of drugs argue against views that suggest supply creates demand, so why do we let this supply centred focus remain unchallenged in the sino-centric view of opium? Is Sinology falling behind disciplines that have evolved to better able to understand drug consumption and society?
- Why do we worry so much about opium's impact but neglect to talk about the impacts of other important products with terrible health consequences, such as alcohol, tobacco or even sugar?
- Could 19<sup>th</sup> century sea freight really supply enough drugs to bring an entire nation to its knees? Why import poppy when it can grow easily enough in China? How much of demand was met by local production?
- What is the historical significance of exploring this corner of history, and should we do it? Can we oppose a moral panic surrounding opium without becoming apologists for the British Empire?

Over the course of my research, I found all sorts of fascinating stories and insights that help to answer a few of the points above. While beyond the scope of this essay, these would make interesting building blocks for future discussions.

- The Opium War wasn't about opium. Opium war is a term that was coined by opponents of the conflict: proponents of the war were far more pre-occupied with other matters, such as general openness to international diplomatic relations and freer trade. Opium was a flame to the powder keg, but no more than that.
- Curiously, Lin Zexu was so certain of the importance of rhubarb to the world outside China that he suggested that an embargo on exports might have worked as a bargaining



domestically produced – imports only satisfied the luxury end of the market. Britain's policy as early as the 1880s was that China was in charge of opium policy and could choose to ban it if desired. In this period, Britain was reluctant to stop trading opium because they would lose out in the market to China, which was far more involved in the trade anyway.

- In the final years of the opium trade (1930), diplomatic archives in Kew reveal that on one occasion an armed Chinese launch, under the Chinese flag, ran aground on a southern Hong Kong island.<sup>4</sup> The British inspected her cargo and accidentally got in the midst of a potential spat between the mayor of Guangzhou's opium smuggling operation and the Nanking government, who had banned the trade. Sadly, the papers didn't explain how that incident ended, but it would be a great further research project. The confidential government note alleges that the mayor of Guangzhou was highly involved in trading opium against the wishes of Nanking, and accordingly had renamed all of his opium dens as hospitals and was selling opium as 'anti-opium medicine'. I enclose a particularly interesting page from the 100-page source.
- Most interesting of all, I read time and again that opium was really quite a widely used, innocuous drug. Of all my discoveries, this is what struck me most.

My primer for research was *'Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China'* by Frank Dikötter, Lars Peter Laamann, and Xun Zhou.<sup>5</sup> Though sensationalist and dismissive of counter-arguments, this gave a great introduction into the fascinating and nuanced revisionism surrounding this topic. A good summary of key points can be found online at the Open Democracy website.<sup>6</sup> Dikötter et al's purpose in writing this book was to place opium in its proper context: as the initial salvo in an unfortunate war on drugs that has brought untold suffering, suspended liberties, enabled gangsters, and led to fruitless outcomes for a century or more all over the world. Their book received mixed reviews. The Republic of China Chair at the University of British Columbia, Tim Brook, criticised the book for its lack of nuance but praised it for the contribution it has made to redefining

the topic, as follows:

*It demolishes many shibboleths that should not have stood the test of time. The authors present, with good reason, ideas that will startle many readers: that most opium smokers consumed in moderate quantities and were able to control their drug use; that addiction was not as widespread as we believe; that anxieties about the effects of opium opened the door to a great deal of bad medicine; that the Chinese were not duped by foreigners into using opium and indeed could not imagine mobilizing public opposition to it until foreign missionaries had taken up the cause; and that Chinese nationalists went on to sensationalize the effects of opium in order to create an anti-imperialist rallying cry for the nation. These ideas come together in a devastating critique of old views, and do so on a bed of rich documentation. The topic will never be the same.<sup>7</sup>*

Dikötter et al have opened up this subject to all sorts of new angles for exploration. To examine the question of whether there really was an opium plague, I will explore a few of the key sources and theories that appeared in these writings.

#### **OPIUM PLAGUE OR DRUG SCARE?**

The narrative surrounding opium is that China was brought to her knees by a debilitating plague. This is one of those rare topics where leading thinkers, sinologists and CCP historians find themselves together on the same page. From Hu Xijin to John K Fairbank<sup>8</sup>, there is broad public consensus that opium was an “evil”. Nowadays, it is held axiomatic that opium is bad; it occupies the same space in our heads as those very different derivatives, morphine and heroin. The unchallenged nature of the assumption that opium is bad is confirmed even in casual conversations with friends over dinner. In a discussion of the subject of this essay, one of my companions expressed the opinion that opium use is ‘just like slavery!’, a little research shows that this sensational view is a relatively recent development and there are plenty reasons to question whether an “opium plague” ever even existed.

There is a great deal of sociological research being undertaken

into the drug scares and moral panics that have gripped the USA in recent years: one book argued that these notional plagues are in fact ‘drug scares and moral panics[,] crucial to understanding how the 37 [recent American] wars on drugs has been waged with relative impunity from critics’<sup>9</sup>. Reinerman, in one of the leading essays on this topic, notes that drug scares and moral panics tend to coalesce around concerns that ‘specific populations are perceived as a threat to the established moral and social order, drug scares are rarely just about the substances involved’<sup>10</sup>. He explains, ‘the first U.S. anti-drug law was passed in 1875 at a time of increased concern about Chinese immigration in San Francisco and outlawed opium smoking because local officials feared Chinese men were using it to lure white women into their opium dens and to their ruin.’<sup>11</sup>, the problem was rarely the substances involved, but assumptions about who was using and their social status. Since the “war on drugs” era began, we have been mired in a moral panic that shuts down discussion, and declarations that a plague existed have gone on uncontested. Arguments made by agitators from the same sort of groups that banned booze in the USA are still reverberating around our heads today, stifling discussion and making everything emotive. When reading materials in the archives, I could find no explanation as to why opium was a bad thing, but opium is often called a “plague”. Barrop complains of this in relation to the 1909 Shanghai Opium Commission, which nailed the coffin of opium use: ‘all the debates, the delegations from China and the United States (supported by the German delegate) used moral arguments. Drawing on the narratives of the vivid anti-opium discourses of their home countries, they kept repeating that opium was an evil that threatened public health and social peace by causing physical and moral degeneration.’<sup>12</sup> To believe in the plague, some faith is needed, and it was after all the faith-based communities that created this anti-opium hysteria<sup>13</sup>.

