



Journal
OF THE
Royal Asiatic
Society
China

Vol. 85

2025

No. 1

PUBLISHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY

The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society China is published by
Earnshaw Books on behalf of the Royal Asiatic Society China

Journal OF THE Royal Asiatic Society China

Vol. 85 No. 1, 2025

EDITOR
Melinda Liu

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Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society China

Vol. 85 No. 1, 2025

978-988-8968-21-3

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EB 282

Front Cover Image: Photograph of Chinese-American pilot Katherine Cheung (center) participating in an 1936 aerial competition. From the collection of Zou Dehuai

Designed and produced for RAS China by Earnshaw Books Ltd
17/E, Siu Ying Commercial Building, 151-155 Queen's Road Central, Hong Kong

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Published in Hong Kong by Earnshaw Books Ltd.

The Royal Asiatic Society China thanks Earnshaw Books
for its valuable contribution and support.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Not all of what we do for the RAS China Journal is obvious from simply looking at its pages. In 2025 we've devoted some thought and time to assessing new technologies and considering whether to expand the topics, format and voice of articles in the Journal. The world is changing fast, and changes in the publishing world are especially wide-ranging. However, the growing profile of AI has also underscored - at least for me - the unique nature of stories created by real people. The great strength of the RAS China Journal remains the people who originate and help produce the stories on its pages, and who explore narratives from the past with an eye on their significance in the present and for the future.

For years I've been thinking about how best to commemorate 2025 as the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. The topic has special resonance for me. My late father Tung-Sheng Liu was a Tsinghua University graduate in 1942, when he encountered a group of American aviators who had parachuted from their aircraft over China after bombing Japanese cities; they needed help from local Chinese to escape pursuing Japanese soldiers. My father was among many Chinese on the ground who helped these Americans. After the war these aviators, known as the Doolittle Raiders, named my father an Honorary Doolittle Raider.

While researching the topic of American aviators in WWII China for more than a decade, I found many stories which seem to have been overlooked or poorly understood. In late 2024 I was introduced to Zou Dehuai, a young Chinese collector of vintage China photographs; he has more than 10,000 on the topic of US-China history and especially the two countries' WWII alliance. He was looking for a photo of my father to include in his first exhibition. I lent him one; when I visited his studio to see more of his collection, Zou demonstrated a phenomenal memory and story-telling skill regarding the stacks of photographs and artifacts in his collection. There were photos of African-American soldiers in the China-Burma-India theatre, reports on *Nisei* (second-generation Japanese-Americans) conducting intelligence work for the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and photos of Chinese female pilots who took to the skies when China was at war against Japan.

The last category had the ingredients for an unusual piece. Contributing his first article to the journal, Zou focused on three women who were born in China but who learned to fly in the West. In the 1930s, Hazel Ying Lee, Katherine Cheung, and Lee Ya-Ching broke through racial and gender barriers to pursue their passion for flying. Although their names are not well-known today, the article evokes their spirit and the complex social undercurrents of the time. We hope you'll enjoy reading about them in our cover story.

Another section in the journal focuses on a frequent phenomenon for those of us living here. Almost daily I encounter microcosms of everyday life which appear modest on the surface, and yet speak volumes about the bigger picture that is China. Acclaimed author and regular journal contributor Paul French describes the maritime traffic along Shanghai's teeming waterfront—specifically focusing on 40 years of customs statistics relating to the movement of junks along the Huangpu river—to illuminate the economic turmoil, trade fluctuations and political emergencies that Shanghai experienced during the first half of the 20th century.

John Villar meanwhile explains why he calls Shanghai a 'city of many cities. In this metropolis one finds a Jiangnan water town nestling one street behind a Hausmann-scale boulevard or a postmodern skywalk floating above the tiled roof of a Qing building'. These diverse juxtapositions weave a patchwork quilt of urban fabric that is an integral part of Shanghai.

And Alan Babington-Smith, who heads the Royal Asiatic Society Beijing (RASBJ), sought to unravel the significance of calligraphy adorning a pot he bought decades ago in Macau, believing then—as he does now—that it's a counterfeit Ming ceramic. The pot was inscribed with the names of three well-known Chinese historical figures. But the more Alan tried to discover what linked the trio on this pot, the more mysteries he unearthed. In the end, the pot remained an enigma with questions surrounding its creation—by whom, when and above all, why—still unanswered. He wrote the article partly in hopes that a future reader might know some answers.

The Journal also includes two deep dives into memorable personalities. Edith Terry profiled the late Susan Chen, known as a "dealers' dealer" in the Hong Kong world of antiques. Lukas Gajdos' narrative about the Central European envoy Gottfried Ernst Ludwig described his encounters in China more than 120 years ago with layers

of detail and intrigue.

The journal's final section features Otari Kakhidze's review of the book *China's World View* by Li Dakui and Council Member Julie Chun's obituary for former US foreign service officer Tess Johnston, a founding member of the modern RAS China twenty years ago. Tess served on the RAS China Council from 2007 to 2016, and was known for her extensive knowledge of Shanghai architecture. (Before her China years she had served in Vietnam from 1967-1974, working for the legendary John Paul Vann and witnessing the Tet offensive at close hand). Before her death in September 2025, Tess had donated many of her books and papers to the Royal Asiatic Society China.

For their heroic efforts to help produce this year's journal, deepest thanks once again go to editors Tracey Willard, Kate Munro and Warren Singh Bartlett. I'm also grateful to advisors James Miller and Robert Martin for their advice, as well as to the team at Earnshaw Books and publisher Graham Earnshaw for their support.

We welcome your feedback—and your suggestions for potential contributions to a future edition of the RAS China Journal. If you are nurturing a narrative that you feel needs to be told, please let us know at raschina@ras-China.org

Melinda Liu
Editor

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RAS CHINA ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

The year 2025 was a period of transition and also consolidation for the Royal Asiatic Society, China as the mix of expatriates in Shanghai continued to change. Membership overall remained steady, but we experienced the transition of many of our longtime members who have relocated out of Shanghai. China's relaxed visa policies have brought much foreign tourism back to Shanghai, but our membership growth depends on more stable, longtime residents of Shanghai. Fortunately we have also welcomed more Chinese members to our membership and to our Council team. I look forward to continuing RAS's role as a site for dialogue and cultural exchange between China and the world.

There were two major changes for the RAS Council in 2025. The first was the retirement of our longtime membership director and film club convenor, Katherine Song. Kathy has been a stalwart of the RAS for many years, and we owe her much for her dedicated service. Alexandra Archer replaced her in the role of membership director, and our new film club convenor is Peter Valero. I am grateful to both of them for stepping into Kathy's shoes and continuing the great example that she set in both these areas.

Film Club convened regular Sunday evening meetings at the Xingguo Radisson Hotel to view a mixture of old favourites and more contemporary films. Highlights included Chen Kaige's sumptuous *Farewell My Concubine* and Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* which explored tensions between traditional Confucian values and the encroaching influence of the Western lifestyles among younger generations. To commemorate the 80th anniversary of Allied victory in WWII and the 88th anniversary of the Battle of Shanghai, the film club paid homage to 'Eight Hundred Heroes', a regiment of Chinese soldiers who fought against Japanese aggression at the Sihang warehouse in 1937, by selecting the movie of the same name made in Taiwan in 1975.

The second big transition within the RAS Council was the stepping down of Sven Serrano as our longtime librarian. In 2025 I was fortunate to work with Sven on our cooperative project with Duke Kunshan University to digitise the library's archives and catalog. I'm pleased to report that the library now has its own website [www].

raslibrary.org] and online catalog. Students from Duke Kunshan have continued to digitise the archival and rare materials of the library, including the Tess Johnston collection, the *China Express and Telegraph*, the *China Journal of Science and Arts*, and the *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Julie Chun, DKU student William Tran and I presented a report on this project at the *Symposium on Heritage in the Digital Age* that was held at New York University, Shanghai on 25-27 April 2025. Thanks also are due to the volunteers who keep our library open during the week and have embarked upon the tedious, but necessary, process of inventorying our entire collection.

Alongside important transitions in our leadership, I have been fortunate enough to rely on the constant support and leadership of Julie Chun. The Art Focus series ‘Integrating China’s Artistic Past’, curated and presented by her, explored the various facets of China’s rich material culture spanning both the recent and distant history that have shaped its aesthetic legacy. The series often took us beyond Shanghai to unique cultural sites such as the Jin Ze Art Centre, a private museum dedicated to documenting and preserving traditional arts and handicrafts. We had a special viewing of rare Qixi embroidery and Song Dynasty literature, accompanied by engaging discussions with the curator. Another key highlight was our visit to the Six Arts Museum in Suzhou, where we examined the context of China’s economic forces that helped to shape the vast collection of wooden handicrafts, which form the core of the museum’s holdings.

Another constant at RAS has been our ‘Stories of Things’ series convened by Robert Martin. One of the outstanding features of the 2025 Stories of Things year was the wide variety of objects and their associated narratives. From Linda Johnston’s modern, kitschy cat mirror, concealing a centuries long Chinese fascination with things feline, to Karolina Pawlik’s reflection on words as both meaning and objects, inspired by an antique set of carved wooden Chinese character types. From Andrew Field’s taking us on a journey into the imagination of a 1930s movie fan as we leafed through a scrapbook he found at a flea market, to Brian Offenther’s linking Elvis Presley in surprising ways to China, while sharing with us a record from the ‘King’ issued by the Hong Kong Elvis Fan Club. We were also regaled with tales of Buddha carvers, cat lanterns, ancient Chinese maps and more, all demonstrating yet again that ‘things’ have a wealth of

knowledge that they can impart to us.

History Club, Philosophy Club and Book Club all held meetings during the year, with a wide diversity of topics including the Jesuit mission to China, the philosopher Tan Sitong, and the massive biography of Zhou Enlai by Chen Jian. Popular as always was the Food Focus Group convened by Lily Chow, who led us on the discovery of Dongbei cuisine and China's yellow wine. Two new innovations for the summer were our book chat series, where RAS members convened on weekend afternoons in the RAS library to talk about a favourite book, and our history summer school. I had the privilege of leading the latter with our history club convenor Professor Aryeh Amihay. Together we investigated recent historiographical controversies in the study of the Zhou, Han, Tang, and Qing dynasties.

The highlight of our social calendar was, as always, the spring social held at the official residence of the British Consul General and RAS Honorary President, Matt Burney CMG. Mr. Burney continues his steadfast support for the activities of the RAS and we are extremely grateful to him for his hospitality. Organising these and other events would not be possible without the support of our administrator Kelsi Su, and the other members of Council who work in the background, especially our secretary Marta Lopez Cámara and treasurer Jenny Yang.

Finally, let me commend the work of our indefatigable journal editor, Melinda Liu, who has once again put together a splendid collection of articles. They reflect the varied interests of our members and maintain the role of RAS as an important bridge connecting China and the world. Reviewing this year's journal together with the activities and events of the past year, I remain convinced of RAS's important role in the broader dissemination of China's history and cultural traditions to the wider public in Shanghai and beyond. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve on the Council in 2025 and I hope to do so for many years in the future.

James Miller, PhD

Vice President and Council Chair

RAS China Memberships on 8 Nov 2025

Memberships

Membership Type	Numbers	Percentage
Honorary Members (non-paid)	11	7.5%
Paid Memberships :		
Institutional Members	2	1.4%
Lifetime Members	5	3.4%
Overseas Individual Members	3	2.0%
Joint/Household Members	48	32.9%
Individual Members	77	52.7%
Grand Total	146	100%

RAS China Events, 27 Nov 2024—8 Nov 2025

AGM	1
Spring Social	1
General Programs (various)	3
Art Focus (Julie Chun)	10
History (Aryeh Amihay)	6
Film (Kathy Song)	5
Food Focus (Lily Chow)	5
Book Club (Various)	4
Beyond City (Julie Chun)	2
Philosophy (James Miller)	1
Story of Things (Robert Martin)	4
Zoom Summer School (James & Aryeh)	4
Book chats (various)	3
Total	49

SECTION 1

Worlds Within Worlds

JUNK TRAFFIC THROUGH SHANGHAI, 1902-1941

BY PAUL FRENCH

ABSTRACT

Metrics are an important part of history. Particularly in the case of a city as economically and politically turbulent in the twentieth century as Shanghai: population statistics—births, deaths, marriages, occupations, crimes and a whole lot of other data are instructive. For a riverine city, river traffic statistics are also a key indicator of economic vicissitudes, political crises and war, both within Shanghai and far beyond the estuary that linked the city to the East China Sea and the world.

Descriptions of the teeming Shanghai waterfront along the Whangpoo (Huangpu) River abound in travellers' memoirs. For instance, American Irene Corbally Kuhn arrived by steamer in 1928 to work for a new radio station—KRC:

All the 1,000 miles to Shanghai from Hongkong the weather was foul, and the rain fell in dirty, gray sheets as the *Inaba* plowed slowly up the thirteen miles of muddy Whangpoo River. We berthed at the Nippon Yusen Kaisha docks in the northern end of Shanghai, and if ever a sight was calculated to dispel illusions of the romantic, exotic Orient, it was here at journey's end. All about, on either side of the river were the gray godowns lining the miles of docks; engineering works, cotton mills, silk filatures and shipyards. The river was crowded with shiplighters and sampans. The smokestacks of the factories belched a black, sooty pall over the grayness, mingling their smoke with the fog.¹

Similar descriptions of the crowded Shanghai waterfront abound. But others, including the Shanghai Inspectorate General of Customs, the Chinese Maritime Customs and the Marine Police, were tasked with analysing and keeping records of this teeming mélange of river craft

and life. Their statistics on junk traffic on the Huangpu over 40 years are revealing of the economic turmoil, trade fluctuations and political emergencies, as well as changes in riverine craft design, that influenced littoral Shanghai in the first half of the twentieth century.

The treaty port that became the Shanghai International Settlement (and its adjacent French Concession) was created in the wake of the First Opium War (1839-1842). Shanghai's unique selling point was the geographic proximity of the pre-existing walled city on the banks of the Huangpu River. Throughout its near century of existence 1842 to December 8, 1941, when the Japanese occupied the city, the International Settlement's Shanghai Municipal Council kept extensive records. It was a bureaucracy that raised rates on residents, organised a police force, fire brigade, Volunteer Corps, customs and other civic functions.

One particularly interesting set of statistics that demonstrate the truism that Shanghai's lifeblood was trade, was the annual tally of 'junks entered and cleared at Shanghai' compiled by Statistical Department of the Shanghai Inspectorate General of Customs. Between 1902 and 1941, on average, fully 50 percent of imports into China and approximately 35 percent of exports passed through the lower part of the Yangtze and Shanghai.²

This trade shaped the city's economy and naturally spurred investment in refining industries—cotton mills, silk filatures etc. It also led to the creation of industries associated with supporting the



Figure 1: Junk in Shanghai's waters carrying an advertisement for Hatamen Cigarettes on its sail.

riverine trade: dry docks, shipbuilding, chandleries, warehousing and godowns as well as coal and fuel dumps. The concentration of business—much of the finance sector, encompassing the likes of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (HSBC), Standard Chartered, and Banque de L'indochine among others—were all closely linked to the river cargo trade. As the city grew, so too did the number of hotels, catering businesses, lodging houses, seamen's missions, skyscraper apartments and office blocks all facilitating merchant seamen, tourism and business travellers

who overwhelmingly arrived by river on coastal steamers and liners.

Cargo ships and junks utilised the extensive wharves and buoy moorings along both banks of the Huangpu, to the west through Yangtszepoo (Yangpu), Hongkew (Hongkou) and down to the south of the Quai de France (French Bund, or now the Zhongshan East Second Road), and across to the east along the Pootung (Pudong) river frontage. Looking at the junk traffic statistics for the 39 years between 1902 and 1941 we can see the surge in trade, from the start of the twentieth century through the economic heyday of the 1920s and early 1930s, to the declines as the Second Sino-Japanese War adversely affected business and traffic through Shanghai, eastern China and the Yangtze Delta.

The figures below are for traditional junks only. This is interesting, and, given the demise of junks in the second half of the twentieth century, a curiosity. The statistics show that even as the amount of non-junk shipping into Shanghai was increasing due to newly designed purpose-built, engine-powered cargo and merchant shipping coming on stream, the fall-off in traditional, by then already “old fashioned”, junks was nowhere near as precipitate as one might expect. Indeed junk traffic on the Huangpu remained strong—at a peak of 77,420 in 1935 and didn’t tail off significantly until 1938, due then largely to the adverse effects of the Japanese attack on eastern

China and the Yangtze Delta. Indeed, in 1936 just over 69,000 junks entered and cleared Shanghai—falling by 43 per cent in 1937 (the year of Japan’s summer invasion of the Yangtze Delta) and by 175 per cent over 1936 to a mere 4,552 in 1938. The number would pick up again slightly in 1939 and 1940 (during the “Gudao” or “solitary island” period, when the foreign concessions were surrounded by Japanese occupying forces and were relatively peaceful despite being occupied) before slumping back to 8,724 in 1941 as Japan occupied the entirety of the International Settlement.



Figure 2: A traditional Chinese junk from Ningbo sketched by Ivon Donnelly. He was a shipping agent living in Shanghai until the 1940s and a keen observer of traditional craft.³

While editorialists in Shanghai were predicting, and in many cases, nostalgically mourning the demise of junk craft in the Yangtze Delta in the 1930s, the traffic was still actually increasing. Most craft remained traditional sail-powered junks even though for most of this period the Japanese were installing engines in junks to extend their longevity somewhat as commercial vehicles. So what accounts for the discrepancies in editorialist opinion and the actuality on the river?