Missionaries were the driving force that promoted the anti-Opium cause, ‘the habit of smoking opium for pleasure not only contradicted their mostly Puritan, Quaker or Calvinistic ideas of pious and abstinent conduct, it also impeded their mission of spreading the gospel.’<sup>14</sup> It was such a prurient anxiety of theirs that former governor of Hong Kong Des Voeux went so far as to suggest that the missionaries had an ulterior motive in presenting China as hooked on opium, perhaps because it was a great way to raise funds! In his mind, they propagated

an image of China as a drug slave in need of liberation because it was a very compelling fundraising and recruitment tool. Whether or not we accept his cynicism, it is clear that certain religious groups were the driving force in the anti-Opium movement, and their fervour roused puzzlement among various indifferent onlookers at the time. The power of the conservative religious campaigners was so significant that one of the key questions that 1895 Parliamentary Commission had to address ask was actually whether or not opium was making evangelism difficult. Interestingly, the Commission found that opium consumption actually posed no 'obstacle to Christian work,' but it is telling that they were even tasked with exploring this question.<sup>15</sup>

Much of the cacophonous 'agitation'<sup>16</sup> came from groups that were very loud but not widely adhered to, Lodwick's proudly narcophobic book *Crusaders Against Opium Protestant Missionaries in China, 1874–1917* (which opens with the telling line, 'I still do not know why individuals in any society take to drug use'<sup>17</sup>) proudly explains at great length that this was a protestant movement, that it came from a niche wing of the protestant right. The Parliamentary Commission had to contend with the fact that the very loud opponents of opium didn't really represent commonly held British or general Christian attitudes, it is worth quoting the tongue in cheek, diplomatic manner with which they dismiss teetotaler brigade:

[...]turning to the missionary evidence in support of prohibition, we may observe that

more than half the witnesses were members of the American Methodist Episcopal and Canadian Presbyterian Communions. Their views were shared by representatives of the Presbyterian and Baptist missions, and the London Missionary Society. These devoted men are without doubt most sincere in their belief in the mischief caused by opium. When, however, we are urged to recommend that the paramount authority of the British Parliament should be brought to bear on the Government of India for the prohibition of the production and use of opium, and the extinction of an export trade which was in existence before British rule in India, it is [...] duty to weigh most carefully the evidence by which such proposals are supported. We

are bound to take notice of the circumstance that most of the missionary witnesses were total abstainers, and some were ardent workers in the cause.<sup>18</sup>

The Commission goes on to clarify that this was not an issue for mainstream Christians, and the report notes the Catholic archbishop of Calcutta and Bishops of Lucknow and Calcutta were all actually against banning opium. We can infer from this that, at the time, the Catholic and Anglican churches were uninterested in this campaign. We should be aware that the same impulses that brought this attack on opium in China are those that later managed to rid the USA of alcohol for a few dry years in the 1920s and 1930s, this really was a loud and radical minority taking up arms against an intoxicant, rather than a broad sway of public opinion. The opponents of opium tended to come from these conservative protestant movements that were disgusted by the ‘deeply rooted habits of self-indulgence’<sup>19</sup> and tended to promote ascetic, puritanical lifestyles. The groups that most fervently campaigned against opium were religious fundamentalists, the same groups that promoted prohibition of alcohol: to them, opium was an ungodly and gross self-indulgence that needed to be curtailed. It is surprising that nowadays their views have become the accepted narrative, given the way the Prohibition Era is now viewed.

#### CHINESE STATE BUILDING

It is easy to see why an opium plague narrative exists today in China, as the narrative that China was plagued by opium in the years before liberation is a crucial bastion that supports the legitimacy of the CCP liberators. The Opium War and the ending of the alleged “opium plague” are essential bookends in the Communist party’s “Century of Humiliation” narrative. Dikötter, Laamann and Zhou sum up the argument as follows: the narrative began at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when China lost to Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-5). As the self-strengthening movement grew, anti-opium rhetoric became ‘an important element at the core of this movement’. They continue:

[...]public debates that were charged with nationalistic and anti-imperial symbolism and peppered with social Darwinian elements declared opium to be the root of



poverty, crime, sexual deviance and addiction as well as physical, mental and moral weaknesses, making it the reason for the nation's degeneration. The eradication of the opium evil thus promised to be a shortcut to national strength. By branding opium as a British means of imperial domination and referring to the opium reformer Lin Zexu as a national hero, the anti-opium campaign gained momentum as an anti-imperial movement fighting for national liberation.<sup>20</sup>

China's elite May Fourth-ists and their predecessors became obsessed with what was causing national weakness, and in many cases, came to the conclusion that it was anything that to them was associated with China's past.

Henrietta Harrison's excellent book, *Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China 1911–1929* gives great insights into this trend to reject the past – she explains how the many traits and facets of what might have been called “muscular Christianity” in Britain at the time came to be appropriated by China<sup>21</sup>. Soon China's elites were promoting certain “modern” lifestyles, sports, fashions and behaviours and looked down on anything that was traditionally felt to be “Chinese”, whether it was foot binding, *Confucianism* and interestingly enough opium.

These signifiers of “Chinese-ness” got thrown out of the window, perhaps unsurprisingly, by a generation that had been partly raised in modern Missionary schools. As Tim Brook explains, quoting *Courtwright*<sup>22</sup>, ‘what we think about addiction very much depends on who is addicted’. It was only once opium became popular among non-elite groups in China, that it was perceived to be problematic, ‘and on a global stage, when opium is the drug of Chinese, rather than of Britons or Japanese, it reinforces assumptions about which race or ethnic group is mastering history and which is mastered by it.’

#### OPIUM'S HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

A key assumption in the opium narrative is that it is bad for health. Such a widely-held claim should be supported by reams of evidence, but oddly, evidence is scant. Newman, quoted in Dikötter et al, explains that ‘opium rarely undermined the health of shortened the lives of the majority of smokers in nineteenth century China’<sup>23</sup>. In fact,

evidence for this claim was so scarce that during the era in which anti-opium campaigning was at its strongest, a Parliamentary Commission studying whether opium should be banned was unable to find any compelling arguments against it, even though the Commission was led by a committee that included anti-opium campaigners. The topic was comprehensively examined in seven volumes, over 2550 pages of small print. The conclusion they reached was that ‘there is no evidence of extensive physical or moral degradation from its use.’ Anyone raised in our era would be shocked by this statement, as it has been universally held that opium is terrible. One might cynically say that of course it is natural that the parliament of an opium trading nation took this view – but before simplistic judgements are made, it should be noted that the Commission was established at the behest of a very powerful group of religious anti-Opium campaigners, with an express purpose of serving as a fact-finding commission rather than a committee devoted to producing policy. The members of the panel were divided in their opinions between those in favour and those against. One standout anecdote from the report that indicates something about the contemporaneous lack of anxiety towards the impact of opium was that after the hard numbers had been crunched, a life insurer with twenty years of experience deemed it not ‘necessary to impose an extra premium on the lives of moderate opium-eaters.’<sup>24</sup> The Commission’s job was performed so persuasively that it effectively brought an end to agitation for prohibition from various groups in Britain, which brought a brief stay of execution for opium – until the baton was taken up again by the Americans (a country that historically has been far more under the thumb of conservative protestant forces.) Eventually, the same movement that banned alcohol in the USA in the 1920s and 30s also managed to swing global opinion against opium at the 1909 Shanghai Conference, under the leadership of Episcopalian Bishop Charles Henry Brent.