Junks Entered and Cleared at Shanghai, 1902-1941

Year	Junks Entered & Cleared
1902	6,379
1903	7,642
1904	7,494
1905	8,454
1906	9,542
1907	10,112
1908	9,989
1909	10,430
1910	9,542
1911	9,714
1912	10,676
1913	10,385
1914	10,213
1915	8,799
1916	9,288
1917	33,227
1918	36,230
1919	43,016
1920	58,092
1921	56,075
1922	57,422
1923	58,603
1924	52,469

Year	Junks Entered & Cleared
1925	54,040
1926	51,582
1927	51,091
1928	48,372
1929	49,134
1930	54,410
1931	28,098
1932	35,258
1933	61,401
1934	73,498
1935	77,420
1936	69,099
1937	44,420
1938	4,552
1939	19,624
1940	21,428
1941	8,724±

Source: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, Shanghai (kindly supplied by the Tide Surveyor's Office, Chinese Maritime Customs, Shanghai)

± = January to May inclusive

The answer appears to be best explained by the foremost western expert on Shanghai's junk craft George Raleigh Gray "RG" Worcester. RG Worcester, born in England in 1890, was himself a seaman who had served on Royal Navy submarines in the First World War and then found employment as a River Inspector for China's Maritime Customs Service, a post he held until forcibly "retired" by the Japanese in December 1941. After being interned during the war he returned to the Customs Service Statistical Department in Shanghai until 1949 when he moved to Hong Kong. He wrote a number of books on Chinese junks including *The Junks and Sampans of the Yangtze* (1947) and *The Floating Population in China: An Illustrated Record of the Junkmen & Their Boats* (posthumously 1970). Worcester also collected models of junks and sampans (often made by the former Inspector-General of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service from 1929 to 1943, Frederick Maze), many of which are now part of the collection of London's Science Museum in South Kensington, and also in the collection of the Horniman Museum in Forest Hill, South London. Worcester died in 1968.

Worcester studied junk movements in Shanghai first hand. His conclusion, put simply, was that there were a dwindling number of large junks, but a proliferation of smaller craft. To be more specific, this meant that junks such as lorchas, Kiangsu (Jiangsu) Traders, salt-junks and other larger junks were slowly being taken out of service while the prevalence of smaller types of junk craft was growing. One reason for this was that the smaller craft also functioned as family homes and were family-owned. Commercial logistics companies were upgrading from junks to more modern engine-driven craft while the traditional family-owned businesses kept going and may have even increased in number.

To the untrained eye, telling apart different types of junk is difficult. A Kiangsu Trader (aka Pechili Trader, Shantung Trader or Shantung Five-masted junk) can be up to 41 metres in length, crewed by 20 to 30 men, able to carry up to 400 tons of cargo with, as the alternative name suggests, significant sail. While a salt-junk could also be multi-masted, long and capable of carrying significant cargo (thought primarily designed for salt transportation). The Chinese variety (other types of salt junk existed in India and Southeast Asia) could sometimes be mistaken for a lorcha, a craft with a European (Portuguese)-style hull and a Chinese junk rig, that is typically faster than most types of

purely Chinese junk and able to carry more cargo too.

However, some anomalies in junk movements still need to be explained. For instance, the fall off in 1915 and then a significant resurgence in 1917 from 9,288 the previous year to 33,227, a 113 per cent growth in traffic in just 12 months. That leap continued to grow steadily and hold throughout the 1920s prior to the more erratic fluctuations in traffic of the 1930s. The figures around 1915-1917 can in part be explained by the reduced exports from the Yangtze Delta due to the war in Europe and disruption of the sea-lanes. Later, the 1930s is a problematic time for Shanghai in many ways that deterred junk craft from the Huangpu. 1932 saw the January 28 Incident, or Shanghai Incident, between January 28 and March 3, 1932 when Japanese and Chinese troops clashed around the city deterring craft entering the port. Similarly so with the Japanese shelling of Hongkou, Paoshan (Baoshan) and Chapei (Zhabei) in the summer of 1937 and the concentration of Japanese and other warships on the Huangpu disrupting traffic. This situation persisted until 1941 and the eventual fall of the Settlement. There are other possible factors—opium suppression in the 1930s, for instance, reduced some cargoes.

There is one final reason, and that is the reduction in foreign cargo ships arriving at Shanghai during World War One and then after the outbreak of hostilities in 1937. Most of the cargo loaded and unloaded from foreign ships was subsequently transported by junk to interior provinces. Worcester estimates that in one year alone, 1919:

[...] more than 43,000 junks entered and cleared at Shanghai. Of this number, one-half plied between Shanghai and the province of Kiangsu (Jiangsu), north of the Yangtze, 40 per cent traded with Chekiang (Zhejiang) province and about 5 per cent with Shantung (Shandong).⁴

Fluctuations in junk traffic on the Huangpu is an interesting statistic as it indicates larger cargo vessel arrivals and departures as merchant ships become larger and able to carry more cargo. It also tracks changes to junk design. Naturally the river remained “teeming” as so often described in visitor memoirs, newspaper reports and books. Added to the junks and foreign cargo vessels (either larger merchant ships or more common “tramp steamers” carrying various cargoes) were warships, opium hulks (permanently moored as water-borne



Figure 3: Opium hulks on the Whangpoo in the 1930s.

storage facilities in the twentieth century), smaller passenger liners and coastal steamers, cross river “taxis”, Marine Police vehicles, various hawkers in sampans (from sellers of items and foodstuff to human waste and rubbish collection), and large flat barges mostly carrying farm produce via the Soochow (Suzhou) Canal.

River traffic and congestion also included the so-called “beggar-boats”, covered sampans that “worked” the waterways of Shanghai by day and moored them along the Suzhou Creek and other various creeks in the evenings. Moving beggar boats along was problematic for the police and authorities. Talking of these beggar-boats in his memoir of the 1930s *Shanghai Policeman*, EW Peters writes,

Numbers of these boats always infest the waterways in Shanghai at night, the beggars mooring them along the creeks in the evening, practising their profession in the streets of the city during the night, and then slipping away in these boats next morning.⁵

Apparently, all creeks and waterways, even in the Settlement’s boundaries, were deemed to belong to the Chinese. Hence, moving beggar boats along was problematic for the police and authorities.



Figure 4: *Junks in Harbour* by Dr Robert Cecil Robertson (1890-1942), who lived in Shanghai between 1925 and 1937.

In December 1941 Japan occupied the International Settlement and those responsible for gathering river traffic statistics, in the offices of the Inspectorate General of Customs or the Tide Surveyor's Office of the Chinese Maritime Customs, either departed or were interned for the duration of the war. In 1943 the Shanghai International Settlement, along with all foreign concessions, ceased to exist by agreement of the foreign treaty powers and Nationalist China.⁶ Statistics for the years of war and occupation were not recorded. Similarly so record keeping was erratic in the immediate post-war years, which were of course years of civil war in China. Record keeping began again in the 1950s. However, over that decade the Huangpu's riverine trade changed dramatically. The beggar boat and sampan clusters around Suzhou Creek and other creeks were abolished and many formerly floating families moved on shore. River traffic of course continued, but less with junks and more with steamer craft. Additionally, a sizeable number of foreign cargo ships, coastal passenger steamers and virtually all international passenger liners ceased to call at Shanghai. The majority of cargo and passenger liner traffic was confined downstream to the port towns of Wusong (14 miles downriver). In the 1960s and '70s the Huangpu remained a ghost of its former self in terms of traffic. During this time the increasing severity of typhoons in eastern China

and resultant floods led the Shanghai municipal government to clear out the remaining river dwellers as well as construct a levee along the riverfront, with the result that the embankment now stands some 10 metres higher than street level. This of course provided the walkway Puxi-side but meant that the old ferry wharves connecting the Bund and Pudong, which had served the area's original purpose, were removed.

Still, junks remain perhaps the most romanticised and iconic watercraft of China and of Shanghai, criss-crossing the Huangpu heading upriver to Jiangsu with myriad tributaries and creeks running off it, and downriver of course to Wusong, where the Huangpu meets the Yangtze and then flows into the East China Sea. And once tens of thousands of junks a year sailed those waters.



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SHANGHAI'S URBAN PATCHWORK QUILT

BY JOHN VILLAR

ABSTRACT

This article explores Shanghai as a city of overlapping urban fabrics: Jiangnan water town, treaty port settlements, socialist planning and modern, postmodern and contemporary urban languages. Drawing on maps, publications, testimonies and fieldwork, it argues that Shanghai's distinctiveness lies in its harmonious layering of urban languages rather than erasure or uniform progress. Thus, Shanghai wears its history like a patchwork quilt, in which are sewn boats trading cotton, communities by water canals, foreign outposts, jazz bands, forward-looking intellectual think-tanks, socialist workshops and operators of algorithmic smart devices, all visible at once thanks to the city's diverse urban fabric embroidered with an entrepreneurial lifestyle. All incoming actors, locals, imperial tax post governors, British treaty port merchants, French boulevardiers, Black American jazz musicians, Japanese mill-owners, Nationalist planners, Jewish and White Russian refugees, Soviet engineers and international start-up coders, have left traces of their own 'city's fabric' without erasing the others. By tracing ten urban languages still visible during an afternoon's walk in Shanghai, this article suggests that this city offers an example of harmonious coexistence within cities.

INTRODUCTION: DIVERSE SETTLEMENTS GROWING AROUND THE SAME RIVERS

Cities rarely wear all their ages on the surface. In Europe, nineteenth-century sanitation produced uniform cities like Haussmann's Paris and Cerdà's Barcelona, which sliced clean, rational corridors through earlier labyrinths, leaving the Roman forums or the Baroque squares as picturesque jewels in isolation. Across the Atlantic, cities in the north and south of the American continent rose on orthogonal grids, consciously modern from birth.¹ Many Asian cities, meanwhile, have pagodas next to post-war slabs and postmodern buildings, but rarely incorporate the European experiments of city planning.² And Soviet models did not spread worldwide, outside of the comrade nations. Yet, Shanghai has it all.

Shanghai is often praised for its speed, how steel and glass towers

sprout overnight in Pudong, and how entire shopping streets reinvent themselves between festivals. The more remarkable truth, however, is that nothing here is ever truly erased. Scratch the mirror-glass of a brand-new façade and you will uncover layer upon layer of earlier Shanghai: a Qing-dynasty tax post beside a cotton guildhall, a Soviet workers' club inside a garden laid out by French surveyors, a Republican Era's Lilong behind an Art Deco apartment block. Indeed, the city has gone through an intense process of demolitions. Still, the scale of Shanghai (bigger than many nations) accommodates these demolition processes with historical preservation. At least several specimens of each style or type of Shanghai's entire urban repertoire are preserved today, inside the very urban structure where they were created. Shanghai is not a single narrative but an anthology. Walking from the Bund to Xujiahui, or from west to east along Suzhou Creek, is like turning page after page of Shanghai's continuing urban endeavours.

Thus, Shanghai stands apart from most cities. In this megapolis, a Jiangnan water town nestles just a lane behind a Haussmann-scale boulevard; a single street links a Victorian embankment with a Soviet exhibition hall; a postmodern skywalk floats above the tiled roof of a Qing building. This is no random chaotic collage but rather a harmonious stitched patchwork quilt, each square representing a distinct urban fabric: traditional Chinese, British imperial, French colonial, American industrial, Japanese mercantile, Soviet monumental and modern, postmodern and sustainable urban designs. Nowhere else can a walker traverse so many architectural dialects in one afternoon. It is not Shanghai's scale or velocity, but its dazzling multiplicity that defines its *genius loci*.

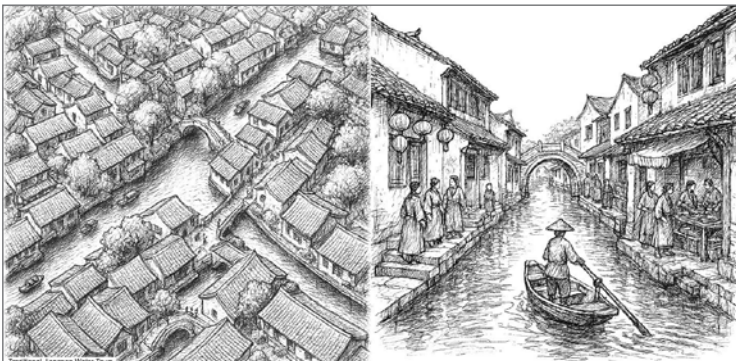


Figure 1: Traditional Jiangnan Water Town. All sketches in the article are by the author

BEGINNINGS IN WATER: TRADITIONAL JIANGNAN WATER TOWN

Shanghai's history begins on a salt marsh. During the Sun Quan (孙权) reign (222-257 CE), Qinglong Town (青龙镇) was little more than a tax pier on the Wusong River, now known as Suzhou Creek, one of countless such outposts spread across Jiangnan. But when sand choked that channel and imperial hydrologists redirected traffic to the broader Huangpu River, Shanghai's fate tilted. In 1267, the third year of Xianchun (咸淳), the Southern Song court set up a Municipal Bureau of Shipping (市舶司) on the Huangpu River.³ Thus, in 1292, in the twenty-ninth year of Zhi Yuan (至元) Shanghai was raised to a County.⁴

Shanghai's original water town featured white-washed walls, black-tiled roofs, and lanterns shining on water lanes where produce was punted from door to door. Commerce clustered along the quayside, temples anchored the quarters and a civic granary stood ready against floods or famine.⁵ By 1560, a Ming era visitor could pass through the city wall, completed in 1553 to ward off coastal pirates and elevate Shanghai's status as an important imperial city, by the water gates and still navigate most lanes by boat.

Yet it was Shanghai's entrepreneurial spirit that managed the heavy lifting. Taxes were insufficient to elevate a small town within a vast empire, with predominant nearby cities like Hangzhou and Suzhou thriving for nearly two millennia before Shanghai. Closer to the sea, Shanghai turned the original handicap of farming rice on salty water into a boon for cultivating high-quality cotton.⁶ By the Ming dynasty, in 1553, the 23rd year of Jiajing (嘉靖), the Shanghai city wall was completed, and the surrounding polders were China's prime cotton fields. Indigo-style fabrics and South Sea spices moved through Shanghai's households and warehouses, making Shanghai extraordinarily diverse in Chinese trade and visitors. As the Empire's number one producer of cotton, it was a major source of the uniforms for the Forbidden City's court and army.⁷

Two centuries of this remarkable development saw local enterprise reach impressive heights. Then the Opium Wars erupted, bringing new urban fabrics from the foreign imperial powers and a new chapter in the city's urban landscape. The British and the French Empires noticed the vast trading activity of Shanghai's port and its strategic location through the reports of Hugh Hamilton Lindsay in 1833,⁸ which confirmed that Shanghai's trade at that time was 'equal to or



Figure 2: Comparison of London's Fleet Street in the 1910s and Shanghai's Nanking Road in the 1910s

greater than that of its contemporary London⁹ and therefore pursued securing extraterritorial concessions to the north of Shanghai's walled city.¹⁰ Rather than retreating in trauma, Shanghai absorbed the shock by transforming foreign imposition into cosmopolitan interplay, where urban identities converged rather than collided. Now, the diversity of Chinese goods and visitors could meet the Western ones. So, Western settlements settled and lived in equilibrium with their already vibrant Chinese counterparts.

The Shanghainese spirit could not be caged. Between 1912 and 1914, the city wall was demolished, and the water canals were covered to build roads that allowed even greater mobility and mixing of this cosmopolitan melting pot of Chinese and Western goods and people. The integration was complete. This is evidence that the Shanghainese do not build walls but construct bridges instead. Shanghai's spirit is a city open to business and to all people. As for its urban heritage, even though that specific traditional Jiangnan water town no longer surrounds Yu Garden as it once did, the city has expanded to bump against neighbouring water towns like Zhujiajiao, known as the 'Venice of Shanghai', Nanxiang, and Sijing, all with their thousand-year-plus histories, allowing everybody in Shanghai to still enjoy the traditional water town experience today.

NEW EMPIRE AT THE RIVERBANK: THE BRITISH SETTLEMENT

The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) opened five ports: Amoy, Canton, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai. In Shanghai, George Balfour, the first British plenipotentiary, claimed 56 hectares north of Shanghai's

walled city the following year;¹¹ on the west bank of the Huangpu River, it became known as the Bund. He laid out squares and parade grounds on a neat grid and planted a small but telling racetrack. Within a decade, granite bank buildings, and Classic revival clubs lined the embankment;¹² tea, silk, and opium were quoted in shillings and taels.

By the 1900s, typists tapped from handwritten sources beneath the banks' lazy ceiling fans, while taipans clapped for racing horses beneath the vibrant sun of what's now the east block of People's Square. For Chinese staff, these offered ambiguity laced with ambition. A decade later, hawkers who had once sold sesame cakes at the racetrack, and waiters who served patrons along the Bund began opening accounts in those same banks or buying horses of their own. Yet fortune proved fickle as many succumbed to the grip of opium. Meanwhile, jazz poured from gramophones and live bands, drifting from midday brunches to midnight waltzes; a soundtrack to a city experimenting with social permeability and liberty.¹³

By the 1930s, the stretch from the Cathay Hotel and Sassoon House, now the Fairmont Peace Hotel, to the old racetrack and the Park Hotel, at that time the tallest building in Asia, Nanking Road, today's East Nanjing Road, formed a grand axis lined with bustling shops and elegant façades echoing the architectural cadence of the City of London. As one strolled along the Nanking Road, it was said one might 'fancy oneself in Oxford Street or the Strand'; a nod to the street's unmistakably British character.¹⁴ And today, that character and urban fabric remain vibrant and ever present.

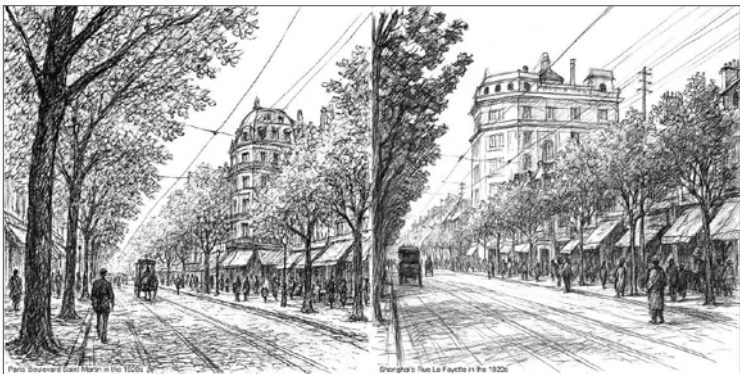


Figure 3: Comparison of Paris' Boulevard Saint-Martin in the 1920s and Shanghai's Rue La Fayette in the 1920s

PARIS OF THE EAST: THE FRENCH CONCESSION

If the Bund showcased Britain's mercantile might, the French Concession radiated a more refined charm, coated in art, leisure and political intrigue. Guided by colonial blueprints from Saigon, French surveyors laid out boulevards as wide as those carved by Haussmann in Paris, interspersed with friendly streets, lined with plane trees which still bloom each spring and whose leaves fall each autumn. For architects, it was an open studio: Neo-Classical villas stood beside Art Deco apartment buildings; Chinese plasterers learned to bevel a mansard cornice in the morning and tile a Jiangnan courtyard in the afternoon.¹⁵ The hybrid vocabulary birthed the "garden lane house" (花园洋房) and, later, the famous Lilong typology (里弄).