When reading arguments suggesting that opium wasn’t “evil”, black and white images of emaciated men, prostrated on mats may come to mind (see figure 1 for an example). Such photographs provide some insight into what opium addiction was like, but even they must be understood in context; after all, these images were employed by various agents to further their agendas rather than promote greater understanding of the situation. Imagery surrounding opium is very emotive and stark – often these images were derived



Figure 1: An opium den in Singapore in 1941.<sup>25</sup>

from anti-Opium campaigner pamphlets. We rarely question the veracity of images, but these photos aren't all they seem: for every image of emaciated smokers, there are other images showing healthy, well-dressed smokers reclining in beautiful opium divans! These stark photos and the tendency to think that opium created dens of starving men can be explained away as a confusion of antecedents. As Dikötter et al explain, opium is not even an addictive drug by medical standards. It was a social and cultural custom akin to alcohol, so pictures of “addicts” are flawed and misleading by nature: they define their subjects as weakened by addiction when in fact they had other ailments and came to opium for its palliative purposes. Dikötter et al argue that ‘negative representations often confused the medical symptoms of the diseases against which opium was taken as a palliative, with the imagined psychological effects of “addiction”<sup>26</sup>, Missionaries new to China may have met some of the most down trodden people in hospitals around the country, and concluded that opium was the cause of their predicament, rather than part of their treatment. This train of thoughts was likely misguided, a “chicken and egg” confusion. In an opium debate, Batten points out this problem saying ‘the indulgers in the drug have been led to the habit by painful diseases, from which they have sought and found relief in opium’, and that ‘these diseases not due but antecedent to the resort to the drug

largely account for the wretched appearance and condition of the patients.<sup>27</sup> The British Medical Journal's comments on the findings of the Parliamentary Commission also affirm this; they note that while many very weakened people were opium users, it would be an act of cruelty to remove opium because they were receiving palliative benefits from the drug:

*The amount of painful, wasting disease which is met with in India in which opium alone gives any relief makes it extremely difficult, and in the opinion of many most impolitic, to interpose any obstacle to the easy acquisition by the people of so important a household medicament [opium]. Those in fact who have followed the evidence and who are aware of the mode of life of many of the inhabitants of India, are well assured that it would be an act of terrible and wanton cruelty to deprive them of the only medicine of any value which is available for the alleviation of the maladies to which their circumstances expose them.*<sup>28</sup>

In that period, even the greatest medical minds of Britain at the BMJ viewed opium as something not only to be tolerated, but in fact a drug that was welcome and helpful, and that abolition wasn't just unnecessary but would in fact be cruel because opium served so important a role as a panacea. As Dikötter et al explain, opium was taken as a panacea, as it was believed to lessen the impact of two of history's most common ailments, malaria and dysentery, and could also bring benefits to asthma-sufferers. Smoking it frequently repelled insects and eating it could be a cure for loose bowels. Interestingly, in the pre-aspirin era 'it was impossible to demonise opium'<sup>29</sup>, because it served such a crucial role as a cure for all sorts of conditions. Only after its valuable functions were replaced by modern scientific discoveries such as aspirin, could opium be repudiated and held up as a scapegoat for society's ills.

#### **HONG KONG SOCIETY AND OTHER CASES**

In absence of any modern data about how a society experiences opium, the best way to check the validity of the theoretical and polemical claims cited in the paragraphs above is to consider historical populations where opium was particularly popular. If the arguments hold true,

then presumably these would be terrible places of degradation.

The Commission gives some anecdotes and data from Penang, where it is claimed that half of all residents were opium users, but only around 3% 'slaves to the habit',<sup>30</sup> a similar rate to that found among contemporary alcohol users and abusers. Mr John Anderson, one time Consul for Siam, and 32-year resident in the Straits, wrote about his experience living among an opium using population as follows, 'if its use be abused by excessive indulgence, the effects morally, physically, and socially, must decidedly be prejudicial to the consumer. Its use in moderation, as a stimulant to the system of men who engage in constant hard and trying physical labour, in my opinion, helps to the maintenance of the working powers.' He goes on to say 'if it were desired, and if it were possible, to stamp out the use or abuse either of alcohol or of opium, I should certainly urge the stamping out first of the use or abuse of alcohol. Of the two, the latter, in my opinion, is productive of the greater harm and misery', and 'drinking people can, but with evil grace, protest against a habit for which there is so much more excuse, and which produces so much less evil results.'<sup>31</sup>

Beyond the Straits, our best data comes from Hong Kong, a city that was both full of opium addicts and incredibly prosperous. Des Voeux, former governor of Hong Kong, gives an interesting insight into his experience living among opium using people, saying this:

Forty servants and coolies employed about Government House – all, or nearly all, of whom were opium smokers... [their] work as a rule [was] done with remarkable alacrity and with a complete absence of incapacitating fatigue. Our experience in respect of servants was very similar to that of others; and I, at all events, am able to say that after an exceedingly varied experience of native and other servants in different parts of the world, I have never known any who so largely combined good health, willingness, activity and intelligence as these Chinese opium smokers.<sup>32</sup>

In the same letter, he notes that as a politically minded British person, he was disposed to be against opium but years and years of experience in colonies around the world, and meeting people from all walks of life, he had come to the conclusion that opium really wasn't so problematic. I found similar accounts again and again,

during my research in the National Archives at Kew. A particularly intriguing memorandum issued by the government of Hong Kong in 1929 gives some useful data points, explaining that around 25% of the 1,300,000 population were consumers of opium, but in spite of that, ‘the general physique of the Chinese population does not appear to give any indication of the ill effects of the use of opium.’<sup>33</sup> The Chinese were considered to be surprisingly healthy, with a lower death rate than in most tropical cramped cities. The memo also notes that in that year only 120 cases of chronic poisoning from opium were recorded, it doesn’t note how many of these cases were fatalities. If we assume all such cases lead to death, the fatality rate of 9.2 opium deaths per 100,000 people would not be as deadly as alcohol is in Britain today (in 2018, 12.7 deaths per 100,000 population<sup>34</sup>.) The study notes that ‘all things considered it is probable that the population of Hong Kong smokes more opium than any other of equal number in the world, and yet relatively to the conditions of its existence, it is extraordinarily healthy, while for activity and industry it could scarcely be surpassed.’ The most opium addicted places on earth at the height of the opium trade were in fact functional societies, and the death rates from opium in those societies were lower than contemporary Britain’s death toll related to alcoholism.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

By examining a number of the foundational tenets that uphold the “opium plague” narrative, I hope to have shown that that this terminology was promoted primarily by the prohibitionist wing of conservative Protestantism, rather than describe a movement that was supported popularly or even across the various denominations of Christianity. There is limited evidence to show that opium was debilitating towards the health of its consumers, and in fact fulfilled an important palliative role before the advent of modern drugs such as aspirin. To understand how the narrative became established in the first place, I have reviewed recent writing on the subject. These recent works, and my own research, present an array of questions and positions for revising historical views, and suggest material for further and deeper study.

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- 27 Lodwick, p.76
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# **Section 3**

## **Book Reviews**



## THE NON-FICTION BOOK CLUB YEAR IN REVIEW

BY PETER HAGAN

AS FOR EVERYONE, this year presented the book club special challenges. By April, Zoom became our unofficial meeting space as the book club members hid away scattered across the globe. What at first appeared to be a burden, news of online book club discussions spread – members from Beijing, London, and Ireland joined us for multiple discussions throughout the year and brought incredible insight and knowledge on topics as diverse as changing landscapes, political upheavals, and not-so-covert espionage.

A book club event from this year stands out to me: The author talk with Phyllis Birnbaum, author of **Manchu Princess, Japanese Spy**, about Kawashima Yoshiko, relative to the ousted Qing Dynasty rulers, adopted daughter of Japanese nationalist Kawashima Naniwa, alleged confidant of Empress Wanrong, the mistress of Japanese General Hayao Tada, famed for leading an army into the Mongolian hinterlands to quell a rebellion and for perhaps having a hand in informing against Chinese during the January 28, 1932 Shanghai Incident. Yet, Yoshiko was an embellisher – not shamelessly so, but unable to resist it. During her trial held by the Kuomintang (which was farcical in its own right), Yoshiko was forced to confess to espionage and treason but went further as she tried to please – she retold thrilling war stories, parachuting into Chinese territory to spy for the Japanese or piloting planes to Qiqihar. Her story was a tragic one from birth to her final moments, and Mrs Birnbaum retold it colourfully.

Our book club has been meeting each month regularly for almost a decade. We have had some interruptions, but dedicated RAS members have kept the book club going with excellent book suggestions and conversations. For us in our little corner of the Royal Asiatic Society of Shanghai, the book club remains a fundamental part of the RAS experience.

6 January 2020:

**Maoism – A Global History** by Julia Lovell (reviewed in this edition)

6 April 2020:

**Blaming China – It Might Feel Good, but It Won't Fix America's Economy** by Benjamin Shobert

4 May 2020:

**China's Asian Dream** by Tom Miller

25 May 2020

Special talk by author Phyllis Birnbaum about her book **Manchu Princess, Japanese Spy**

6 July 2020:

**China and Japan: Facing History** by Ezra Vogel

3 August 2020:

**Unruly Waters: How Rains, Rivers, Coasts, and Seas Have Shaped Asia's History** by Sunil Amrith

7 September 2020:

**The Third Revolution** by Elizabeth Economy

12 October 2020:

**Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane** by S. Frederick Starr

02 November 2020:

**Treason, by the Book** by Jonathan Spence

07 December 2020:

**The Unfinished Revolution: Sun Yat-Sen and the Struggle for Modern China** by Tijo Kayloe

# THE FICTION BOOK CLUB YEAR IN REVIEW

BY DAGMAR BORCHARD

## SHANGHAI – CITY OF LITERARY IMAGINATION

Due to current difficult times, the Fiction Book of the Royal Asiatic Society Shanghai did not meet in most of the months in 2020, but we will revive our monthly lively debates on Chinese and Asian literature in the very near future. Our mission is to offer our members a good selection of valuable Chinese fiction and interesting books of Asian authors, translated into English.

Some years ago, the Fiction Book Club had selected an extraordinary novel for its reading list *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. The novel, by famous Shanghainese author Wang Anyi, depicted life in the Shanghai *longtang*, the crowded labyrinthine alleys of Shanghai. This poetic masterpiece left deep impressions, so when Wang Anyi's novel *Fu Ping* came out in 2019 (rendered into English by internationally renowned translator Howard Goldblatt), it was natural to put it at the top of our list of upcoming books. There is a review of *Fu Ping* below.

One of our main aims is to bring writing about and by Chinese minority people to the attention of our members – books that might otherwise have been easily overlooked. Chinese author Chi Zijian's fantastic novel *Last Quarter of the Moon*, about the changing life of the last reindeer-herding communities in North Eastern China, was one of our most popular reads. Chi Zijian's latest book to be translated into English, *Goodnight Rose*, tells us about the unusual friendship of a young Chinese woman and an old Jewish lady, a child of the Jewish diaspora in Harbin.

Another focus is to add classics of Asian fiction to our reading list, like those by the Japanese Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata, and the work of Malaysian writer Tan Twan Eng, who won the first Man Asian Literary Prize.

## UPCOMING TITLES

### **Fu Ping: A Novel**

Wang Anyi: Translated into English by Howard Goldblatt.

New York: Weatherhead Books On Asia Series, Columbia University Press 2019

**Death of a Red Heroine** -An Inspector Chen Novel.

Qiu Xiaolong: First published in America by Soho Press 2000

**Goodnight, Rose**

Chi Zijian (translated into English by Poppy Talent)

Viking of Penguin Books 2018

**We, The Survivors**

Tash Aw

London: 4th Estate 2019

**The Garden of Evening Mists**

Tan Twan Eng

Newcastle upon Tyne: Myrmidon Books 2012

**Snow Country**

Yasunari Kawabata

First published in Japanese 1956. First English Translation New York:

Alfred A. Knopf 1956

**I Am a Cat**

Natsume Soseki

First published in three volumes 1905, 1906 and 1907 in Japanese.

English Translation Tokyo; Rutland, V.; Singapore: Tuttle Publishing  
1972, 2002



## FU PING – A NOVEL

WEATHERHEAD BOOKS ON ASIA SERIES, COLUMBIA  
UNIVERSITY PRESS: NEW YORK 2019

BY WANG ANYI (TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY HOWARD GOLDBLATT)  
REVIEWED BY DAGMAR BORCHARD

FEW WRITERS have become as synonymous with Shanghai as Wang Anyi. The Shanghai *longtang* – the city's fast disappearing lanes with their typical communities and particularly Shanghainese lifestyle – are the real protagonists of Wang Anyi's novels. The author, in her foreword, describes her latest novel *Fu Ping* as reflecting almost a decade of inquiry. and again, the Shanghai *longtang* assume centre stage. *Fu Ping* is translated into English by the eminent sinologist Howard Goldblatt. Goldblatt's choices of Chinese fiction to be rendered into English for foreign readers have always proved excellent.