The plane trees were essential in defining the unique character of the French Concession. In summer, their broad leaves cast cool shadows over those strolling or sipping coffee under the green canopy. In winter, their bare branches welcomed sunlight, warming bodies and drawing light into rooms. This quiet symbiosis of nature and city life rendered the streets desirable and magnetic, attracting many British residents to the French Concession over their own settlement, joined by Chinese who could afford a home or a room. By 1900, café conversations beneath the dappled shade of Rue Massenet drifted effortlessly between Baudelaire's verses and Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary visions, sustained by a spirit of cosmopolitanism and intellectual freedom.

Wander down the former Rue La Fayette, today Fuxing Middle Road, and you might momentarily lose track of which continent you're on.¹⁶ Wrought-iron balconies, mansard roofs, kiosk newsstands and cafés exhaling drinks and jazz under dappled light, with people



Figure 4: Traditional Lilongs

reading and talking in French, including Chinese, the very *mis-en-scène* of Boulevard Saint-Martin in Paris. The proportions have been gently stretched to suit the subtropical air, but the choreography is unmistakably *Rive Droite*. On summer nights, then and now, the street is perfumed with osmanthus blossoms and Gauloises smoke, as Shanghainese locals and expatriates still debate films, novels and politics, over the same terrazzo floors that might have heard Sun Yat-sen plot revolution against the Qing Empire.

LIVING IN THE LANES: THE LILONG NEIGHBOURHOODS

Another war, the Taiping Rebellion, drove waves of refugees into Shanghai, exponentially increasing its population from 270,000 in 1843 to over one million by 1911.¹⁷ Protected by French and British military forces, alongside the Emperor's army, the city became an oasis within the chaos of civil war.¹⁸ Most cities would shut their doors to a wave of refugees three times bigger than their entire population, yet Shanghai's entrepreneurial spirit saw an opportunity to accommodate this migration. Many houses were needed. Restricted by treaty port fire regulations from building upward, developers responded by bonding several three-floor houses in a row, blending Eastern and Western architectural elements in the Lilong style, a style as hybrid as the city itself. Thus, the Lilong was born, defined by its narrow, elongated houses arranged in tight east-west rows, sharing common walls in an urban rhythm of order. Each row was accessed by shared lanes, with a service entrance to the north opening onto the kitchen and a noble entrance to the south opening onto a small courtyard. Yet beyond its physical layout, the true heart of the Lilong lay in the communal life of the lanes; a microcosm where neighbours cooked, argued, celebrated and lived side by side.¹⁹

A Lilong lane at breakfast sounds like an orchestra: stir-cooking from fathers, sewing machines from grandmas, chanting from children and gossiping from neighbours. By dusk, the same lanes transform into a stage for outdoor dinners, shared laughter and the sound of Mahjong tiles echoing late into the evening.²⁰ Lilongs are densely packed and intensely social urban engines of community life. Many Lilongs have been demolished to make way for new developments, sparking debates between nostalgia and progress; preservation and displacement; over statistics like Lilong's infant mortality in the 1930s, double the treaty port average at that time, due to shared latrines and

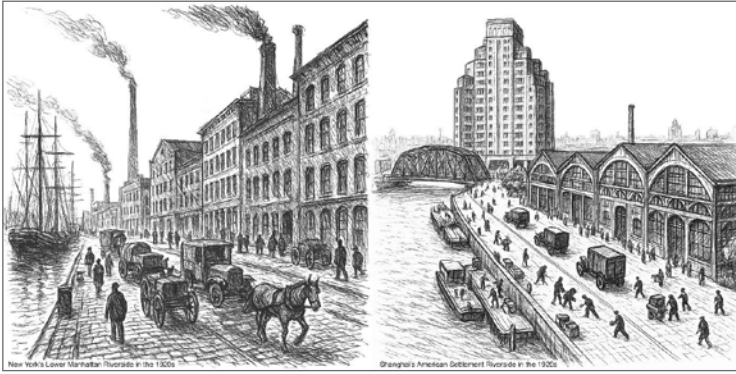


Figure 5: Comparison of New York's Lower Manhattan Riverside in the 1920s and Shanghai's American Settlement Riverside in the 1920s

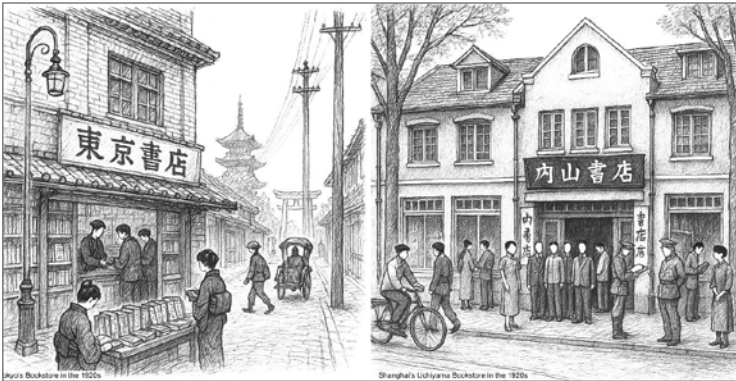


Figure 6: Comparison of a Tokyo bookstore in the 1920s and Shanghai's Uchiyama Bookstore in the 1920s

scarce piped water, and spreading fires and diseases in the 2000s. The truth is that today, approximately 190 Lilong blocks are under official protection, along with thousands of individual Lilong buildings elsewhere, recognised for their architectural value. More recently, Lilongs demolished due to ageing infrastructure have been replaced with contemporary Lilong reinterpretations, preserving the original scale and architectural language while incorporating amenities such as private bathrooms, elevators and underground garages that the original Lilongs never offered.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF TWO OTHER OUTSIDERS: AMERICAN AND JAPANESE SETTLEMENTS

In 1848, the United States established its own settlement north of

Suzhou Creek. This enclave, which merged with the British Settlement in 1863 to form the International Settlement, developed a waterfront dense with warehouses, reminiscent of New York's Hudson River docks.²¹ Early Art Deco apartment buildings like the Broadway Mansions, large warehouses made with cast iron lintels, and Beaux-Arts porticos stood alongside locals searching for new fortunes.²² Meanwhile, Japanese merchants established bookstores, bathhouses, and cotton and silk-reeling sheds in an area of the International Settlement that locals dubbed 'Little Tokyo'.²³ Among them, the renowned Uchiyama Bookstore, stocked with Japanese translations of Marxist and Western literature, made once-distant ideas newly accessible to Chinese readers. Lu Xun, China's pre-eminent early modernist writer, was a daily visitor. By the mid-1920s, the Bookstore of Uchiyama at Lilong's Lane 1818 of North Sichuan Road became a meeting point and editorial hub for the League of Left-Wing Writers,²⁴ highlighting Shanghai's vital role as a centre for China's evolving modern identity.

Traces of the former American and Japanese settlements endure in today's Hongkou district, where architectural and cultural echoes remain embedded in the urban fabric. Meanwhile, their postmodern successors rise across rivers in the Pudong and Huangpu districts. With its forest of glass towers, global corporate presence and busy avenues, Lujiazui has emerged as a global financial hub reminiscent of Manhattan.²⁵ At the same time, the bustling pedestrian corridors of East Nanjing Road brim with luminous signage and LED façades, conjuring visual parallels to Tokyo's Shibuya Crossing. In each case, Shanghai does more than imitate; it absorbs, distils and reimagines

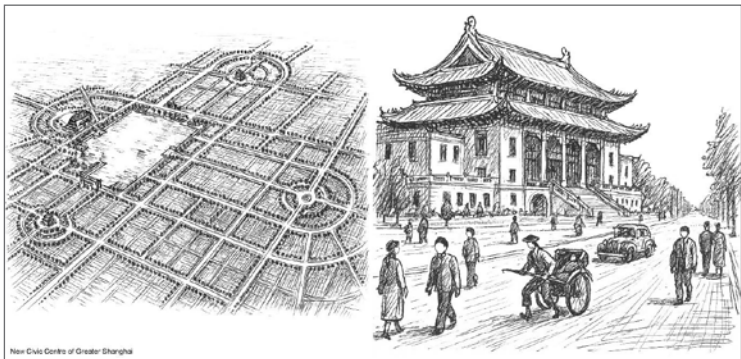


Figure 7: New Civic Centre of Greater Shanghai.

these foreign urban models, but according to its own scale, historical and cultural diversity until they become distinctly Shanghai's own.

THE REPUBLIC DREAM: THE NEW CIVIC CENTRE OF GREATER SHANGHAI

Following the Qing abdication, Shanghai's municipal leaders, under the Kuomintang, envisioned a new civic heart, modern in function, yet unmistakably Chinese in spirit.²⁶ In 1929, German-trained engineer Shen Yi and American-educated architect Dong Dayu drafted the blueprint for the 'New Civic Centre of Greater Shanghai', a monumental plan anchored by a City Hall and flanked by a library, a museum, and a hospital, all arranged along a cardinal axis.²⁷ The City Hall (1933), positioned at the northern end, represents Shanghai's government as a symbol of guidance; at the southern end, the hospital (1937) represents Shanghai's health as a symbol of its foundation. To the east stood the library (1936), representing Shanghai's wisdom as a symbol of the future evoked by sunrise; to the west, connected by a boulevard, stood the museum (1937), to represent Shanghai's heritage as a symbol of the past evoked by sunset.²⁸

Its architecture married reinforced concrete with a roof built in the Song-style 'dougong' bracket system; a modern structure wrapped in dynastic symbolism. This juxtaposition of 'International Style' modernism with traditional Chinese motifs embodied the aspirations of the new government, fusing progress with cultural continuity, between modernity and heritage, affirming their aim for innovation and identity. At its heart, a visionary urban plan unfolded: roads radiated like spokes from the Civic Centre, stitched together with monumental boulevards, gardens, and fountains, that would eventually expand over the city. An ambitious fusion of function and symbolism on a massive scale, similar to those envisioned twenty years later by Oscar Niemeyer for Brasilia.

But just as these dreams began to take architectural shape, war silenced the drafting tables and construction sites. Monumentality would give way to war and foreign occupation once again. Had war not intervened, the 'New Civic Centre of Greater Shanghai' might have become China's Brasilia, materialised two decades earlier than its counterpart in the Americas. But Shanghai's destiny unfolded differently, embracing diversity over monumentality. World War II and the ensuing civil war arrested the completion of this modernist enclave, confining it only to the northern edge of the Hongkou district.

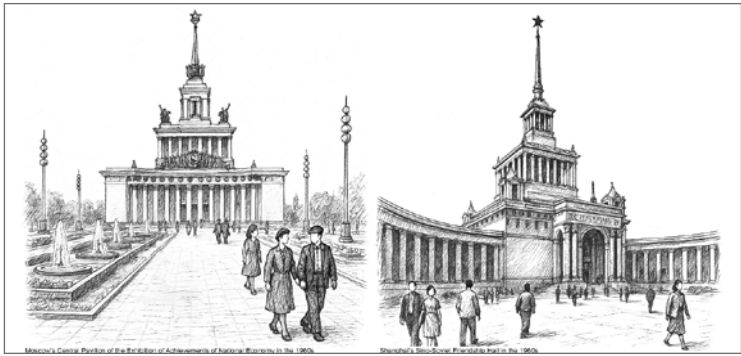


Figure 8: Comparison of Moscow's Central Pavilion of the Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy in the 1960s and Shanghai's Sino-Soviet Friendship Hall in the 1960s

There, it coexists in harmony with American and Japanese settlements without spreading its modernist DNA over the entire city. Today, the remains of this bold dream host the campus of Shanghai University of Sport, the Yangpu District Public Library, a unit of Changhai Hospital, and a variety of residential, commercial and public buildings.

THE SHADOWS OF WAR: OCCUPATION, DISCREPANCY AND SILENCE

The Japanese Imperial Army's full-scale invasion halted Shanghai's development, leaving the city marked by bombs and scarred by occupation.

Yet even during the turmoil, Shanghai continued to absorb newcomers, as 23,000 Jews escaping from the Holocaust found refuge in Shanghai through its rare open-door policy, settling in a safe, designated area in today's Hongkou district. As violence escalated, many Chinese citizens perished and most foreign nationals fled. In 1942, following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and the subsequent declarations of war between the Axis and Allied powers, the Japanese military interned the remaining civilians from Allied nations in Shanghai, holding them until the war's end in 1945.²⁹ The devastation of World War II gave way to a renewed civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist forces led by Mao Zedong, culminating in the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. With this political shift came a new architectural language, shaped by Soviet urban planning principles, sewing into Shanghai's patchwork quilt yet another fabric.

RED TURNS TO GREY: THE SOVIET URBAN INFLUENCE

When the People's Republic took control of Shanghai in 1949, factory whistles replaced jazz as the city's daily rhythm.³⁰ Stalinist monumentalism arrived in the form of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Hall (1955), with its iconic towering spire crowned with a five-pointed red star imported directly from Moscow. New residential complexes followed the Soviet model of austere six-floor, walk-up apartment blocks aligned for optimal cross-ventilation, echoing socialist ideals. Walking past these state-planned developments, one could easily feel as though they were in Moscow.³¹ Yet, Shanghai's entrepreneurial spirit endured. A 1962 municipal survey counted over 8,000 alley hawkers still operating in the Lilong neighbourhoods, a testament to Shanghai's refusal to be constrained. By 1979, with Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms underway, Shanghai once again stood at the forefront of transformation, embracing capitalist energy while still



Figure 9: Shanghai's Modern Developments



Figure 10: Shanghai's Postmodern Developments

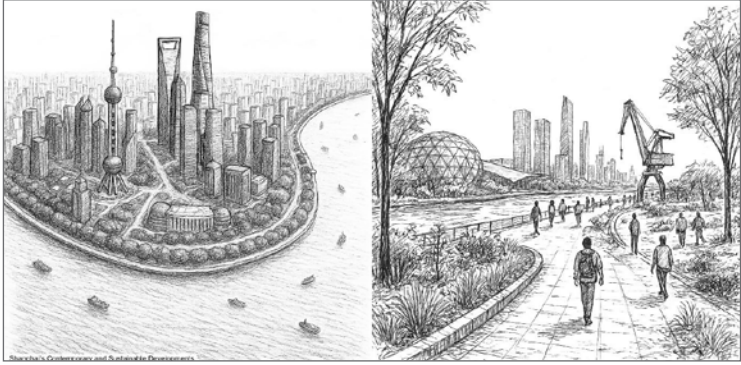


Figure 11: Shanghai's Contemporary and Sustainable Developments

carrying the imprint of its Soviet chapter, revived alongside echoes of earlier eras.

Soviet architecture and urban language have been preserved. Post-reform buildings, such as the Shanghai Police Bureau (上海市公安局) on Wanhangu Road, reflect the Soviet planning vocabulary that once defined the city's Leninist guidelines. The former Sino-Soviet Friendship Hall, now the Shanghai Exhibition Centre, is fully operational today. Nonetheless, in true Shanghai fashion, the past is repurposed: the Exhibition Centre's red star now gleams over luxury brand showcases, while six-floor, walk-up apartments, once collectivist housing symbols, are overflowing with consumer goods purchased in the marketplace, some from those very same luxurious showcases.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

Reform and Opening Up unlocked Shanghai's entrepreneurial spirit in 1980. Pudong, once farmers' mulberry fields, sprouted the Oriental Pearl Tower (1995), Jin Mao Tower (1999), Shanghai World Financial Centre (2008) and the Shanghai Tower (2015). Planners championed vertical density and transit-oriented development in this new urban fabric, allowing the city to catch up with the latest global trends. By 2010, with Lujiazui Central Business District, eleven metro lines, a magnetic levitation train to the Pudong Airport, a lattice of metropolitan parks and a trendy revival of the city's lifestyle from the past 100 years, including its nightlife freedom,³² Shanghai was once again at the forefront of global urban life.³³

World Expo 2010, themed 'Better City, Better Life', drew 73 million visitors and left a necklace of riverside parks, solar panel-topped

pavilions and plenty of contemporary museums, including The Power Station of Art, a recycled turbine hall similar to that of the Tate Modern in London. The expo grounds demonstrated that brownfields could be repurposed as cultural lungs. Since 2017, Shanghai’s planners have been developing systems to control floods and sea level rise, the West Bund shipyards have been carved into terraced wetlands that absorb typhoon surges; Suzhou Creek’s concrete fences have given way to bike paths and gardens. All this development followed modern, postmodern, and contemporary and sustainable urban planning trends.

Today, Hongqiao Railway Station dispatches a high-speed train to Beijing every five minutes, every day, like a heartbeat echoing across the land, reaching the capital in less than five hours. What began in 1993 as a modest metro line has now grown into a subterranean web longer than London and New York’s combined, where each station is not just a stop, but a node of civic life. In 2026, Pudong Airport’s Satellite Hall is expected to welcome 100 million souls, flickers of movement in Shanghai’s global presence and its sky choreography

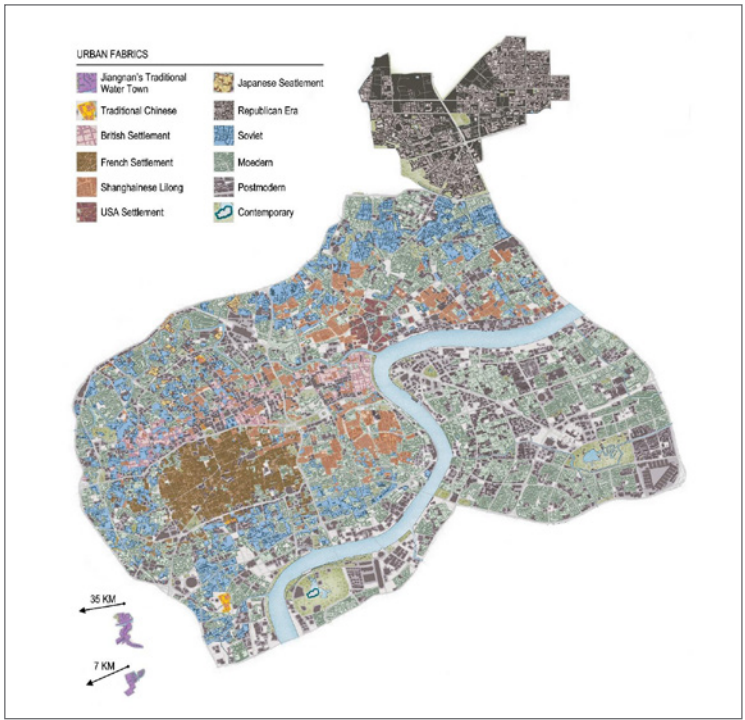


Figure 12: Shanghai’s Urban Patchwork-Quilt

of arrivals and departures. From a city with but a few museums, Shanghai now curates more than a hundred exhibitions of memories and expressions brought to the present simultaneously. Even its lampposts have grown wise, sensing the air's invisible weight, easing traffic with a silent algorithm to hush the engines' shiftless breath; overhead drones buzz with quiet urgency, lifesavers in flight reaching any Inner-Ring's doorstep in three minutes flat with defibrillators or helping fight fires in tall buildings. On the Nanpu Bridge, sunlight is harnessed to power the night lights of the bridge, which glow by the sun's grace by day and night. Nevertheless, as all these innovations may gleam across its skyline, Shanghai's most genuine brilliance lies in how it walks forward without loosening its grip on memory.