Fu Ping, the main character, an orphaned teenage girl from the Yangzhou countryside, is chosen to marry Li Tianhua in a traditional arranged marriage. Li Tianhua's adoptive grandmother, Nainai invites her future granddaughter-in-law to spend some time with her in Shanghai before the wedding. Nainai adopted the young man to make sure someone would care for her in her old age. Also a native of Yangzhou, Nainai's life has been hard; she was widowed early, and suffered the death of two sons. After thirty years of working in Shanghai as a nanny, her appearance and accent have changed – she is not rural anymore, but also not totally Shanghainese. The two of them share a bed at Nainai's employers' home where Fu Ping is supposed to help with the household chores and to master her new role as a housewife. Though Fu Ping's course of life seems to have been all planned out for her, she has a plan herself. The longer she stays on in Shanghai, the more she takes her fate into her own hands, leading her to reconsider the planned wedding.

Though the novel bears Fu Ping's name, the young women with her doubts is not always centre-stage. The novel is structured into twenty chapters introducing the many people Fu Ping encounters along her way. Wang Anyi painstakingly depicts the life of the urban underclass, the nannies, the garbage scow operators, handymen, peddlers – those who serve others in Shanghai's complex societal layers. She contrasts

the life in Huaihai Lu, right in the centre of the bustling metropolis, with life in Zhabei, a remote suburb on the periphery. Some of the episodes focus on events such as New Years celebrations, funerals or a visit to the famous New World Amusement Arcade. At some point, the plot seems a mere pretext, a literary artifice that allows Wang Anyi to tell more stories about Shanghai's urban landscape, to give deeper glimpses into people's lives, to linger longer in her beloved old lanes and alleyways. With its many detours, the book seems like a long, winding tale, lacking purpose. The fragmented structure may not please every reader, with some of these diversions being longer than the parts devoted to the main strand. But the chapters gradually come together and form a full-colour picture of life in Shanghai in the 1960s.

The English edition opens with some remarks by the author herself, revealing her sources of inspiration. A trip to Yangzhou reminded her of a poem by the famous Chinese poet Li Bai, which takes her back to her own childhood and dear memories of her nanny who was also a Yangzhou native. Poetry and childhood memory merge together to form her literary works, an approach already applied in previous works of Wang Anyi. Wang Anyi was born in Nanjing, but her mother, famous novelist Ru Zhijuan, took her back to Shanghai at the age of one. Her literary career started in the late 1970s; today she is one of China's most acclaimed and prolific writers.

Fu Ping is a story about breaking with traditions, and of facing consequences of such a rebellion. It is the story of a young girl who learns to challenge convention and follows her heart. Fu Ping is not satisfied with what life offers her: she wants more. At the end of the novel, a great rainstorm floods Shanghai. Amid the confusion, we find Fu Ping, settled and happy, on a boat floating along the cold floodwaters of the Suzhou River.

# THE LAST KINGS OF SHANGHAI: THE RIVAL JEWISH DYNASTIES THAT HELPED CREATE MODERN CHINA

VIKING, AN IMPRINT OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE LLC (2 JUNE 2020)

BY JONATHAN KAUFMAN

REVIEWED BY CONNOR BRALLA

In 1935, despite the global depression, Shanghai enjoyed an export boom. It had skyscrapers and a thriving film industry, and its publishing houses produced thousands of magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets. And yet, amongst such prosperity, in that single year the Shanghai Municipal Council removed 5950 corpses just from the International Settlement. So many local Chinese residents were so destitute that they could do nothing but leave their expired relations on the sidewalk to be collected like refuse.

This is one of the many ways in which *The Last Kings of Shanghai* illuminates the stark division between rich and poor, foreign and Chinese that existed not only in 1935, but indeed throughout the entire ‘Century of Humiliation’ between the beginning of the First Opium War in 1839 and the conclusion of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. The third book by Jonathan Kaufman, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and professor at Northeastern University, *Last Kings* follows the multi-generational trajectory of two Baghdadi Jewish families, the Sassoons and the Kadoories. The fortunes of these dynasties experienced an intense series of ups and downs that followed the socio-political upheavals of Chinese history.

Despite ultimately reaching similar levels of economic success from similar ethnic backgrounds in the same Asian sphere of British colonialism, the Sassoons and Kadoories were in fact dramatically different in their origins. The story of the Sassoons (Kaufman tells us they bear no relation to Vidal) begins with David. He was born at a time when his family were wealthy and politically influential members of the Jewish community of Baghdad, and from the beginning he was groomed to assume a position of great power in a place where his roots ran deep. But after a bout of political persecution by the Ottomans in 1832 that involved him being kidnapped and ransomed, David was forced to flee and start life anew, arriving first in Iran and later

establishing himself in British Bombay. Over the course of a decade, he built a thriving trade empire that bridged traditional trading networks of the Middle East with the developing global system of British imperialism. He expanded his reach further eastward after the First Opium War opened up trade with China, exporting not just Indian cotton but also Indian opium. He stationed his eight sons in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and various other points along China's eastern coast, rotating them every few months or few years to ensure that all of them were familiar with all aspects of the business. Though he never learned to speak English, the British Empire occupied a place very close to David's heart, an affinity that expressed itself in his naturalization as a British citizen, the British-style education his sons received, and even his offer to recruit a Jewish battalion to help suppress the 1857 Indian Mutiny (an offer that was declined). Nonetheless, David maintained a strong Jewish identity throughout his life, mandating that his sons marry within the faith and continue attending Orthodox synagogue. He also used this identity to his advantage by setting up something akin to a company town in Bombay, attracting Jewish refugees from across the Ottoman Empire by providing education, religious instruction, and medical care, in addition to steady jobs and upward economic mobility.

While David Sassoon was able to use his family name and business knowledge to regain the wealth and prestige his ancestors had enjoyed for generations, Elly Kadoorie came from substantially humbler origins. Elly spent the first part of his life in Baghdad, the son of a moderately well-off 'merchant farmer'—essentially a banker dealing with transactions in the Baghdadi countryside for which sheep served as security. While Elly was still an adolescent, his father passed away, and his mother cast around for ways to support the family. Having heard about the Sassoons, she sent him along with three of his brothers to work for them. Elly began with an apprenticeship in Bombay before being sent to Hong Kong and then Weihaiwei, a small port north of Shanghai in Shandong province. Only eighteen, he already had a promising clerkship, comfortable accommodations, and room to advance to higher positions in Shanghai.

However, it wouldn't be long before Elly would move to get into business for himself. Family lore tells of a critical juncture, one that Kaufman argues is likely embellished in its retelling but nonetheless exemplifies how Elly Kadoorie saw himself—as an upright, principled

and ambitious man with little tolerance for the moral weakness of others. Weihaiwei was beset by periodic outbreaks of disease, and soon after Elly's arrival the city suffered an attack of the bubonic plague. With dead bodies appearing near the company warehouse, Elly removed a barrel of disinfectant from storage and used it to douse the premises. He also sold some of it to Chinese employees, accepting promises of repayment in lieu of cash in some cases. His actions don't appear to have been radically generous, but they nonetheless earned the ire of his superiors, who reprimanded him for giving away company property. This was too much for Elly, who quit in a fit of righteous pique. He relocated to Hong Kong and obtained a loan of 500 Hong Kong dollars from his elder brother. Before long, he had formed a stock brokerage with two other traders and obtained stakes in several dozen companies across a wide range of industries. It was his first step on a long career that would see his family owning and managing luxury hotels and electric utilities in Hong Kong and Mainland China, along with rubber companies in Malaysia and a greatly expanded stock portfolio.

In this way, *Last Kings* weaves in and out of the stories of the Sassoons and Kadoories, covering multiple generations of economic vicissitudes as well as inter- and intra-family business disputes, all against the background of modern China's rapid social and economic change. Reflecting the much more unselfconsciously patriarchal nature of society during this historical period, the book's attention rests primarily upon the men of the Kadoorie and Sassoon households, but Kaufman nonetheless includes a number of prominent female characters, including Elly's wife Laura. Laura came from a wealth family, the Mocattas, that had been established in England for centuries, and marrying her opened up a wide network of business contacts for Elly. She kept herself busy engaging in a wide array of charitable ventures such as building a school for girls in Baghdad; she also travelled with Elly to China even though it was typically expected that wives would not accompany their husbands on such stressful colonial adventures. Her death is another subject of Kadoorie lore; when the family's opulent Shanghai mansion caught fire, she escaped but then ran back in after realizing that the governess to her two sons was still inside. The governess managed to find her own way out; Laura did not. She was buried in Shanghai.

Also central to much of the book's action is Emily Hahn, an

American journalist whose closest connection with the Sassoons was an extended affair with Victor, the grandson of David who was known as one of Shanghai's wealthiest playboys in the 20s and 30s. In many ways, their relationship embodied the cultural dynamics of Shanghai at the time, in which Europeans and Chinese were highly segregated and there existed a great deal of cultural condescension—Victor often chafed when Emily displayed any signs of Chineseness, such as pronouncing foreign names with a Chinese accent or developing a slightly yellowed skin tone due to smoking opium. Kaufman describes Hahn's reservations toward living in a society characterised by harsh, exploitative labour practices, one of many ways in which he forces the reader to dwell upon the economic depravity that so many people experienced at that time and that created conditions ripe for the rise of communism. Many foreigners in Shanghai at this time apparently balked at the exploitation embodied in the use of rickshaws, but Hahn wondered what use there was in such indignation when virtually everything the wealthy and foreign used at the time was produced in a similarly exploitative fashion. In a world that continues to see stark economic disparities and that is still no stranger to issues such as sweatshop labour and human trafficking, Hahn's reflections should give the reader pause.

One of the greatest sagas of the book is the story of the 18,000 Jews that were saved from the Holocaust by taking refuge in Shanghai. Being divided between British, Chinese, French, and Japanese zones of administration, Shanghai was free to enter without a visa, so in the late 1930s it naturally attracted Austrian and German Jews who were fleeing increasingly violent persecution and who were being turned away most everywhere else. The story of these refugees is humanized through the figure of the Reismans, a Viennese family who had been refused visas to multiple different countries before finally arriving in Shanghai, where they remained until after the conclusion of hostilities. They, like many others in their situation, were helped by Ho Feng-Shan, a sympathetic Chinese diplomat stationed in Austria who made it a personal mission to issue documents that Jews needed to obtain exit visas, helping thousands get to safety before the start of WWII in Europe. Upon arriving in Shanghai, these refugees were given a large amount of financial support from Elly Kadoorie and Victor Sassoon, who helped them resettle and reinvent their lives on the opposite side of the world.

Even setting aside the Holocaust, anti-Semitism is a constant theme throughout the book. The Sassoons and Kadoories, though fierce supporters of the British Empire who enjoyed a great amount of wealth and prestige, nonetheless occupied an ambivalent place in colonial society. Elly initially adopted the name 'E. S. Kelly' to sound more reputable in his business in Hong Kong, and he had great difficulty in obtaining British citizenship. Against the backdrop of the violent European anti-Semitism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that most readers will be familiar with, Kaufman describes the perversely intriguing nature of its Japanese cousin. In the interwar period, Japan had been exposed to European ideas of an international Jewish conspiracy, but lacking a Christian anti-Semitic tradition, these ideas failed to take root as they had in Europe. Nonetheless, some began to believe that coordinated Jewish machinations kept the American public hostile to Japan. Rather than attempting to simply wipe them out as Hitler was doing, however, elements of the Japanese military sought to cultivate Jewish allies in the hope that it would allow them to turn the tide of public opinion in the US. It was this belief that motivated them to attempt to woo Victor Sassoon in the years before they formally declared war on the US and Britain, and it may also explain their tendency to take the view that the Jewish refugees in Shanghai were 'hostages,' not targets for extermination, even after they had conquered the city. Despite being rounded up into a ghetto in Hongkou district, and despite German insistence that the best thing to do was to load them onto a ship and then sink them all into the Huangpu river, the vast majority of Shanghai's Jewish refugees survived the war.

Though the bulk of *The Last Kings of Shanghai* focuses on the China's 'Century of Humiliation,' it does cover the period after the war, when both the Sassoons and Kadoories fled Shanghai just before communist forces took the city. The Sassoons never properly recovered from the loss of their assets in Mainland China, but the Kadoories went on to become influential in Hong Kong. They supported refugees that fled the Civil War, stuck around in the city in the midst of violent protests inspired by the Cultural Revolution in 1967, and even wielded significant influence during the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to the PRC in 1997.

*The Last Kings of Shanghai* will intrigue anyone who is interested not just in the history of modern China or the Jewish diaspora,

but anyone who wishes to see the formation of the modern world in which we now live, a process into which many participants were dragged kicking and screaming. Though nearly none of the principal characters are Chinese, this book more than anything sheds light on the historical contradictions that define China today. On one hand, Kaufman points out the ways in which the history he covers reinforces the story that the Communist Party tells about Chinese history and China's place in the world: after a long period under the heel of foreign domination, China is finally experiencing a 复兴 (*fùxīng*, rejuvenation), that is, restoring its traditional status as *a*, perhaps even *the*, major power of the known world. Yet *Last Kings* also details the ways in which the tools of modernity that have enabled China's *fùxīng* were brought to China by those same foreign oppressors. It was Shanghai's foreign concessions that ironically provided safe havens for radicals like the Communists – safe havens without which they may have been stamped out by the Nationalist government before they could ever gain the strength to dominate the country. Understanding these contradictions and complexities is of great value to an English-speaking audience as China increasingly possesses the international clout to ensure that its concerns, no matter how we may feel about them, cannot be ignored.

**Connor Bralla** ([connorbralla@outlook.com](mailto:connorbralla@outlook.com)), a native of Pennsylvania, has been resident in China for six years, during which time he has worked as a teacher and college admissions advisor. He is a student of Chinese history and several other things, including early Christian history and Esperanto. This is his first small foray into academia since graduating from Haverford College in 2014.