CONCLUSION: SHANGHAI'S HARMONIOUS URBAN QUILT

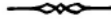
Shanghai's genius lies in blocks of stone on brick, glass on iron and story on story, creating a vibrant metropolis that is an immersive museum of its history, with engaging, alive exhibits. Shanghai's most extraordinary wisdom is its instinct to build bridges instead of walls and to foster business instead of wars. When foreign gunboats appeared, it opened quays; when Soviet planners arrived, it integrated their Halls into international exhibitions. Time and again, the city chose inclusion over exclusion, trade over trench, coexistence over conquest. In an era when metropolises are told to retreat behind ramparts, Shanghai says that prosperity is the dividend of multiplicity as preservation and innovation gather pace.

Besides preserving the urban fabric of previous epochs, preserving Shanghai's tangible architectural history is gaining momentum as the years pass. The 1914 Normandie Apartments became a heritage building in 1984, Wukang Road, the former Ferguson Lane, is beautifully preserved, and the Lilong of Tianzifang became an artistic bazaar rather than a new development.³⁴ App-based couriers deliver contemporary Chinese tea to a 1920s teahouse repurposed as a co-working loft. In Shanghai, epochs do not cancel one another; they stitch each other into harmonious arrangements. This remarkable stitching together of different urban fabrics guarantees that anyone who wants to walk Shanghai's streets, looking at the buildings and its people instead of the phone's GPS, will encounter a remarkable history that is still present, even as the city moves forward with its unjudgmental and unapologetic entrepreneurial spirit. Shanghai's patchwork quilt is

sewn with every urban fabric it meets and embroidered with the best lifestyles it sees. No wonder the Shanghainese can proudly sing ‘魔都·魔都’, a mosaic of voices, just like the city it celebrates:

You tolerate every mood
You listen to every voice
You are down-to-earth, dedicated, warm
Responsible, elegant, and lovely
...
I love Shanghai!

John Villar, an architect by training, philosopher at heart and former RAS Program Director has lived in Shanghai since 2009. He received his doctorate from the Laboratoire Image Ville et Environnement (LIVE) at the University of Strasbourg, with his research project ‘Desirable Cities’.



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A POTTED HISTORY: THE ENIGMA OF A (FAKE) MING CERAMIC

BY ALAN BABINGTON-SMITH

ABSTRACT

The author examines a pot bought in an antique shop in Macao decades ago, and reflects on the linked figures from Chinese history whom the pot references.

Most objects described in the pages of a journal such as this have some aesthetic or antiquarian value. However, the pot that is the subject of this article is stated by every expert that has viewed it to be a clumsy, coarse fake. I bought it in an antiques shop in Macao 20 years ago, attracted by its robust elegance of shape, and boldness of decoration.

It's probably about 50 years old, but it could also be older, or younger, and is original in the sense that it is not a copy of any known pot. It is made of thick earthenware, glazed white, with inscriptions in Ming blue around its full circumference and rim, and stands 21cm high and is 25cm across, with a rim 2cm thick. It has also been broken and clumsily mended.

More handsome than beautiful, what it lacks in grace it gains in



Figure 1: The author's glazed pot with inscriptions.

interest, as it links us to three remarkable, and very different people, who will be familiar to many readers, as well as to most Chinese, from poetry, plays, and TV series. They are Wáng Zhāojūn (王昭君) from the Han dynasty (2000 years ago), Wáng Anshí (王安石) from the Song dynasty (1000 years ago), and Nián Gēngyáo (年羹尧) from the Qing dynasty (300 years ago).

The origin and creation of this pot is a puzzle—there seems to be no connection between Nián Gēngyáo and the other two people, and there is no known original pot of which this might be a copy. Why anyone would have gone to the trouble of making such an obvious and not very valuable fake is a mystery.

Wáng Zhāojūn (王昭君), one of China's four great beauties¹, was married off to a “barbarian” king, as part of China's long-standing foreign policy of *héqīn* (和亲), or “peace consorts”. Throughout much of Chinese history and into the 21st century, her story has inspired not only hundreds of poems, tales, operas and plays, collectively known as the *Zhāojūn Chūsài* (昭君出塞), but also raises questions of choice, justice, and (later) the role of women.

Wáng Anshí, (王安石), a literati who became Prime Minister² in 1070, wrote the *Míngfēi Qū* (明妃曲): two poems about Wáng Zhāojūn (one of which is partially inscribed on the pot). These became the focus of much subsequent literary and political discussion.

Nián Gēngyáo (年羹尧) was the general who conquered the western regions in the early 1720s, then fell dramatically from grace.³

The links—both historical and on the pot—between Wáng Zhāojūn and Wáng Anshí, are clear, but what connects either with Nián Gēngyáo is less obvious and it's a charming mystery, which perhaps one of you readers can help solve.

These characters and their stories illustrate the continuity of many aspects of Chinese culture, history, and politics over the last 2000 years, and separately, the discussion of women's rights and imperial power, and the terrible lessons of overweening ambition.

Wáng Zhāojūn (53BCE-18CE) was one of at least a hundred concubines who lived in the palace of Emperor Yuan of the Han Dynasty. She was sent by the emperor as a *héqīn*, to Huhanye Khan of the Xiongnu—at that time, the most vexatious of the northern frontier nomads. Her story was first documented a hundred years after her death in a formal imperial history,⁴ and she immediately, and ever after, inspired poets and playwrights, amongst them Du Fu, Li

Bai, Guo Moruo, and most famously, Wáng Anshí.

By Wáng Zhāojūn's time in 33 BC, the *hégān* had been a routine part of China's diplomacy and foreign policy for some 200 years—as was the case, also, in Europe until the 19th century. The story goes that at this particular moment, the Xiongnu came to the emperor not threatening, but begging for protection from their neighbours, so he decided that he need not give them one of his own family, but could give them a concubine instead.

Of course, the emperor had never seen most of his concubines and relied on portraits to choose his companion for the night. Mao Yanshou was one of several court painters responsible for producing these portraits.⁵ Naturally, the concubines would pay the painters large amounts to present them favourably—an early version of photoshopping for Tinder. Our heroine, poor but honest, declined to pay the bribe—we will come shortly to her reasons—and so her portrait was not flattering.

Consequently, the emperor chose her and she was formally betrothed to the khan. When she was called forward, the emperor saw that Wáng Zhāojūn was by far the most beautiful of all his concubines, but by then, it was too late. He had given his word, and he had no choice but to give her to the “barbarian” khan.

The story has become a cliché—the wilder shores of love—embroidered with hugely romantic details such as the claim that birds flying overhead thought her so beautiful, they dropped dead, that her *pipa* was heard lamenting her journey into exile from 1000 miles away, and so on and so forth.

In reality, Wáng Zhāojūn stayed with the Xiongnu for the rest of her life. She gave the khan one son who survived him and who eventually became the khan. After Wang's husband died, according to tribal tradition, she married his brother, who was the next khan, and had two daughters by him. When she died, she was buried in the Xiongnu capital Hohhot, which is now the capital of



Figure 2: Contemporary artist's impression of Wáng Zhāojūn with her pipa.⁶

Inner Mongolia, or at least, that is what the tourist industry there claims. As for Jingmen, the village where she was born, and which Du Fu visited seeking inspiration for his poem about her,⁷ it now lies submerged beneath the Yangtze River (due to the higher water level caused by construction of the Three Gorges Dam).



Figure 3: The honorary tomb of Wáng Zhāojūn close to Hohhot in Inner Mongolia⁸

Whether Wáng Zhāojūn left the imperial court in Chang’An in sorrow or not, the emperor was enraged, and had not only Mao Yanshou, but also all the other court painters, executed, presuming quite correctly that they had all taken bribes, and had been deceiving him. As time has passed and attitudes have changed, Wáng Zhāojūn’s reasons for declining to pay the bribe have varied from virtue to poverty.

Early versions agree that exile was a fate worse than death, as living among the “barbarians” was by definition worse than living in China. Where the early versions disagree is whether she was too poor to pay a bribe, but also honest, whether she was a strong personality who refused to play by the harem rules, or whether she paid, but was cheated by the painter.

Generally speaking, the earlier versions agree that Wáng Zhāojūn was an outstanding beauty and an obedient subject, and some also say that she became *heqin* as a way out of dreary palace life, but as her legend developed over the next 2000 years, she came to be seen rather differently in several different ways.

In one version, Wáng Zhāojūn is a victim—a tragic figure who had no way of legitimately gaining the attention of the emperor, and who

died in exile, a victim of treachery and corruption. Another version has it that she was a heroine who volunteered to be given as *heqin* to the Xiongnu in order to protect the peace of the empire. A third version is that she became a cultural ambassador and “civiliser”, since she was trained in Chinese court etiquette and music. Indeed, one of the most common symbols of Wáng Zhāojūn in Chinese art and poetry is the *pipa* or Chinese lute. The earliest extant poem about her marriage into the Xiongnu tribe, written by Shi Chong in the third century, suggested that Wang listened to Chinese pipa music to ease the pangs of homesickness as she made her journey to the West.⁹

Longing for Chinese culture resonated especially during the Qing dynasty 1700 years after Wang’s time, when many Han Chinese were chafing under Manchu rule and looking for Han cultural icons. Wang’s story became a peg on which a great many parents—as well as numerous wives and mothers—could hang their own laments about their situation in life. Even in the *Dream of The Red Chamber*, the girl sent to be a concubine laments to her father ‘What is the use of all this luxury and splendour, if I am always to be separated from those I love?’¹⁰ Her probable suppression in the imperial palace became a broader meme for the oppression by Manchus that many Han felt.

A fifth interpretation of the story was that it showed how corruption inadvertently served the emperor, because it saved him from becoming so distracted by Wáng Zhāojūn’s beauty that he could have ended up neglecting the affairs of state.

In this context, it’s worth noting that the three other great beauties of China did end up corrupting the ruler of the day. Xi Shi, who lived in 450 BC, and was purportedly so beautiful that fish looking up from a pond drowned upon seeing her, so diverted the King Fuchai of Wu that his state collapsed. The fictional beauty Diao Chan, who appears in Luo Guanzhong’s 14th century novel *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, was so beautiful that the moon hid behind a cloud. Diao became caught up in all the wonderful shenanigans of the *Romance*, seducing people and betraying them at will. Most famous of all was Yang Guifei, who was so fair that flowers wilted when she gazed on them, and whose beauty so completely corrupted the emperor, that the court’s resulting neglect and decay led to the An Lushan rebellion.¹¹

However it came about, Wáng Zhāojūn’s life as a *heqin* was successful enough that the emperor renamed his reign *Jing Ning*, or ‘Seeking Peace’, and renamed Zhaojun *NinghuYanzhi* (‘Barbarian

conquering queen’).

The practice of *heqin* continued for many centuries and dynasties. Another notable example occurred during the Tang dynasty, when the Emperor Taizong gave to Songtsen Gampo, ruler of the then-expanding Tibet, his daughter Wencheng Kojong.¹² As part of her dowry, Wencheng brought a bronze statue depicting the young Buddha at the age of 12, which had allegedly been cast in his lifetime, which you can still see in the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa today. But that is a story for another time...



Figure 4: Inscription showing Mingfei Qu and the name of Wang Anshi

You many by now be wondering what connects the concubine to the pot. The answer lies in the inscription around the body—lines from a poem by Wáng Anshí titled *Mingfei Qu* or ‘Song of the Beautiful Concubine’.¹³ You can see on the pot this title and the name of the poet. Wáng Anshí, lived during the Song dynasty (1021-1086), a thousand years after Wáng Zhāojūn’s lifetime in the Northern Song Dynasty and served two Song emperors, Shenzong and Zhezong, as minister, including five years as Prime Minister. He was also a very distinguished poet; over 1000 of his poems are still known and he wrote three of the 100 poems in the *Yuwen* that every Chinese schoolchild learns today during their twelve years of basic education.

Wáng Anshí passed the imperial examinations in third place when only 21. He started his career in Jiangsu but made his mark in Zhejiang, his fortunes rising and falling on the whims of the emperor

and his eunuchs. As Prime Minister, he is best-known for having tried to modernise the Chinese economy. He failed, and was doubly unlucky in that the implementation of his plan was disrupted by floods and famine. His ideas had to wait another thousand years for the IMF and the World Bank to catch up.

In 1059, eleven years before he became Prime Minister, and while he was an up-and-coming figure known better as a poet, Wáng Anshí wrote two poems that referred to Wáng Zhāojūn, which became known as the *Mingfei Qu*. What prompted him to write these poems is unclear, but they had a startling effect. While they mostly repeat the conventional wisdom, they include three twists that caused a literary sensation at the time.

One appeared in the lines: ‘Don’t you know, when an emperor withdrew his favour, an empress grieved behind her gate? South or North, there’s but one unhappy fate’, which implied that a concubine’s fate depended not on racial considerations but rather on her individual relationship, since once discarded, even an empress had to live in a gilded cage.

A second was: ‘Few are the favours of Han, strong the Xiongnu’s love—in mutual regard lies the true joy of life’, which implied that Wáng Zhāojūn was better-off being married contentedly to a “barbarian” than she would have been living her life in the back rooms of the harem. In this, Wáng Anshí anticipates the modern Chinese saying about whether young girls would be happier crying in the back of a BMW, or laughing on a bicycle.

But a third, and most dangerous, was the line: ‘The painter Mao was killed, though he committed no sin’, which implied that an emperor could do wrong. In mitigation, some said that Wáng Zhāojūn was too beautiful to be captured in paint.¹⁴

The poems created a literary sensation, and several other contemporaneous poets followed up with responses of their own,¹⁵ such as Ouyang Xiu and especially Su Dongpo. Some 15 years later, when Wáng Anshí was Prime Minister, criticisms resurfaced that he was an unreliable character, who was likely to subvert the government.

The reforms that Wáng Anshí proposed amounted to a root and branch reform of the way China was governed—reform of everything from taxation and land holding, to education and the army—so of course, it made him enemies.¹⁶

His proposal for land reform was particularly interesting

historically as it was made at the same time as the Domesday Book was being written.

To put Wáng Anshí in perspective, he was dealing with two issues. One was political—how do you pacify the nomad tribes to the north, do you deter them or do you defeat them? The other was economic—how do you reduce poverty and inequality, and change the situation of the peasants, who make up the bulk of the population and are overworked and overtaxed? There was also the more fundamental question of whether an economy can grow as fast as its population.

These are questions that China grappled with for over a thousand years on a massive scale. One key element of his policies was to remove the tax breaks and general inequalities enjoyed by the people he referred to as *jianbing*—basically the same landlord class that the communists targeted a thousand years later. After his dismissal, Wáng Anshí lived another ten years in gracious retirement, mostly writing personal poems not intended for publication.

One explanation for why he wrote the two poems about Wáng Zhāojūn is that he had a reputation for being cantankerous and argumentative and would always take the opposite view to whoever he was talking to. Apparently, it was a characteristic of Jiangxi literati and scholars, that is, they argued for the sake of arguing, and contradiction for its own sake *fan an* (case reversal)¹⁷ was in vogue among some Song poets.

Moving on from the body of the pot, which references Wáng Zhāojūn and Wáng Anshí, figures from the distant past, we move to the rim, where there is an inscription¹⁸ that can be precisely dated to 1724. It reads:

Reward in the second year of the Yongzheng Reign of the Great Qing for meritorious service in pacifying the rebels by Nián Gēngyáo, Governor-general of Chuan-Shaan and General-in-chief of the Pacification of the West.

The recipient of this honour is the third person alluded to by the pot, Nián Gēngyáo. He was born into high expectations—despite being Han and not Manchu, his family had earned the favour of the Kangxi Emperor. His father served for more than ten years as Viceroy of Huguang (today's Hunan and Guangxi), his sister was a concubine to one of Kangxi's sons, and his brother later ran the imperial kilns at



Figure 5: The rim of the author’s pot, mentioning Nián Gēngyáo’s name (author’s collection).

Jingdezhen—which was China’s largest enterprise, and greatest source of foreign exchange at the time.

Nián Gēngyáo was inducted into the Bordered Yellow Banner, which was the only Han Banner that, with 2 other Manchu Banners, reported directly to the emperor. For British readers, this was comparable to the Household Division, comprising Grenadier, Coldstream Scots, Welsh, and Irish Guards, who you see Trooping the Colour and guarding royal palaces. Nián Gēngyáo became *Jinshi* (a top scholar in the Imperial Examinations) when he was 30, and joined the Hanlin Academy, which was the imperial think-tank. His Banner was assigned to serve Yinzhen, the 4th son of Emperor Kangxi. His association with the prince was enhanced by his sister’s position as one of Yinzhen’s concubines, who bore the prince a son and two daughters.

Nián Gēngyáo spent the next 15 years between 1709 and 1724 in various roles on China’s wild west—“suppressing rebels” and expanding the empire to include what are now western Sichuan and Qinghai. In 1721, he had an audience with the Kangxi emperor, who promoted him to the rank of Governor General of Sichuan and Shanxi. Kangxi died the following year and was succeeded by his fourth son, who took the title of Yongzheng.¹⁹

One of the new emperor’s first actions was to give an audience to Nián Gēngyáo and award him hereditary rank as Grand Guardian.

He also made Gengyao's elder brother governor of Guangdong. A few months later, as a reward for his help in ejecting the Dzungars—a Mongolian tribe also known as Oirats—from Tibet, he was elevated to Duke (third class). Later that year, he commanded the forces that quelled an uprising in Qinghai and upon returning to Beijing, was raised to Duke (first class). In 1724, (the date of the inscription on the rim of the pot) he was given additional privileges, titles and honours normally reserved for a member of the royal family. This was the highest point of his career.

When Nián Gēngyáo returned to his command in Sichuan, he soon realised that he had become the object of hostile memorials (the official term used for memos to the emperor), and had fallen out of favour. His meteoric rise had attracted the jealousy and hatred of rivals, and they were not slow to suggest that his loyalties to Yongzheng were divided, as he was also close to Yongzheng's elder brothers, Yintang and Yinti, who had been overlooked in the succession.

Nián Gēngyáo's protestations of innocence were ignored, and in the early months of 1725, he was gradually demoted down to the rank of simple Bannerman. In November 1725, he was arrested and brought back to Beijing in disgrace.

In 1726, he was found guilty of 92 crimes of which 20 were capital offences. Purported examples of misconduct included the usurping of several ceremonial rites of the emperor during his own travels, and presumptuously endorsing or confirming an order by the emperor. Official history describes him as resolute, diligent, courageous, and fair. Popular history (notably, several TV series) paints him as ruthless, cruel, crafty, and dissolute. The truth may be somewhere in the middle, but whatever he may or may not have done, Nián Gēngyáo created and secured the frontiers later extended by the Yongzheng emperor's successor (and fourth son) the Qianlong emperor, into Tibet and Xinjiang.

Nián Gēngyáo was sentenced to execution, but Emperor Yongzheng allowed him the privilege of suicide. His eldest son, however, was executed, and the rest of the family were stripped of rank and sent in exile to Xinjiang as slaves. His brother Nian Xiyao who was in charge of Jingdezhen's ceramic production, China's biggest industry, was spared—and subsequently lent his name to a period of porcelain.²⁰ The story of the ill-fated official is sadly familiar. From Wolsey, and Fouquet, to Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao, the tyrant's favourite has no friends.

My pot, the genesis of all this musing, has fared better and currently rests quietly on a bookcase beside a window, a charming and constant reminder of both the continuities, and the ups and downs, of 2000 years of Chinese history.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For insights into the legends of Wang Zhaojun, the author gratefully acknowledges his debt to the double issue of Renditions 59 & 60 (Spring & Autumn 2003), and to the generosity of Alfreda Murck, Hu Xinyu and William Lindesay whose corrections and/or writings deepened understanding of some of the stories behind a mysterious pot.

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SECTION 2

Larger Than Life

FLYING FREELY ABOVE THE BLUE HEAVENS CHINESE FEMALE AVIATORS OF WORLD WAR II

BY ZOU DEHUI

ABSTRACT

Like most women at that time, the lives of Chinese women in the 1930s and 1940s were constrained by convention, duty and traditional conceptions of femininity. These emphasised obedience, modesty and submission. However, there were some who challenged these restrictions, who achieved their dreams and, in doing so, made their contribution to China and its allies during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and World War II. This article will introduce three remarkable women who, in an era when the battlefield was dominated by men, dreamed of aerial combat and learned to soar through the skies. They are three forgotten female aviators of World War II.

INTRODUCTION

This article tells the stories of 3 remarkable Chinese women, Hazel Ying Lee, Katherine Cheung and Lee Ya-Ching; each a skilled pilot, each a pioneer in aviation and each a patriot who sought to use their skills to serve their country in a time of war. I came across these three remarkable women in photographs. Intrigued by their combination of flying skills and glamour, I wanted to learn more about them and to hear their stories.

They have much in common. They were all skilled pilots who were experts in many aspects of aviation; they each faced discrimination—both racial and gender—but persisted in their attempts to serve their country, even after being turned down for combat roles. They each faced considerable prejudice throughout their aviation careers, including being denied requests to join the air force as fighter pilots, but none gave up—they then each sought out a way to serve in a civilian capacity as all saw aviation as a way to both aid and advance China.

Sadly, what they also have in common is that they are largely forgotten today, but their stories deserve to be told and to be better known. Their stories are not simply about the considerable skills

required to be an aviatrix but also of defying convention, challenging prejudice and a determination to fly.

HAZEL YING LEE

Hazel Ying Lee, the first Chinese-American female pilot was born in Oregon, USA, in 1912. Both her parents were Chinese immigrants from Taishan City, Guangdong Province. Her father was a wealthy businessman.¹ There were eight children in the family, and she was not particularly outstanding among them. As a teenager, she was more rebellious than ordinary girls; loved swimming, playing bridge and learned to drive.²

At the age of seventeen, Hazel Ying Lee worked as an elevator operator in a department store in Portland; asking guests which floor they wanted and pressing the button for them. This menial and exhausting work was one of the few jobs allowed for Chinese women at that time.³ At the age of twenty, she experienced flying at an aviation exhibition with her friends. This experience ignited her passion for learning to fly. Despite strong opposition from her parents, she assiduously saved money and enrolled in flying lessons. Later, she joined the Portland Chinese Flying Club and studied under the famous pilot Al Greenwood. This project was sponsored by the Chinese Charity Association, with the aim of training pilots for China during the war. In that club, female pilots were few and far between, but she was one of them.⁴

After becoming one of the first Chinese-American women to earn a pilot's license in 1932, Hazel Ying Lee's deeds caused a sensation locally. *Oregon's Magazine* published a report entitled 'Portland Elevator Girl Earns Flying License', praising her,

The fifth floor of the H. Liebes & Co department store was not high enough for Hazel Lee, 20, and an elevator operator there, so she got up early each morning to learn to fly. Since her first airplane ride a year ago, Miss Lee has been deeply fascinated by flying, and now she has transformed into a pilot. She dreams of one day flying back to China to ignite the enthusiasm of women there for the aviation industry.⁵

During her studies in Portland she met Yin Cheung Louie, a fellow countryman. This man, two years younger than her, would eventually

become her husband. Their wedding in 1943 made a splash at the time, with media outlets covering it as the ‘Chinese pilots wed’. Yin Cheung Louie later rose to the rank of Lieutenant General in the Air Force, serving as Deputy Chief of the General Staff and General Manager of China Airlines. They were truly a well-matched ‘pair of flying partners’.⁶

In 1933, inspired by the September 18th Incident of 1931, Hazel Ying Lee, filled with patriotic fervor, went to China, hoping to contribute to the fight against Japanese aggression.⁷ However, despite the great need for pilots, the Republic of China Air Force would not accept her due to gender restrictions. She could only take up a clerical position in the Chinese military. She continued to fly with occasional flights for commercial airlines but her ambition to contribute as a fighter pilot was thwarted.⁸ In 1937, after the outbreak of full-scale war, Hazel once again volunteered to join the Chinese Air Force but, unfortunately, was rejected again. Frustrated, she spent the next year flying for a private airline. In 1938, following another unsuccessful effort to aid the Air Force as a pilot, she returned to the United States and settled in New York.⁹

In 1943, an opportunity to fly arose with the formation of the Women Airforce Service Pilots. Formed of civilian, women pilots, the WASP was attached to the United States Army Air Forces. Although having no military standing, members of the WASP became trained pilots. They tested military aircraft, ferried aircraft and trained other pilots, thus freeing up male pilots for combat roles.¹⁰ Upon learning about the WASP, Hazel Ying Lee joined the team without hesitation. Everyone loved Hazel. She had a cheerful personality, was humorous and always joked around with a bounce in her step. She also had a particular fondness for fried chicken. She could make friends with almost anyone. She liked to use lipstick to write Chinese characters and their Chinese nicknames on the wings of her and her teammates’ planes, even though her teammates couldn’t understand them at all! No matter



Figure 1: A signed photograph of Hazel Ying Lee in 1942

where she went, she could always find a Chinese restaurant and order food in Cantonese, allowing her teammates to taste authentic Chinese cuisine.¹¹

Although they did not directly participate in combat, the contribution of the WASP was crucial to the war. Hazel Ying Lee performed numerous flight transport missions; these were responsible for delivering planes mass-produced in converted automobile factories to distribution centers, which were then transported to the front lines of the European and Pacific theaters of war. In letters to her family, she stated that, ‘The work here is intense, seven days a week with hardly any free time’.

Hazel was a favorite with her fellow pilots, known for her sense of humor and for being ‘calm and fearless’; this was echoed by her family having been described by her mother as fearing ‘neither the wind nor the waves’.¹²

Although a skilled pilot, Hazel Ying Lee’s flying career in the WASP was not without incident. Following an emergency landing in Kansas in June 1943, she was chased round her plane by a farmer armed with a pitchfork who shouted to his neighbours that the Japanese had



Figure 2: Hazel Ying Lee in WASP uniform, pictured on the cover of a tribute by Gott, K. (1991), Eureka, California, Broadway Printing

invaded. After convincing the farmer that she was a Chinese 'girl', the man couldn't help but praise her flying, 'Girl, your landing was really beautiful!'. After confirming her identity, the farmer and his wife took her home and helped her contact her base to retrieve the crashed plane.¹³

On Thanksgiving Day in 1944, during a flight training exercise in Great Falls, Montana, Hazel Ying Lee attempted to abort a landing but unfortunately collided with an aircraft above her. She suffered severe injuries, burns and fractures, and a few days later, she passed away at the young age of 33. Three days after her sacrifice, her family learned that her brother Victor, who served in the US Army, had been killed in action in France.¹⁴

Hazel Ying Lee was laid to rest in the Portland Memorial Mausoleum Cemetery, alongside her brother. However, as with so many aspects of her short life the internment of Hazel and her brother was not without obstacles caused by prejudice. Initially, due to racial discrimination, the cemetery administrators denied their request to be buried there, insisting that people of colour could not be buried in the same cemetery as whites. Faced with this unfair treatment, the Lee family chose not to give up but instead embarked on a long struggle. Eventually, their perseverance paid off, and they were allowed to hold the funeral in the cemetery, allowing the deceased to rest in peace.¹⁵

However, as a female pilot of that era, Hazel Ying Lee did not receive the recognition and respect she deserved. Her sacrifice did not bring her the honour she merited and her funeral could only be held with civilian honours. It was only in 1977 that the military status of the WASP women pilots was legally recognised in the United States,¹⁶ and Hazel Ying Lee and other female pilots who sacrificed their lives finally gained their rightful place in history, recognised at last for their bravery, service and contribution to equality and inclusion.

KATHERINE SUI FUN CHEUNG

The legend of Katherine Cheung, the first Chinese female aerobatic pilot, began when she was seventeen and went to the United States to study music. Born in Enping, Guangdong in 1904, her father was an overseas Chinese who did business in the United States.¹⁷ There, she frequently visited airports with her father, witnessing the magnificent sight of airplanes soaring in the blue sky and developing her life-long love of aviation.¹⁸

At that time, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who viewed aviation as a critical component of China's modernisation, was actively advocating the concept of 'saving the country through aviation'.¹⁹ Katherine Cheung was deeply moved and wrote, 'Given the troubled times of our motherland, I have identified aviation as the only means to save the country. When the opportunity arises, I will return to serve on the battlefield to fulfill my duty as a "female patriot"'.²⁰

Having given up her studies to marry and have a family, it wasn't until 1931 that Katherine returned to her ambition to fly. Despite being a mother of two daughters by then, she successfully enrolled in the Lincoln Airplane School in Nebraska; their only female student. After only 12 hours of flight instruction with her instructor, she bravely flew the airplane alone. The following March, she successfully passed the exam and obtained an American private pilot's license, thereby becoming the first Chinese woman to obtain a US pilot's license.²¹

She subsequently obtained commercial and flight instructor licenses, becoming the first Chinese person to hold all three types of pilot license.²² Rather than being content with these achievements, she continued her studies, learning to fly international routes, practicing difficult aerobatic manoeuvres, and exploring aviation engineering



Figure 3: On 11 January 1935, Katherine Cheung, who had just obtained her international pilot's license, sat on the tyre of an airplane with a radiant smile on her face

and aircraft structures. In 1929, when a friend in China told her that women were barred from joining a local aviation school in the Chinese city of Guangzhou, she responded, 'Don't say women can't fly. We're heading to the sky'.²³

Almost as soon as she was licensed, she performed at fairs and air shows along the California coast, performing aerobatic tricks. Her performances were thrilling to the Chinese American community who took up a collection to buy her a plane.²⁴ An American journalist reported on her flight performance saying,

During the Los Angeles air show in 1932, the audience was deeply shaken by the breathtaking stunts performed by a light and agile biplane. When the aircraft landed steadily and the cockpit slowly opened, instead of the expected burly American pilot stepping out, it was an Oriental girl with graceful posture and delicate features.²⁵

Following the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, Katherine Cheung promoted fundraising among overseas Chinese in the US in support of the war effort in her motherland before deciding to return to China and open a flying school to help provide much-needed pilots for the Chinese Air Force.²⁶

She toured Chinese American communities raising money for her school, securing nearly \$7,000.²⁷ She purchased a plane but before her plans could progress any further, her cousin was killed while testing the plane. Her father always hoped that his daughter would live a safe and peaceful life and did not want her to engage in dangerous activities. He made her promise to give up flying and in 1942, following the loss of her cousin and her father, coupled with her brother's death in China she vowed never to fly again, finally convinced by her being the sole support for her mother.²⁸ She opened a flower shop near the airport, often staring through the wire fence 'just to see the airplanes and those spirited



Figure 4: Katherine Cheung at an aircraft exhibition on 23 January 1936

pilots wearing flight helmets.²⁹

In 1989, she returned to visit her hometown. Tears streamed down her face as she exclaimed, with her accent unchanged, 'I'm home, I'm home! My father asked me to speak Enping dialect when I'm in my hometown.'³⁰

Katherine Cheung passed away at her home in Los Angeles in 2003, aged 98. As a pioneer in aviation she has been recognised in Enping Aviation Museum, Beijing Air Force Aviation Museum and the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum and remembered for her skill, spirit of adventure and determination.³¹ She exemplifies those women who challenged the restrictions of the times and who refused to conform to the traditional order. When, as a young woman, she saw a statement in a Guangdong newspaper that said 'It is difficult for women to become flying generals', she was indignant and said 'I don't see any reason why Chinese women cannot become good pilots.'³² When the Guangdong Aviation School refused to admit female students Katherine Cheung, deeply outraged, said ³³

Men and women are equal; why should there be intentional bias that stifles our aspirations?

LEE YA-CHING

Lee Ya-Ching, film actress, pioneering aviator and philanthropist was born in Haifeng County, Guangdong in 1912. She became China's first licensed female pilot in 1936, later co-founding its first civilian flying school.³⁴

Her father, Yingsheng Lee, co-owned a film company in Shanghai and through him she began a successful career as a film actress. She appeared in films such as *Why Not Her*, *The God of Peace*, *Romance of the Western Chamber* and *Mulan Joins the Army* under the stage name Li Dandan, becoming a popular actress of the time and being known as one of the 'Seven Sisters' alongside actresses like Hu Die and Ruan Lingyu.³⁵

Stories of her described her as capable and resourceful since childhood; as capable as any man. When filming *Mulan Joins the Army*, she reportedly encountered bandits and bravely stepped forward, defeating two of them single-handedly and pushing the ringleader into the Huangpu River.³⁶

She developed her love of flying when she was just 16 and, like

Katherine Cheung, came to believe that aviation offered a means to save her country from Japanese aggression. She decided that she could best serve her country through flying. In 1933, at just 21 years old, she broke gender barriers at the Contran École d'Aviation in Geneva, Switzerland, by achieving excellent results and obtaining a pilot's license with flying colours, becoming a pioneer in flight for Chinese women.³⁷ When the examiner questioned her, saying 'Aren't all Chinese women bound-footed? Why do you want to learn to fly planes?', she replied

I am here to let the world know that Chinese women can not only walk on the ground but also fly in the sky³⁸

In 1936, when she returned to Shanghai, she obtained the first civil aviation pilot's license issued by the Nationalist Government. She performed aerial acrobatics at Shanghai Longhua Airport, drawing a crowd of 150,000 spectators and causing a sensation. Acutely aware of the need for pilots in the Republic of China Air Force she co-founded a civilian flying school in Shanghai, but this was shut down in 1937



Figure 5: A promotional card published by an American chewing gum brand in 1941, featuring Lee Ya-Ching fundraising in the United States for the War of Resistance Against Japan



Figure 6: On 27 February 1940, Lee Ya-Ching flew across South America aboard the 'Estrella China'. This photo captures her at a ceremony held at New York's Roosevelt Field Airport, peeking out of the aircraft cabin with a radiant smile on her face.

when Japanese aggression escalated. When the Battle of Songhu began in Shanghai in 1937, she volunteered to participate as a pilot but unfortunately did not receive government approval. However, she did not stop there. She was determined to serve her country and established refugee camps and a hospital in Shanghai. She flew for the Red Cross, wrote a ten-thousand-word proposal and conducted tours to promote the idea of saving the country through air power, becoming a target of the Japanese army with a bounty on her head for a time.³⁹

As the need for aid and supplies escalated in China, Lee embarked on a goodwill tour of the United States and Canada. In 1939, she flew her self-purchased 'Spirit of New China' around the Americas on a goodwill tour, raising money and awareness of the plight of Chinese refugees. She set a record for fundraising, raising 40,000 yuan in donations in just one hour. She was hailed as the 'Flying Ambassador' and the 'Oriental Dragonfly'.⁴⁰

The goodwill tour was overwhelmingly successful, gaining the support of relief organisations, socialites and film stars. She visited 40 cities in 3 months, receiving a reception at each of her stops. The

press attention that followed this beautiful actress made her famous as a fundraiser for China's resistance and ensured that her message about the plight of Chinese refugees and the war effort in China was widely received.⁴¹

Unable to return to China during the war, Lee extended her tour to include Central and South America. Aboard her new plane, the 'Estrella China'—the 'Star of China' in Spanish, she undertook a 25,000-mile Pan-American fundraising drive, raising not only funds but also international support for China and providing a voice for the Chinese people.⁴²

When asked why she was doing so much, she said 'Facing invasion, China is enduring hardships to survive. All Chinese people, whether at home or abroad, rarely think of danger when it comes to their motherland'.⁴³

At the end of the war, Lee Ya-Ching returned to China but eventually settled in California. She never lost her love of flying. In her sixties, while traveling in California, she came across a vast farmland where a plane used for pesticide spraying was parked. After repeated pleading, she finally received permission from the owner to step into the cockpit. With the roar of the engine, the plane slowly ascended into the sky. To the astonishment of everyone present, this lady, who had already passed her sixties, performed a series of breathtaking aerial acrobatics, displaying the charm undiminished from her youth.⁴⁴ Perhaps her heart had never left that vast blue sky.

On January 24, 1998, she passed away due to acute pneumonia at the age of 85.

CONCLUSION

Hazel Ying Lee fell in service beneath her beloved blue sky, Katherine Cheung quietly retired for family reasons and Lee Ya-Ching continued to fly until the end of her life. Although their fates varied, they each wrote their own legends of female flight in their own ways.