## **‘BURMESE DAYS AND BRIXTON NIGHTS’: A REVIEW OF JULIA LOVELL’S MAOISM: A GLOBAL HISTORY (2019)**

BY ROBERT BROWN

‘What dazzled us about Mao was his spirit of mischief, his insubordination...To me, Mao’s China at the end of the 1960s was much more “olé olé” [than rival Communist faiths]...during these days there was frankly nothing better to do in France than to be enraged; and nothing better for the enraged than to be a Maoist’

Gerard Miller, *Minoritaire*, (2001)

OF THE standout quotes of former Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Chairman Mao Zedong’s political career, the oft paraphrased, ‘the revolution is not a dinner party’ is perhaps the best known among Western activists, synonymous with the grim acceptance that radical change does not occur without struggle. To stretch culinary-historical metaphors further, Julia Lovell’s *Maoism: a Global History* (2019) could be described as a rich buffet stuffed with interesting anecdotes and transnational connections. The book offers an accessible overview of Mao Zedong thought, based on the idea that the humble rural peasant, steered by the CCP with Mao as his or her ‘Great Helmsman’, would be the engine of a Communist world revolution. More interestingly, however, Lovell’s main thesis examines the complex efforts of the CCP to transmit Mao’s dialectical theories as a way to propagate global ‘soft power’ during the Cold War. She examines the complications faced by both international admirers and CCP technocrats trying to define the lessons and legacies of a Chinese form of Marxism, that actively encouraged contradictions over coherence.

This pulls the cold war’s centre of gravity to the East, complicating existing narratives of US-USSR rivalry and the Sino-Soviet split. For members of the Far Left, from Burma to Brixton, Mao was seen as a Populist-Communist hero and revolutionary genius who offered a third path to utopia, particularly during China’s Cultural Revolution (1966-76). These disparate groups took Mao’s dialectical teachings in some starkly different, and frequently, bizarre directions, from

hedonistic cults to militarised cells, especially in the urbanised West where theoretically agrarian Marxism offered limited appeal. Focusing on the West, this review argues that the real strength of Lovell's work lies in how she knits together very different groups, from the Black Panthers to bandits and book groups. These under-explored, intersecting nodes of the global cult of Mao have been continually re-interpreted, contested and re-shaped across time and space.

Mao's thoughts were distilled into the Little Red Book, which became a crucial item of internal nationalistic propaganda. Lovell observes that bourgeois western urbanites, not Mao's quintessential audience, were also keen to get their hands on these little red books. In 1970, Andrew Marr, who later became a well-known political broadcaster in the UK and author of *A History of Modern Britain*, was an 11-year old at a private school in the Scottish borders. Swept up in youthful political ardour, he decided that he wanted to start a Chinese style 'Cultural Revolution', and wrote to the Chinese embassy requesting materials. Not realising Marr was eleven, the embassy saw a 'potential propagandist' in the boy and sent a number of red books for him to distribute. Pupils from another British prep school requested so many copies of the little red book that the Chinese embassy had to write them a letter, read out by the headmaster, that they could send no more copies! <sup>1</sup>

Lovell has a lively and accessible style, using eclectic anecdotes to engage the mainstream and academic reader, often drawing on swathes of under-utilised and awkward to access primary material about Maoists' global activities. She is persuasive in arguing that we need to examine a plethora of transnational scenarios (she picks eight) to understand Maoist activity and influence. Sweeping us from Indonesia to Vietnam and Cambodia, India, Africa, Peru and the United States before ending in China, Lovell pulls together a tangled and disparate literature on Maoism's domestic and transnational impact.

Lovell highlights this disparity by arguing that Maoist dialectics were not simply the ideology of the Little Red Book, but a lifestyle, or discourse: an organic system from which elements could either be cannibalised and re-engineered, or believed and enforced as inflexible gospel. This is what made Mao so potent, and partly explains why his ideas intersected with several very different activist groups in the West, from sexual liberation to Vietnam War protests, the green movement and Black liberation. On the one hand it could be used to assert that

military discipline and harsh 'self-criticism' regimes were the key to revolution and an effective party structure, as was the case with Kommune 1 in 1970s West Germany. On the other, groups such as the Black Panthers re-worked Mao's maxims as they saw fit until they barely resembled the originals, from calling suspect comrades 'Paper Panthers' instead of 'Paper Tigers' as Mao had said, to the highly divergent reworking of 'revolution is not a dinner party' into 'pick up some guns and don't be bullshitting'.<sup>2</sup> To the Western outsider the ideas seemed confusing and contradictory, but this 'mobility' Lovell argues, was what made it persuasive to a constellation of different left wing groups with very little in common other than a hatred of the status-quo. In this way the doctrine could become a fluid omnipresence, a 'creed of winners and insiders, of losers and outsiders, of leaders and underdogs, of absolute rulers, of vast, disciplined bureaucracies, and oppressed masses'.<sup>3</sup> As Lovell explores, these groups attracted the oppressed, the tyrannical and the idealistic in almost equal measure.

Lovell describes Maoism as 'an unstable political creed'.<sup>4</sup> Mao in his 'Selected Works' (1937) stated that contradiction was 'the fundamental law of nature and society', that was 'not to be feared', and this was a key trope that he, 'propelled[...] across the world'.<sup>5</sup> He was fond of Hegelian dialectics, but his Marxism was firmly rooted in Chinese thought, centred around the 1<sup>st</sup> problematic, the idea of constant motion and change rather than the more Western teleological approach that often characterises the 2<sup>nd</sup> problematic.<sup>6</sup> This emphasis on perpetual motion, rather than ends and solutions, represents a massive ontological difference. Lovell frequently mentions the contradictions in Maoism but could have delved more deeply into its Chinese origins, and speculated in more detail as to what proportion of Western Maoists, in the 1960s and 1970s, really understood or accepted Chinese Marxism in its original and often violent context. She does touch upon this in her description of French and West German groups who cherry-picked ideas they liked and discarded those they disliked. Some saw Maoism as a genuine alternative to a Marxism-Leninism road map for overthrowing Western states, while others in France took a more hedonistic view of the 'Cultural Revolution as one long, fantastic, libertarian fiesta to challenge the stultification of Gaullist France'.<sup>7</sup> One Kommune 1 member in West Germany even claimed his orgasm was 'of greater revolutionary consequence' than the Vietnam War.<sup>8</sup> When the Cultural Revolution in China collapsed

in 1976, the country under Deng Xiaoping pushed instead toward a market economy and co-existence with the West. Microscopic splinter factions such as the Workers Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought in Brixton, London seemed surely doomed. However, Lovell's great contribution is to call for such groups to be taken together, a challenge which will also presents great opportunities for other historians of post-war social movements. These factions, she states, when dealt with together become nodes in a broader, 'networked political phenomenon that tells us much about radical politics [...] post-Second World War democracy, and the global translations and mistranslations of China.'<sup>9</sup>