Unfortunately, their stories were often overshadowed by the uproar of war and their names remained largely unknown in the long river of history, as if they were merely footnotes in the grand narrative of war.

Today, we reopen this dust-laden history to listen to their voices, to feel their courage, and to remember their names.

All photographs from the private collection of Zou Dehuai

Zou Dehuai has been dedicated to the collection and research of modern historical images and cultural relics in East Asia since 2012. He currently possesses a collection of over 100,000 original vintage photos, more than 10,000 of which are related to Sino-American history. Since November 2024 he has held solo exhibitions in Beijing, Kunming, Qingdao, Hong Kong, San Francisco and Germany. In recent years, he has been invited to give public lectures at institutions such as Peking University, the University of Southern California, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing. He serves as a special council member of the Sino-German Exchange and Cooperation Association, a special researcher at the Institute of Chinese Photographic Documentation of the China Academy of Art, and a columnist for Singapore's Lianhe Zaobao. He has been interviewed and featured by numerous domestic and international media, and also compiles videos and books in order to explore lesser-known stories behind the photos. He has accumulated over 2 million social media followers. His 2025 book *Our Country: A New History of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression* won the prestigious annual Wenjin Books Award in the social science literature category.



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A DEALER'S TALE: SUSAN CHEN HARDY (1940-2014)

BY EDITH TERRY

ABSTRACT

A self-taught connoisseur, Susan Chen was a leading figure in Hong Kong's world of antiquities in a time when it was largely dominated by men. She had a keen eye and a gift for telling captivating stories about how she found a tiny white jade carving of a mythical animals or how her grandfather displayed a late Ming celadon narcissus dish annually to mark the Chinese New Year. When Chen passed away in 2014 parts of the proceeds from auctions of her personal collections were used to establish a foundation in her name.

She was someone around whom legend easily accumulated. A diplomat's wife when she arrived in Hong Kong in 1973, Susan Chen (陳淑貞) spoke multiple languages, including fluent English, dressed elegantly, ran dinner parties with aplomb and became a fixture on the Hong Kong art circuit without visible effort. Part of the proceeds from auctions of her personal collections were used to establish a foundation in her name.

She was primarily known as a dealer's dealer, buying from both reputable dealers and the shadowy 'runners' who brought Chinese antiquities from the mainland at a time when China was using such treasures indiscriminately to raise foreign exchange. Giuseppe Eskenazi, one of the world's leading dealers in Chinese antiquities, called her the best in the world after himself. She would travel back and forth to Macau by hydrofoil, sometimes twice a day, to meet runners.

At one point, she was held up in her office on Lyndhurst Terrace by a group of men, together with a client. She recognised one of the masked individuals by his voice as a supplier when he spoke up to order the others not to harm 'Ho Tai Tai'. They led her to the safe so that she could open it. They took money and a 'stunning archaic jade huang', a crescent shaped plaque, recalls Pola Antebi, one of her mentees, later Deputy Chairman and international director for Chinese ceramics and works of art at Christie's, the global auction house.¹

‘She was so influential in the Hong Kong art market’, Antebi says, ‘When people came through Hong Kong, whether they were academics, dealers, collectors, or just curious about Asian art, they would all contact Susan. She hosted large memorable lunches for her out-of-town guests and invited local auction specialists and friends to attend as well. She provided opportunities for her guests to learn from each other in discussing the latest discoveries and to build new relationships. She was very generous in this way.’²

She was the only woman who was prominent in dealer circles in Hong Kong, and the only woman invited to gatherings of major international dealers and collectors hosted by Eskenazi in Mayfair, London, according to her second husband, Anthony J. Hardy.³

The art market ecosystem in Chinese antiquities is made up of dealers and auctioneers on the supply side, with collectors, museums and casual buyers on the demand side. In between dealers and the market are other dealers, and, at the bottom rung, sellers, often operating in a legal grey market, and the so-called ‘runners’ who smuggle art works across the border. During the beginnings of the Hong Kong market for Chinese antiquities, the grey market was very grey.

The 1980s and 1990s were a time when the Chinese economy was just beginning the astonishing growth that would make it the world’s leading manufacturing economy by the mid-2000s. Roads, rail and factories were being built at a blistering pace, unearthing tombs and ancient cities too quickly for China’s archeologists to catch up. Hong Kong became the prime destination for these goods, by way of Macau, but it was not a profession for the faint-hearted.

That era had ended by the year 2000, when Christie’s and other auction houses stopped accepting Chinese antiquities of unknown provenance and mainland Chinese buyers exerted levels of demand that drove the prices for Chinese antiquities into the stratosphere. The success of Chen’s posthumous auctions reflected the huge excitement of young, wealthy mainland Chinese newly learning about the creative output of their civilisation, past and present. But one of those sales stood out both for the intensity of buyer interest and as a testament to the unequal balance between commercial forces in the art market and the aesthetic, historic and even spiritual values embodied in art.

THE SZE YUAN TANG COLLECTION OF CHINESE JADES

One of the auctions from Chen's personal collection was by Bonhams in April 2016. This was a collection of 73 jades dating mostly from the classic period of China's civilisation, the age of Confucius and the first emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi. The sale grossed HK\$177.4 million and electrified the market. A male dancer in biscuit colored jade sold for HK\$31.5 million; an elephant with its mahout or shaman, in pale green and brown jade, for HK\$19.2 million; and a mottled gray *bixie*, or chimera, sold for HK\$21.9 million, rivaling prices paid for ceramics and ancient bronzes. Colin Sheaf was deputy chair of Bonhams Auctioneers, which held the auction in Hong Kong on April 5, 2016. He says: 'The sale set a completely new level. People believed in the source, even though 99% of jade has no kind of provenance.'⁴ By 'source' he meant Chen, whose taste and authority were accepted partly because she had built her collection before a tsunami of fakes washed over the market in the 1990s.

The sale marked the return of mainland Chinese buyers to a category that had been neglected for at least two decades, archaic jades from a time when Chinese history 'evolved on essentially indigenous East Asian ideas', according to Li Feng, professor of early Chinese history and archeology at Columbia University.⁵ This was the time of the great philosophers of the Spring and Autumn period, the warrior aristocrats who followed, the Legalists who helped shape the unified empire and the growth of the Chinese bureaucratic state, when China's values and views of the world crystallised. The objects reflect the demanding craftsmanship, radical naturalism and martial energy of the period.

Why this was significant has much to do with the patterns in the market for Chinese antiquities in the 1990s and early 2000s, when the market for Chinese antiquities was simultaneously booming and undermined by increasingly brazen fakes. While ceramics and bronzes can be dated, jade has no means of establishing provenance other than by rigorous supervision of the process of excavation or by the experienced eye of highly trained experts. Both can lead to false or mistaken authentication and frequently do.

One controversy involved two collectors' exhibitions at the National Palace Museum in Taipei in 1995 and 1999. Chang Wei-Hwa, an important dealer in archaic jades, was one of those invited to exhibit and subsequently scarred enough to decamp to Hong Kong

from Taipei, at Chen's encouragement. In 1998, the National Palace Museum and the two collectors became embroiled in controversy after the museum acted as authenticator in a lawsuit against jade dealers accused of fraud. When the Taipei City mediator ruled in favor of the buyers, ruling that the dealers had to pay compensation, the dealers teamed up with a vindictive collector, who falsified a document allegedly from the Institute of Archeology under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, accusing the director of the Palace Museum of fraud in assembling the two collectors' exhibitions. While the details remain murky, it took a review by the mainland authorities to set the record straight. According to Chang, 'The reputation of this event was not restored until 2011 when it was addressed in a postscript' in a National Palace Museum publication.⁶

Chang began to collect archaic jade again, after the Palace Museum stood by its original judgement on the two collector's exhibitions. In a catalog for his own auction in 2019, Chang writes that jades from Chen's Sze Yuan Tang posthumous auction were entrusted to him together with Hong Kong dealer Cai Cheng, another highly regarded jade dealer, in curating the sale.⁷ The five-day auction preview was packed, according to Xibo Wang, who at the time was head of the department of Chinese ceramics and works of art at Bonhams. 'In terms of the atmosphere, it was amazing. The attendance, the number of people coming in for the jades was much larger than for the ceramics', which Wang had organised two years earlier.⁸

'The timing was just about right', says Wang. 'It was when everyone started realising the value of archaic jade. Susan's collection brought back so many collectors who had started with archaic jade but gave up because there were so many fakes in the market after the 1990s. They started collecting in the 1980s when they had good sources, but there were plenty of fakes in the market, so they got spooked and gave up.' The market was quiet for more than 20 years, corroded by the masses of ancient jades produced in factories primarily in Henan, according to Wang.

Chen's collection with its extraordinary quality and range, spanning the entire classical era from Neolithic to Han, dramatically restored confidence in the market. The buyers included dealers who had sold her the pieces in the first place, but Chen's judgement and taste were seen as infallible. Chang Wei-Hwa's three sales with Christie's between 2019 and 2022, which included objects displayed

in the contested Palace Museum collectors' exhibitions, saw stunning proceeds and prices for archaic jades have yet to come down to earth. The Sze Yuan Tang sale turned the corner for collectors, as well as the auction houses, establishing a level of trust and vast new interest in treasures from arguably the most consequential centuries in Chinese history.

For the uninitiated, this might seem like much ado about a mere price movement in a tiny niche of the larger art market.

'There is more going on than just these public auctions,' says Renee Chiang, a jade collector and expert. 'In the mainland, the government started a campaign to search for the origins of Chinese civilisation, so there has been lots of funding, research, archeology, museums, just a gigantic booming of interest in the early periods. By the time the Susan Chen jades came into the market, there was a new market of hungry, young, rich Chinese collectors. Plus, the older generation of Hong Kong and Taiwanese dealers who sold her those jades in the first place were eager to get them on a second round to a larger market at higher prices.'⁹ Chiang continues,

Jades do resonate in the Chinese culture in ways no westerner can understand (including myself) so now that Chinese themselves are in the market, it is bringing them to a status that actually makes more sense to me. Their spiritual and historic value are so much greater than ceramics, and as such, there is so much more than just beauty in them; they bring us back beyond the materialistic values that have come with modernism. I think the interest in them is a longing for something deeper and more meaningful.

WHY JADE IS SPECIAL IN CHINESE CULTURE

China is not the only civilisation to have seen jade as something worthy of reverence. The Olmecs, the Mayans who came after them, the Aztecs and the Maori in historic times, used jade in their art and ritual.

Art historian Elizabeth Childs-Johnson argues that China is different in that it experienced a 'jade age' before the bronze and iron ages, and that nephrite jade 'is a ubiquitous presence amidst elite burials, as an emblematic implement of status and ritual, a symbolic

weapon or costume ornaments of religious significance. The reason nephrite jade became the premier symbol of national China has to do with the aesthetic and magical properties of the material, and China's early respect for these properties continues to the present.¹⁰

From the perspective of its chemical composition, there is a narrow mineral range that is recognised as either nephrite or jadeite, the two types of material usually meant by the English word jade or the Chinese *yu*. The word 'jade' crept into English not by way of East Asia, but from *piedra de ijada*, nephrite used as an amulet against kidney disease, which early Spanish navigators brought back from Mexico and Central America, based on their understanding, or misunderstanding, of its use among the Aztecs and Mayans.¹¹

In Chinese, the character for *yu* (玉) dates back to the first known writing on oracle bones and bronzes of the Shang dynasty (1554-1046 BCE) and Zhou interregnum (1045-256 BCE) but similarly, the definition is ambiguous. Early use of the word likely referred to 'a scarce and costly stone, fashioned by lapidaries into ritual objects and small articles of personal adornment and equipment', writes S. Howard Hansford (1899-1973), a western scholar of jade. But it could also describe marble and 'all or most minerals having an industrial use or economic value', even gold and copper.¹²

Nephrite and jadeite are very different in chemical structure and have different names in Chinese, *zhen yu* (真玉) for nephrite and *fei cui* (翡翠) for jadeite. As an inert material, it has no gender, but in China jade has a masculine whiff, because it became associated with Confucius and his prescription for the ideal traits of the *jun*, or gentleman scholar, who he compared in various ways to the qualities of jade.

Most of the collectors, connoisseurs and the single craftsman in history that signed his name to his work were all male. Chen's collection included a pendant signed by this Ming dynasty craftsman, Lu Zigang (1522-1592), of a fisherman sitting by a stream, which sold for HK\$2 million. Women, of course, used jade for adornment from ancient times, as did men, but the nobility of jade and its value were associated with the patriarchal values of a male-ordered state.

A POST-WAR STORY

Even more remarkable then, was Chen's accomplishment in reviving an interest in archaic jade. She kept items from her personal collection

on the desk in her office, although probably no one who knew her would describe jade as her primary interest.

Her expertise as a dealer, as well as her personal interests, were wide-ranging. Besides the Sze Yuan Tang auction, Bonhams held an auction that Chen personally curated before her death, The Feng Wen Tang collection of Song and Tang ceramics, named for her father, Han Fengwen, on October 9, 2014. It grossed HK\$42.1 million while The Feng Wen Tang collection of Qi Baishi paintings, held by Christie's, grossed HK\$275.4 million on June 2, 2015.

These were not the only auctions of her personal collections; Christie's held an auction of the Feng Wen Tang Collection of Bamboo Carvings and Furniture on June 3, 2015, that grossed HK\$55.8 million, and there were others. But the auction that most disrupted the market was the one for jade, by introducing new and higher valuations unseen since the 1990s.

In jade, Chen lavished attention on the classical period of archaic jade, from late Shang through the end of Zhou. And she could only have built her remarkable collection in a particular time and place—Hong Kong in the 1970s through the mid-1990s, when Hong Kong was at the center of the global trade in Chinese antiquities, and before the trade was flooded and debased by counterfeit goods, largely from Chinese factories.

Cheng Huan, a Queen's Counsel, later Senior Counsel, is one of 37 family, friends, collectors, dealers and auctioneers who contributed to a book of commemoration about Chen after her death on December 7, 2014.

Cheng tells how runners directed her to a decrepit industrial building in Macau, where they had six jades wrapped in wet newspaper smelling of rotten cabbage. She left for Macau immediately by hydrofoil ferry, found her way to the windowless room where the runners were waiting, and bought all six jades although only one was worth her while, a six-inch Hongshan *zhulong* or 'pig dragon'. These are C-shaped, with a face suggesting a wild boar and the body a softly curved curl ending in a flat surface parallel to the snout.¹³ These were extremely rare in the mid-1980s, and despite recent archeological excavations remain rare; only about two dozen have come from supervised digs, although there are many more *zhulong* of unknown provenance.¹⁴

Chen wrote a seven-figure cheque with the name of the beneficiary

left blank, called a jade collector in Mid-Levels with a mobile phone—only recently introduced to Hong Kong—visited him in his pajamas, then phoned a collector in Chicago after the jade collector gave his opinion that it was authentic, who jumped at the chance and immediately wired funds to Chen’s account before her cheque to the runners had been presented at her bank.

Chen was ‘lucky to be the right person in the right place at the right time’, wrote Cheng. ‘I met her during the glory days for buying things Chinese. It was as if a conveyor belt was delivering treasures to Hong Kong, mainly by way of Macau.’¹⁵

While Hong Kong remained a British crown colony to July 1, 1997, the community of collectors and dealers was a uniquely Hong Kong nexus of former Shanghai businessmen, Taiwanese white goods entrepreneurs and, by the mid-1990s, mainland Chinese buyers which drove the growth of the market. Sheaf, interviewed after his retirement from Bonhams in 2022 in *The Art Newspaper*, said ‘The sale composition still remains highly influenced by the traditional preferences of pre-1949 Shanghai collectors for grand Imperial porcelains and brightly-colored jades, not for the more literary and archeological tastes of pre-Revolutionary Beijing.’¹⁶

The 1970s through 1990s was also when the United States led a seemingly unstoppable wave of globalisation, with Hong Kong, a free port, as one of its avatars. Its low tax regime, absence of import duties and strong legal structure were among the reasons why Hong Kong attracted the major international auction houses. James Lally, one of the directors of Sotheby’s in the 1970s and 1980s, saw Hong Kong as a better place to establish its business than Taiwan or Japan, both more rigid and protectionist than Hong Kong.¹⁷

Ivy Yi Yan Chan, co-convenor of the Arts of China at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, describes the diverse make-up of Hong Kong’s collectors in *Collecting Chinese Art in Hong Kong from 1949 to 1997: Collectors, Museums and the Art Market*.¹⁸ Two groups of collectors, and one group of dealers, emerged in Hong Kong in the 1960s; the Min Chiu Society (敏求精舍) (1960), the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong, or OCSHK (1974) and the Kau Chi Society (求知雅集) of dealers (1979).

The Kau Chi Society was founded ‘as a response to the Min Chiu and OCSHK’s rejection of dealers and dealer-collectors such as Robert Chang who were seen to be motivated by commercial interests in

their collecting', Chan writes.¹⁹ Chen became its first and only female member.²⁰

Both the Min Chiu Society and the Kau Chi Society followed a long-standing Chinese tradition of 'elegant gatherings' of scholar-literati for appreciation of fine objects over tea and wine, while OCSHK was modelled on British learned societies, as an English-speaking society to encourage new and emerging collectors. Meanwhile, Sotheby's held its first sale in Hong Kong in 1973 and Christie's followed more than a decade later in 1986.

During the last two decades of the century, Hong Kong became the world's foremost location for buying, selling and collecting Chinese antiquities. In 2000, the Hong Kong auction market claimed the lead in terms of market share.²¹

If globalisation was a key driver behind Hong Kong's emergence as the leading global market for Chinese antiquities, Chinese isolationism was another. The period after 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China was when bourgeois capitalists and their enthusiasms became unwelcome in mainland China, and antiquities in private hands were confiscated or handed over to the Chinese state, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Antiquities collectors and dealers who had been based in Shanghai and Guangzhou relocated to Hong Kong; 10 of the founders of the Min Chiu Society were from Shanghai, others were Cantonese-speaking collectors whose families had originated in Guangdong province. Cantonese speaking non-Chinese collectors, like Brian McElney, Richard Kilburn and Tony Miller were later invited to join the group.²²

According to Chan, Hong Kong dealers such as Alvin Lo and his father P.C. Lu were able to purchase huge volumes of antiquities deemed second-rate from the China Arts and Crafts Company.²³ First-rate treasures were kept for China's museums, which also conducted discreet sales to dealers and collectors. Chung Wah-pui, a jade collector who helped Sir Robert Hotung build his foundational jade collection, now at the British Museum, recalls visiting a shop in Sham Shui Po in the 1980s, together with art historian James Watt. Jade animals in the round were sold by the box, with several hundred pieces per box, he recalls.²⁴

ENTER THE DRAGON

Susan Chen's rise as the queen of Hong Kong's antique trade was far

from deliberate. She was born in the Japanese colony in Formosa, on July 5, 1940, a dragon year in the Chinese zodiac, to a Korean father and Taiwanese mother. After graduating from the National Taichung Girls' Senior High School in 1959, she worked for the Taiwan News Agency and then at Taichung Hospital. In 1963, she married Marvin Haworth, a cultural attaché at the US embassy in Taipei, whose work took the family to Hong Kong in 1973.