Another of Lovell's main arguments is that despite its bloodiness and brutality, Maoist thought formed a pillar of Chinese 'soft power' during the cold war, part of a strategy to win admirers and influence allies. However, she adds that Mao's embrace of dialectics, contradiction, and unpredictability complicates his international legacy in the eyes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century CCP which praises political and economic stability and is at pains to downplay its previous foreign interference.<sup>10</sup>

In the second chapter, Lovell explores the story of how Edgar Snow, an American journalist, wrote a book about Mao that massively fed and sustained the leader's global cult reputation both at home and abroad. Snow, portrayed in part as a wannabe Gatsbian flaneur and budding entrepreneur of 1920s New York, ended up as a journalist in China during the 1930s. In Shanghai he came into the orbit of China's radical circles, gaining such trust that the Chinese Communist Party, shrewdly sensing the opportunity for beneficial PR operations, arranged for Snow to visit Party headquarters in Yan'an to interview Mao and other high ranking cadres. The result of these interviews, transcribed by Snow and then translated into Chinese so that the Communists could vet them, was Snow's book *Red Star Over China* (1937).

The book had a huge international impact, selling 100,000 copies in Britain alone, and provided a major boost in generating global admiration for Mao, persuading Western readerships and politicians that Mao and his group were foremost noble patriots and democrats rather than Communists. *Red Star* inspired several post-colonial leaders and insurrectionists such as Nelson Mandela in South Africa and the Malayan Communist Party leader Chin Peng. British troops even found numerous copies in abandoned military camps as they

battled Maoist jungle fighters during the Malayan emergency of the 1950s. The translation of the book into Chinese, Lovell argues, was crucial in drawing more affluent Chinese metropolitan recruits from the coastal cities towards Mao's key central base at Yan'an, adding great momentum to the Communist cause.

Many of the central chapters explore the international impact of Maoism throughout and beyond the Cold War. Re-assessing the 1950s Sino-Soviet split, Lovell chronicles the developing bitterness between China and the USSR, but also the lengths to which the CCP were willing to go in deploying Mao Zedong thought as a foreign policy weapon to supplant Marxism-Leninism in capturing the admiration and support of the post-colonial world. Lovell suggests that wider understandings of Maoism's legacy lie in decolonisation and the romantic fight against waning imperial power that gave the teachings of the little red book their 'global moral glamour'.<sup>11</sup> Julius Nyerere's Tanzania and the encroachment of Maoist supporters in Sukarno's Indonesia are mentioned in detail. In chapter Six which explores Mao's African footprint, Lovell uses archival material to give us a revealing glimpse of the true scale of the support that China was providing to African States and revolutionaries in return for their receptiveness to Maoist Communism. Despite crippling economic struggles of the Great Leap forward and the dislocation of the Cultural Revolution, China spent around \$24 billion abroad, 13-15 percent of this in Africa, from 1950–1978. According to Lovell, China took its global revolutionary role even more seriously than previously supposed.

Looking also to the more contemporary afterlives of Maoism and the movements that it inspired, Lovell covers the Naxalite groups in India with emotional sensitivity. The Naxalites are a collection of persecuted tribes and lower caste 'untouchables' who continue to struggle against both government and international corporate incursions and exploitation in areas such as West Bengal. It is her contention that 'Naxalite Maoism' has been one of the spurs for academics and public intellectuals of the subcontinent to engage with 'subaltern' studies, which in turn has had a big impact on Western approaches to colonial and post-colonial history writing.<sup>12</sup> Chapter 11 is also an illuminating discussion of Nepal's future fate after Maoists were voted into power there.

Lovell's previous book, *The Opium War: Drugs, dreams and the Making of China* (2011), examined the two 'Opium Wars' (1839-42,

and 1856-60) between British and Qing Empires. This work examined the mess of greed, stereotyped 'orientalism' and misunderstanding that often punctuated the spread of 'Treaty Port Imperialism' in the Far East. It was conversely the reversal or complication of these occidental-oriental discursive flows during the Cold War, the imprint and reception of motifs of Mao on Western culture and politics, that I found particularly engaging in Lovell's analyses in *Maoism*.

At Mao's instigation, China experienced a 'Cultural Revolution' (1966-76), which stoked the admiration of Western radicals frustrated by the technocratic stagnation of both the USSR and their own societies. The mass student protests of the Spring of 1968 in Paris and elsewhere saw many looking towards Maoist dialectics as new tools for radical insubordination. Riffing off her previous work on Sino-Western entanglement, Lovell deftly asserts that Western radical adherents to Maoist doctrine at this time showed a 'predisposition towards identifying conveniently remote, exotic China as a repository of political, social, cultural and economic virtue', that bordered on the fantastical.<sup>13</sup> This fitted into a centuries long trope of Western thought, telling us more about the kaleidoscope of stereotypes through which New Left 'observers' viewed China than 'Mao's politics.'<sup>14</sup> Various groups in the West reinterpreted and "vernacularised" Maoism for their own divergent, often parochial, context-sensitive ends, such as the Parisian student protests, and again, Lovell argues that the protean natures of Maoist dialectics made it perfectly suited to this 'spirit of 68'. Tropes satirising the sectarianism of Maoist radicals became enduring figures of public amusement in *Citizen Smith* and *Monty Python's Life of Brian*.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, within China itself, Lovell charts in chapter 12 the complex history of de-Maoification began after his death in 1976 by successor Deng Xiaoping. Lovell argues however that Xi Jinping has been adopting elements of Maoism as a tool for building nationalism to 'make China great again', and his contemporary rehabilitation of Mao makes this chapter poignant.<sup>16</sup> The CCP, forged in the furnace of a civil war to unify the nation, always had a heavily nationalistic flavour to it. This is an important point for Western mainstream readerships to grasp, because as China historian Robert Bickers states, 'Nationalism matters in China, and what matters in China matters to us all.'<sup>17</sup>

Understanding about the historical engagement between China and the West is still sorely lacking. I observed this first hand in 2014

when I saw Robert Bickers giving a small guest lecture at the University of Birmingham where he asked a room of senior historians about some events in the modern era. To his surprise, nobody could give him the dates of the two opium wars nor of the Taiping Rebellion, and very few knew anything about the Boxer Uprising, key events in China that have shaped transnational as well as national trajectories.

Lovell's previous book, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China* has helped rehabilitate Western interest in Anglo-Chinese historical interactions, drawing on a wealth of Western and Chinese sources. It also explained why such transactions were powerful in narratives of patriotism and resistance in 20<sup>th</sup> century China. *Maoism* feels like a continuation of Lovell's mission to explain how, as Communist China asserted itself globally, these entanglements were playing out during the cold war and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is to global and transnational history that we must continue to look, if we are to understand China.

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