While they were still living in the US diplomatic quarters in Yangmingshan near Taipei, Chen began frequenting the National Palace Museum, which opened to the public in 1965. She began chatting with Wu Yu-Chang, curator of objets d'art at the museum, about porcelain.²⁵ Wu was the first of many mentors that included a founder of the Min Chiu Society, Shanghai collector J.M. Hu (胡惠春) and the distinguished Kyoto dealer Tadanori Nakamura, as well as Sheaf, former deputy chairman of Bonhams, and founding director of Christie's office in Hong Kong in 1986.²⁶

As Sheaf tells it, Chen's entry to the antique market was 'impeccably timed'. As a member of both the Kau Chi Society and OCSHK, Chen began collecting and only turned to selling after she had amassed a collection of bamboo and jade carvings and exhibited a few of them at the first International Asian Art Fair in Hong Kong in 1979.²⁷ This led to a gallery, first at the Merlin Hotel in Kowloon, then on Lyndhurst Terrace in Central on Hong Kong Island.

'A visit to her office was an encounter with entire epochs of Chinese ceramic history', Sheaf writes. 'With the passing of the years and changes in international demand, her stock shifted towards archaic bronzes and jades of a bewildering variety, usually concealed from prying eyes, Japanese-style, in handmade fitted boxes. Every visit to her gallery would be a journey through Chinese antiquity often shared with a leading collector or dealer whose meeting had been slotted into her always-busy schedule.'²⁸

Haworth passed away in 1992. In 1999, Chen married the divorced Anthony Hardy, founder of the Hong Kong Maritime Museum, former chairman of the Wallem Group, a third-party ship manager, and an ambitious collector in his own right.

Anthony, her family and Antebi are all associated with the Susan Chen Foundation, which was established in 2022 from her estate. Its goal is 'to promote Chinese art in the Hong Kong community and beyond', and to help young people reach their full potential. Chen's

legacy continues to unfold. But one important piece of it was to renew enthusiasm for the jade art that lies at the spiritual and aesthetic core of early China and continues to speak to Chinese today.



Figure 1: Photograph of Susan Chen Hardy courtesy of the Susan Chen Foundation

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FROM A POZSONY/PRESSBURG MILL TO LATE QING CHINA: ERNST LUDWIG AT HIS IMPERIAL AND ROYAL MAJESTY'S SERVICE

BY LUKÁŠ GAJDOŠ

ABSTRACT

Pozsony/Pressburg-born Gottfried Ernst Ludwig, also known as Ludwig Ernő in Hungarian; Ernest Ludwig in English; 盧達偉 in Chinese, (1876-1932) was among the first Chinese language graduates from the Austro-Hungarian Konsularakademie and was posted in the first decade of the 20th century as an Austro-Hungarian diplomat, interpreter and Vice-Consul, to Shanghai, Peking, and Tientsin (modern-day Tianjin).

This article draws on primary sources from the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, along with contemporary press coverage and a range of secondary sources to piece together Ludwig's story. It chronicles his studies of Chinese and delves deeper into three episodes from Ludwig's China days—the time he spent as Acting Consul at the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Tientsin; his literary pursuits; and his feud with a fellow Austro-Hungarian diplomat. The article concludes with an overview of Ludwig's life after leaving China, including his time as the Austro-Hungarian Consul in Cleveland, Ohio before and during the First World War, his short stint in the Hungarian foreign service, and his final return to the United States.

This article is personal. Firstly, because it focuses on one person's life. Secondly, because the author grew up in the vicinity of Ludwig's childhood home and because a three-word reference in a newspaper article inspired him to uncover as much of this story as possible.

Note on spellings: for reasons of brevity, all Austro-Hungarian place names will appear in both Hungarian and their historical English/German equivalent upon their first appearance. Thereafter, they will appear under their historical English/German name only. Please note that some place names have changed e.g. Pressburg is known today as Bratislava.

THE LUDWIG FAMILY

Gottfried Ernst Ludwig was born on 20 November 1876 and baptised six days later in the nearby Blumenthal, ‘Flower Valley’, church, the registry of which identifies him under no. 434 as the ‘legitimate son of Johann Ludwig and Valenta Sophia, Roman-Catholic. Ernst Ludwig’s father Johann was a progressive industrialist and a second-generation owner of *Gottfried Ludwig Dampfmühle* (Gottfried Ludwig Steam Mills), named after Johann’s father Gottfried. He had two older brothers, Johann and Viktor, and three younger siblings, Robert, Helene, Julius. The siblings grew up in a palace, the so-called Ludwig Palace, which was built next to the Ludwig family’s steam-mills. Gottfried Ludwig’s grandchildren were born into a country that had evolved in the aftermath of the 1867 Compromise, which created the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, officially known as the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy/Realm.

The Compromise ‘created two states in which no language was the language of a majority, and no ethnic nation could claim to be the majority’.¹ Following this division, the two parts of the Habsburg realm handled issues of language and identity differently. Austria emerged as fundamentally multinational and the Hungarian part, in which Pressburg was located, as a place where ‘Hungarian nationalists mixed traditional state patriotism with emerging ethnic nationalism in an attempt to create a specifically Hungarian nation that sought increasingly to assimilate ethnic non-Hungarians to an ethnic Hungarian identification’.² No records of Ernst Ludwig’s upbringing



Figure 1: Ludwig’s mill and palace (right), undated, approx. late 19th century

survive, but the decisions he made later on as an adult personify him as the archetypal dualist; equally at ease with his German (linguistically-speaking) family history and his increasingly stronger identification with the Hungarian part of the Empire.

Ernst Ludwig resurfaces in the archives at the end of the 19th century as one of the very first students of Chinese language at Vienna's *Orientalakademie*, renamed the *Konsularakademie* in 1898. The idea of teaching future Austro-Hungarian diplomats Chinese was suggested by Heinrich von Coudenhove; writer, polyglot, and diplomat at the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Tokyo, whose Envoy was accredited to China. In September 1894, von Coudenhove contacted Joseph Haas, Austro-Hungarian Consul-General in Shanghai, about the approach of different foreign countries to educating their own interpreters in East Asian languages.³ The need for formal training for Austro-Hungarian interpreters became even more pressing after the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian legation in Peking in 1896, the designation of its first envoy, Baron Moritz Czikann von Wahlborn, on 26 December 1896, and his arrival in Peking five months later.⁴

The rationale for establishing a separate school for Chinese interpreters, whose curriculum would differ from university students of sinology, was also elaborated upon in a letter from Arthur von Rosthorn, Secretary of the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Peking, to his newly arrived superior. Rosthorn argued that 'the goal [of teaching Chinese at the *Orientalakademie*] is to train interpreters and [Chinese-speaking] officials for service at His Imperial and Royal Majesty's missions and consular offices' and drew Czikann's attention to the 'current spoken language and formal written style that are completely different from the idioms found in classical [Chinese] literature'.⁵ He also mentioned the need to hire a native speaking instructor, as was the case at similar institutions in Paris, Berlin, and Petersburg.⁶

The decision to teach Chinese at the *Orientalakademie* was announced by Viennese newspapers in spring 1897. It was meant to 'acquaint the attendants of this course with the Chinese language as such and its written form in order to facilitate practical appropriation of this language on the spot [while serving in China]'.⁷ It was open to Year III students of the Academy, who along with the knowledge of the Chinese writing system, were meant to familiarise themselves with colloquial Chinese during the first year (Year IV) of their studies of the language and along with widening their knowledge of



Figure 2: A postcard featuring the Imperial and Royal Consular Academy in Vienna, late 19th/early 20th century

colloquial Chinese, to learn the official writing style and the written language respectively.⁸ The first three students of Chinese to enrol at the *Orientalakademie* in October 1897 were Ernst Ludwig, Nikolaus Manojlović von Bozovics, and Hermann von Ploennies.⁹

One immediate issue the Academy faced in the early stages of teaching Chinese was how to give examinations, or more precisely, its lack of a fluent Chinese speaker able to objectively assess the performance of the three students. Following the very first round of exams on 22 March 1898, Director of the Academy Baron Michael Pidoll von Quintenbach, contacted the Imperial and Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, writing that ‘since currently there is—to my knowledge—not a single person in Austria-Hungary with Chinese fluent enough to enable him to fulfil this position’ he was looking for a ‘theoretically and practically qualified person from abroad to fulfil the task in question’ for the second round of exams, which were due to take place between 7 and 14 July 1898.¹⁰

The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry solved the problem by tasking Baron Ladislaus Szögyény, its Ambassador to Germany, with finding a member of the Chinese Legation in Berlin, who had practically and theoretically mastered German.¹¹ Following a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Lü Haihuan, the latter recommended that Chinese diplomat Li Dejun be dispatched to Vienna in early July, with the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry covering his travel and

accommodation costs in full.¹²

Li arrived at Vienna's Northwestern Railway Station on 8 July 1898 and administered the oral exams. Ludwig received the lowest grade of the three students, satisfactory i.e. the equivalent of a C, with unsatisfactory/D being the lowest possible grade. Li was nevertheless impressed with what he saw and heard, describing the Chinese pronunciation of the teachers and their students as 'fully comprehensible and appropriate' and the language skills of the students as on a 'better level than those of the students at the Seminary for Eastern Languages in Berlin'. Similar praise was given to the students for their writing skills.¹³ Ludwig successfully concluded his studies and graduated from the *Konsularakademie* on 14 July 1899. He was now ready for his inevitable posting to China.¹⁴

LUDWIG, AUSTRIA-HUNGARY AND CHINA

Ernst Ludwig received his first consular rank in a decree from the Austrian-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 12 December 1900, which also stated that he would be posted to the Austro-Hungarian Consulate-General in Shanghai, to work under Consul Pisko.¹⁵ A short announcement in the *Preßburger Zeitung* noted Ludwig's first consular posting on 20 December 1900.¹⁶ With small breaks, he would spend the rest of the decade in China. After a brief stint in Shanghai, he was moved to the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Peking on 2 May 1901; with a travel advance of 100 taels, the present-day equivalent of approx. 3250 USD. He was promoted to Vice-Consul on 7 December 1902; temporarily moved back to Shanghai between 5 November 1902 and 6 April 1903 to work at the Austro-Hungarian Consular Court; temporarily posted to Tientsin as the Acting Consul from 8 June 1905 until 10 May 1906 and then left China to provisionally work at a court in Vienna on 2 March 1907. He was sent back to Peking on 7 October 1907, where he would remain for another eighteen months.¹⁷

To illustrate the broader historical context, this period, with Count Agenor Goluchowski heading the Dual monarchy's Foreign Ministry, has been described as the high point of Austro-Hungarian imperialism abroad, with the Foreign Minister eager that Austria-Hungary not lag behind the other great European powers in the aftermath of the First Sino-Japanese War, and the attempts of other Powers to obtain concessions.¹⁸ The Empire had a wide gap to bridge. Although it concluded an unequal treaty with China in 1869, guaranteeing the

Dual Monarchy extraterritoriality, in line with its own perception of itself as a major European power, it had no political interest in East Asia and hardly any economic ties with China.¹⁹

Important changes also occurred during Ludwig's studies at the *Konsularakademie*. As mentioned previously, a decision was taken in 1896 to open the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Peking and its first Envoy, Czikkann, reached Peking in April 1897.²⁰ Three years later, Austria-Hungary took part in the Boxer War, dispatching four ships which arrived too late to participate in the actual fighting, with only its flagbearer joining the international column sent to relieve the foreign legations in Peking.²¹ In total, 382 marines were stationed in Peking, Tientsin, and Tanggu, and Austro-Hungarian forces took part in two punitive expeditions into the Chinese countryside in 1900 and 1901.²²

It was against this backdrop that Ernst arrived in China. Rather than looking at the time he spent in China in a chronological manner, let us zoom in on three important moments. Firstly, his work in Tientsin, where he was posted shortly after the creation of the Austro-Hungarian concession for the opening of the new building for the Dual Monarchy's Consulate, which still stands today. Secondly, his literary work, a collection of Chinese tales published in Hungarian and a book on an inscription in the Yellow Temple 西黄寺 commemorating the visit of the 6th Panchen Lama to the court of Qianlong Emperor, which was published in English. Thirdly, his long-running feud with Erwin Zach, a colleague and Austrian sinologist.

IN TIENTSIN

Shortly after Russia and Belgium occupied land in Tientsin, Envoy Czikkann wrote to the Foreign Ministry, requesting permission to seize 'a piece of land now that is quite suitable for this on the left bank of the Peiho [...], adjacent to Italian-occupied land, fairly close to the station, opposite the Chinese city [...] for Austria-Hungary'.²³ He added that any delay would likely result in Japan occupying this particular plot.²⁴

On 20 June 1902, a formal treaty was signed by Czikkann, the Austro-Hungarian Envoy, Karl Bernauer, vice-consul in Tientsin, and Yuan Shikai, viceroy of Zhili, in Tientsin.²⁵ Bernauer took over the administration of the concession on 4 August 1902, but only concluded the formal agreement with local authorities on 27 December 1902.²⁶ One historian opined 'it is likely that this [the establishment of a concession] was one of the primary goals on the part of Goluchowski

when he sent marines to Northern China.²⁷ What was received, however, was far from overwhelming. Bernauer reported that ‘almost the entire area is [already] built up with houses, which are arranged on often very narrow and irregular streets and alleys’, in addition to some 10,000 graves, there were about 25–30,000 inhabitants and some 1832 houses, ranging from ‘very shabby mud houses’ to ‘better-built Chinese houses’. There were also three Europeans—none of them Imperial and Royal subjects.²⁸

Soon thereafter, the Imperial and Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna decided to award Ferdinand Kowarski, a Silesian-born architect, the project of repairing the heavily-damaged building of the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Beijing, as well as of building the new consulate building in Tientsin, which was Austro-Hungary’s first, and would be its only, overseas possession.²⁹ The contract was signed in April 1903, and the design featured offices on the ground floor and the official residence of the consul on the upper floor, with an annex building and estimated costs of approximately 87,000 Mexican Dollars, the present-day equivalent of 1.85 mil. USD.³⁰ The execution of the project proceeded slowly, courtesy of a petition by expropriated owners and the need to ship many of the building materials—fencing, handrails, carpets, wallpaper, stoves, and furniture—all the way from the Dual Monarchy.³¹

Vice-Consul Ludwig started what would turn out to be an eleven-month posting as Acting Consul in Tientsin on 8 June 1905, and his correspondence from this period offers an insight into the struggle

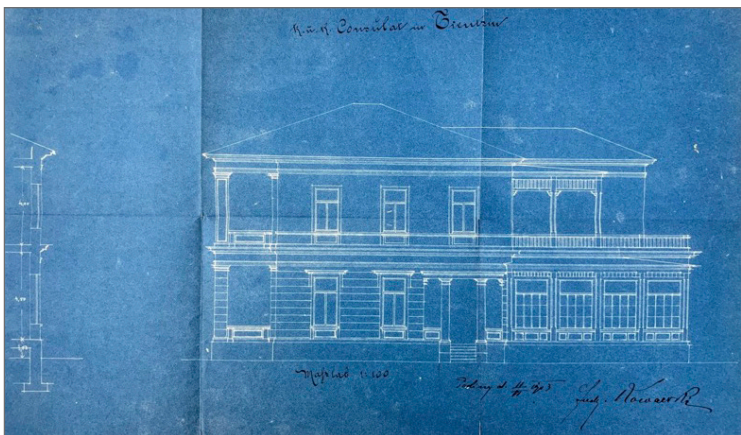


Figure 3: Blueprints of Kowarski’s design for the Tientsin consulate

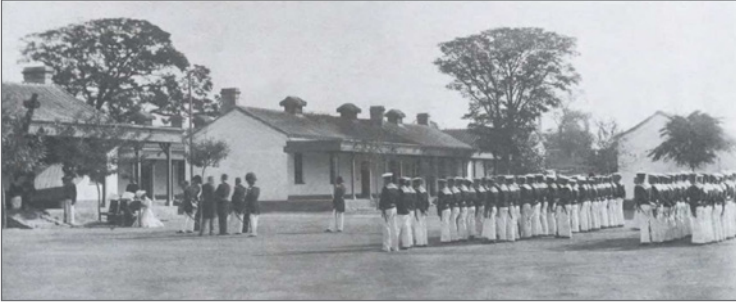


Figure 4: A field mass in the Austro-Hungarian Concession in 1906—with Ludwig (possibly) in attendance

to finish the ongoing project. In more concrete terms, he spelled out issues with the fence and invoices for different imported building parts; complained about the imported furniture ‘...the Fatherland’s industry brings no honour to itself with the despatched pieces ... the quality is much inferior to those for the I. and R. Legation in Peking’, and the work of the architect, including a proposal to fine Kowarski 4000 Crowns, the present-day equivalent of approx. 32,000 USD, both due to the delay to competition and the solidity of internal and external equipment of the building and furniture.³²

The long-expected opening of the Consulate occurred on 22 September 1905, with the Viceroy of Tchili Province Yuan Shi-kai in attendance.³³ From the Austro-Hungarian side, Ludwig presided over the festive occasion, with other high-level guests including Commander



Figure 5: Figure 5: The band of the S.M.S. Kaiserin Elisabeth (1910)

Mirtl, some of the officers and the band of the *S.M.S. Kaiserin Elisabeth*, which had called in at the nearby port of Qinhuangdao 秦皇島; Peking Legation councillor Rosthorn; Commander of the Legation's guard, von Pflügl; and Austro-Hungarian citizens of the concession.³⁴ To celebrate the opening, 'the consulate, the quay, and the pontoon bridge were decorated by our concession with flags, lanterns, etc. ... with the new, completely white building [of the consulate] looking very monumental and stately in the middle of this spectacle', with only unfinished fencing on one side disturbing the overall impression, earning itself a half a page in Ernst's letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the event.³⁵

The unprecedented presence of Yuan Shikai was highlighted, 'he had never attended any afternoon or evening celebrations held by Europeans', and equated with the 'extremely cordial links between our governments' that were 'mentioned in numerous toasts'.³⁶ Yuan was described as the 'most powerful and influential man in China and his views and influence extend to the Empress Dowager and the Emperor'.³⁷ Yuan also impressed Rosthorn, whose short report of the opening mentioned his 'toast about the rapprochement between China and the Austro-Hungarian Empire'.³⁸ Ludwig went on to argue that a rapprochement would advance commercial and financial relations with China and went on to provide examples of similar behaviour by other foreign powers.³⁹ He concluded his report by writing that 'even if we get to do so very late, the possibility still remains open for us to proceed in the same way as the rest of the world'.⁴⁰ With hindsight, it is safe to conclude that Austria-Hungary never pursued this avenue and went on to remain a minor player in Chinese affairs.

However, upon its opening, Ludwig continued to chase up several missing pieces, including lighting, and delays to the delivery of certain furnishings.⁴¹ As of early 1906, the building was finally complete and would remain in Austro-Hungarian, later Austrian and Hungarian, ownership until 18 April 1923, when it was liquidated by Paul Bauer, Austria's Honorary Consul, for 56,050 taels, the present-day equivalent of approx. 1.8 mil. USD, in accordance with the 1919 Treaty of St. Germain, which compelled Austria to cede to China all her property on the latter's territory.⁴² China revoked the concession's existence after entering the First World War on the side of the Entente on 14 August 1917. The Consulate building survived many travails and still stands on the banks of the Haihe River.



Figure 6: The Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Tientsin, as photographed shortly after its completion in 1907 and by the author in 2020



Figure 7: Seal of the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Tientsin

LITERARY WORKS

On 4 January 1903, the *Preßburger Zeitung* published a short, yet informative summary of various articles that Ludwig, ‘who speaks a large number of Asian and European languages’ had published up until then. These included an article about Tibet in the 1901 edition of the *Oesterreichischen Lloyd* and another entitled *Pekingese Lamaseries—Places of Peace* that ‘includes several hundreds of temples, halls, and houses’, which was published in 1902 in Shanghai in *Der Ferne Osten* (The Far East; edited by Carl Fink), which presented itself as an illustrated magazine about the popularisation of East Asian culture.⁴³ The *Zeitung* added that these articles were published in German and French, and elaborated on Ludwig’s work on a collection of Chinese tales, which ‘he recently translated from Chinese into Hungarian ... rich with illustrations ... currently in press by an excellent publisher [Athenaeum] from the capital [Budapest]. The newspaper also praised the unprecedented nature of this endeavour, its humour and its introduction, adding that ‘an enlightening presentation of Chinese cultural conditions is taken into account’.

A more substantial article on the 200-odd page long *Khinai Mesék* (Chinese Tales) was published in the *Nyugatmagyarországi Híradó* (Western Hungarian Advertiser) on 15 March 1903. Written by a local historian Dr. Tivadar Ortvyay, the author expressed his gratitude to *Ernő* Ludwig for giving him a copy of the book, which ‘contains eighty-two Chinese tales that can serve as a pleasant read ... of a very innocent

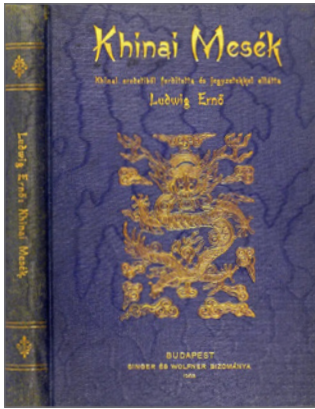


Figure 8: The cover of *Khinai Mesék*

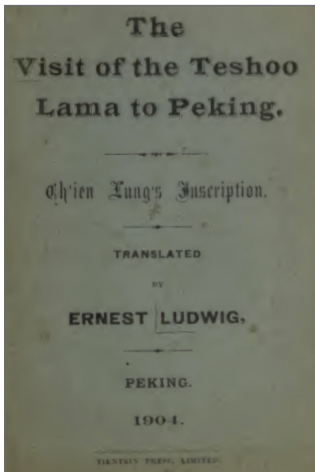


Figure 9: The cover of *The Visit of the Teshoo Lama to Peking. Ch'ien Lung's Inscription*

Ludwig's book of Chinese tales; "The devil says to a beggar, "I will give you 1000 taels, if I can beat you to death". The beggar answers, "Give me 500 taels and beat me only half as much".⁴⁶

One year later, Ernst Ludwig published *The Visit of the Teshoo Lama to Peking. Ch'ien Lung's Inscription*, a slender, 91-page book by the Tientsin Press. We may speculate as to what led Ludwig to choose this particular subject matter, but a connection may be drawn with the 1902 article on Pekingese Lamaseries that appeared in the *Der Ferne Osten*. The book is divided into three parts; a translation of the inscription in the first part that refers to the visit of the Teshoo Lama to

nature, both in terms of their subject and presentation drawn from Chinese life.⁴⁴ Ortway judged the Chinese to be more virtuous than the peoples of Western civilisation. Turning his attention back to the book, he underlined the fact that it was the only Hungarian translation of original Chinese tales, with explanatory notes in certain parts of the text, where [Chinese] customs were 'explained to the reader and made understandable'.

In tune with the times and filled with nationalist sentiment, the historian then encouraged Ludwig to 'pick up the thread of the historical narrative' about the alleged connection between the Magyars and other steppe tribes, which led him to draw a line all the way back to the Yuan dynasty, that passed from the hands of late 18th century Orientalist Joseph de Guignes to the Pressburg-educated Jesuit György Pray, in order to 'extract knowledge that would, from the viewpoint of national historiography, ... be welcome and desirable'.⁴⁵ Four days later, the same Hungarian-language newspaper printed an excerpt from

Peking in late 18th century; the original Chinese text of the inscription in the second part; and explanations necessary for the comprehension of the translation, in the third part, along with a lengthy appendix on the names of the Dalai and Tashi Lamas.⁴⁷

In the book, Ludwig also offers a summary of the travels of the Teshoo Lama, the 6th Panchen Lama, including his repeated refusals of the Qianlong Emperor's invitation to visit him in the imperial capital, and a short account of the long and strenuous journey that started in Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in mid-1779 and took the 1500-people retinue through Kumbum Monastery 塔尔寺 in the vicinity of Xining and Chengde, where Qianlong honoured the Teshoo by building the Xumi Fushou Temple 须弥福寿之. This was where the pair met for the first time, most likely in September 1780, with Teshoo Lama staying on for approximately a month before continuing on to Peking, where he took up residence at the Yellow Temple.⁴⁸

Various interesting details of the meetings between the Panchen Lama and Qianlong are described. These include linguistic asides, 'in order to converse with the Pan-ch'an intimately, the Emperor had previously learned the language of the Tanguths'; religious conversations on various aspects of Buddhism, symbolic moments like the Panchen Lama's insistence on kowtowing to the Emperor, who eventually permitted him to do so; curiosities, 'the Lama is reported to have given on one occasion an audience to the ladies of the Imperial harem, who came to receive his benediction, which he bestowed upon them while sitting behind a fan of yellow gauze and fixing his looks on the ground, to avoid troubles of conscience'; touristic impressions, visits to the Fragrant Hills 香山, Longevity Hill 万寿山 in the Old Summer Palace 颐和园, the Forbidden City 故宫, and all notable temples in the capital; and ultimately tragedy, the Panchen Lama's death from smallpox in December 1780, after which his remains were moved to the Yellow Temple in February or March 1781, where a mausoleum was erected before he was ultimately returned to Tibet.⁴⁹

On the inscription itself, 'carved on a tablet standing upright on the back of the fetiche [sic] of Chinese, the tortoise, under the shelter of a pavilion to the right of the Dagoba ... presented in four languages, Chinese, Manchu, Tibetan and Mongolian', Ludwig gives two reasons for its noteworthiness, a clear, though not exactly detailed account of the visit, and comments upon the general views of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung on the Buddhism of his day.⁵⁰



Figure 10: Cenotaph erected to the Banjin Lama of Thibet, as captured by John Thomson in the early 1870s and by the author in 2020

Ludwig was not the only person fascinated by the inscription. John Thomson, the famous late 19th century Scottish photographer of China, called it 'the most remarkable, and perhaps the finest, monument in all China'.⁵¹ He went on to speculate that the Panchen Lama was 'poisoned, as is said, by a jealous Emperor ... the monarch treating his victim with the most stately courtesy to the last, and even worshipping and glorifying him in public, while his sacrifice was being prepared'.⁵²

As usual, the *Preßburger Zeitung* dedicated a lengthy article to the book, reminding its readers of Ludwig's track record of publishing on East Asia in Hungarian, German, French, Italian, and now in 'good English', underlining that 'it should not be without interest for the Fatherland that a local town child appears as a learner writer in English *lingua franca* in the land of the setting sun'.⁵³ It also gave a detailed summary of the short book.

A brief review published in the *T'oung Pao II* in French, however, was less celebratory:⁵⁴

... this text does not contain much new information and the main interest of Mr. Ludwig's publication lies in the notes where the author sought to elucidate the Chinese transcriptions by which are expressed the names of the various Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lama. It would be desirable, moreover, that we could see a phototypical reproduction of the inscription, because it seems that the copy executed by Mr. Ludwig is not always exact.

A more damning review appeared in the form of a handwritten letter to the *China Review*, penned on 19 January 1905 by a certain 'A. Brady' from the 'Palace Hotel, Peking'. The letter called the book 'nothing but a bundle of gross mistranslations', alleging that 'the text of Kienlung's inscription was inexactly copied by the author'. While congratulating Ludwig on his industry, A. Brady went on to state that 'his insufficient knowledge of Chinese is to be deplored. I should recommend him to stick to the Jones [sic]'.⁵⁵ It is this letter that brings us to Ludwig's feud with his colleague.

ZACH VS. LUDWIG

Erwin Ritter von Zach was born in 1872 into the family of a high-

ranking army officer, and after studying medicine for several semesters at the University of Vienna, followed his calling for sinology and studied Chinese at the University of Leiden in 1896 and 1897.⁵⁶ In 1897, upon successful completion of an entrance exam in London, he entered the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, serving in Beijing (1897-1898) and Shantou (1898-1900). Due to a shortage of interpreters at the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Beijing, he took a year-long leave of absence from Chinese customs and joined the Legation on a temporary basis on 27 March 1901, eventually staying on a permanent basis, becoming a Consular Attaché on 7 June 1902 and Vice-Consul on 25 January 1903.⁵⁷

The roots of Zach's conflict with Ludwig can perhaps be traced back to the very early days of their interactions. Writing in summer 1901, one observer characterised Ludwig as 'a rich Hungarian and ... a blunt, stupid man' and Zach as 'the only able man, on whom the burden of work lies, but who has an entirely subordinate position and is no more than a Chinese interpreter'.⁵⁸ The latter, as Counsellor Rosthorn argued in his proposal to promote him to Vice-Consul, 'already had five years of practical experience in China behind him and has achieved qualifications that our new consuls seldom do'.⁵⁹ Zach might have therefore felt slighted for his promotion, initially denied, having taken so long, in addition to being critical of what he perceived as the unequal division of labour within the Legation. Writing to his headquarters in 1903, he complained of having to cover for Ludwig for six months and, 'due to a shortage in personnel [of having to take] over the whole administrative work as well as the often-protracted negotiations related to the processing of construction invoices [of the new Legation building]', which left him unable to comply with his interpreter duties.⁶⁰ Subsequently, Zach suggested that he should either share administrative responsibilities with Ludwig or that a lower officer from the armed guard assume them.⁶¹



Figure 11: Staff of the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Beijing prior to being received by the Emperor in the Forbidden City (1907 or 1908)—possibly featuring both Ludwig and Zach

In May 1905, Zach left for Europe for around nine months. Upon his return, he was confronted with the fallout of the aforementioned 'A. Brady' letter, whose real author Ludwig had identified as him. From his interim posting in Tientsin, Ludwig complained to the Dual Monarchy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Zach's irresponsible behaviour and systematic incitement, characterising him as someone who 'initially makes ... a very good impression ... [but] his overexcitement and his through-and-through intriguing and hateful nature comes to the fore in the longer run'.⁶²

As for the 'A. Brady' letter, Ludwig obtained the original manuscript and instantly identified the handwriting as Zach's.⁶³ Zach also critiqued Ludwig's work in the third part of his *Lexicographischen Beiträge*, accusing Ludwig of mistranslation, something that Ludwig described in his written complaint to Vienna as attempts to 'push down the value of my book to a low level'.⁶⁴ The saga concluded with Zach asking for Ludwig's forgiveness in a letter dated 10 March 1906, for what he described as 'a bad joke'.⁶⁵ Eight days later, Ludwig, writing to chargé d'affaires Rosthorn from Tientsin, complained that Zach's letter 'came unexpectedly ... because it came so late ... [and] because it came at all'.⁶⁶ With this letter, he considered the matter settled and asked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be informed accordingly.⁶⁷

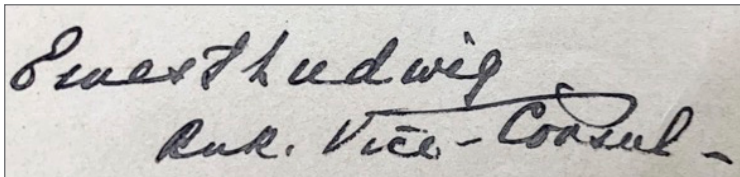


Figure 12: Ludwig's signature on an official document from the Austro-Hungarian Legation

The feud was rekindled two years later by Zach's letter to the Austro-Hungarian chargé d'affaires Storck on 11 June 1908, in which he alleged to have been 'confidentially alerted by a high level Chinese official that ... Vice-Consul E. Ludwig wore on a festive occasion a diplomatic, instead of a consular uniform, and officially described himself as a ... Chinese Secretary', concluding that this was 'more moral insanity rather than dishonour and imposture'.⁶⁸ Storck, in his reply from 26 June 1908, pointed out that it was Zach who was impairing the prestige of the foreign service and that his actions were 'far more likely to do harm than when Ludwig wore one green tailcoat

instead of another green tailcoat' or used a different title.⁶⁹ Storck also asked Zach not to pursue the conflict any further.

Three weeks later, Zach's response returned to the idea of what has damaged the prestige of our foreign service in China and Ludwig's 'moral insanity', both of which were evident to Zach as the result of Ludwig marrying 'a brothel mother that is famous all over China'.⁷⁰ The Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was informed of the feud in September 1908, as Zach was nearing the end of his temporary posting in Hong Kong, during which he complained bitterly about the high living costs there. They settled the affair by moving him to Yokohama.

LIFE AFTER CHINA

Ernst Ludwig left China for good in late May 1909. A front-page article in the *Preßburger Zeitung* from 29 May 1909 gives a detailed account of a 'very animated' farewell ceremony that took place at the residence of Miloslav Kobr, Consul of the Austro-Hungarian Settlement in Tianjin.⁷¹ The ceremony's attendees included local Chinese elites—judge of the Chinese Court of Justice Taotai Tsai, a brilliant humourist; Taotai Cheng Ching Hsi, who returned in the morning from Berlin, where he was received alongside His Excellency Tang Schao by the German *Kaiser*, along with a number of high-ranking representatives of Tianjin's treaty ports including the President of the British Chamber of Commerce Mr. Southern, Adjutant of the Viceroy Yuan Shi-Kai, Johan Wilhelm Normann, Munthe, and Police Major Lugowski.⁷²

Speeches were delivered by the British Consul Williams and the Austro-Hungarian Consul Kobr, who celebrated their close friend with spirited words.⁷³ Mr. Emil Zilcher, a representative of Tianjin's Austro-Hungarian community, emphasised that Ludwig was 'always ready to work for the interests of the Motherland with all his strength' and to stand by the community's side in their dealings with China. According to the article, Ludwig was gently moved, and embarked on his journey back home from Peking.⁷⁴

According to an article in the same newspaper from 10 June 1909, Ludwig returned to Vienna on 5 June after a fourteen-day journey on the Trans-Siberian railway and stayed at the Hotel Oesterreichischer Hof.⁷⁵ Referring to its past reporting, the newspaper reminded its readers that Ludwig 'received ovations in Peking and Tientsin' and added that 'Envoy Ritter v. Kuczynski and the Gentlemen of the

Legation, along with many Chinese dignitaries, escorted him at the railway station.⁷⁶

While taking extended leave, Ludwig was designated as the Austro-Hungarian Consul to Cleveland, Ohio on 10 November 1909 and left for the US just three weeks later, setting sail from Genoa on the 30 November on the *SS Prinzess Irene*, and arriving to New York on 7 December 1909.⁷⁷

Being put in charge of the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Cleveland, Ohio was a considerable promotion from his previous position as interpreter for the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Beijing, as the city had one of the strongest communities of migrants from the Dual Monarchy in North America, estimated by one contemporary source at over 150,000 Hungarians and 50,000 Austrians in 1912, following a major rise in the 1900s.⁷⁸

Faced with the 'robber economy of the American *Grosskapitalismus*', which 'exploited' Austro-Hungarian migrants, Ludwig began campaigning for foreign workers' rights in the US and raising funds, 'in an American manner', to open the Queen Elizabeth Hospital to serve Imperial and Royal subjects.⁷⁹ It was for this work that Ernst Ludwig was made a Knight of the Order of the Iron Crown (3rd class) on 9 December 1911.⁸⁰

Another important part of Ludwig's work in Cleveland had to do with the fact that the sizeable proportion of local Hungarians and Austrians were, in fact, ethnically Czech and Slovak, in addition to Croatians and Slovenians. A confluence of different factors, including the creation of Czech and Slovak societies, higher disposable incomes, the ability to use their own language freely, and in no small measure, exposure to the host country, led these communities to become more and more vocal critics of the Dual Monarchy.

It was precisely these types of activities that posed harm to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially following the outbreak of the First World War. The war, or as the *Preßburger Zeitung* put it, 'the outbreak of the recent catastrophes', cut short Ludwig's first holiday in Europe in over two years. He saw his family in Pressburg on 3 August 1914, but left Vienna for Cleveland on 4 August 1914.⁸¹

Upon his return to Cleveland, Ludwig became active in the war of narratives that was taking place in the neutral US. On 12 January 1915, his book *Austria-Hungary and the War* was published.⁸² He subsequently published a number of propaganda pamphlets,

including a response to *The American Verdict on War*, written in early 1915 by Samuel Harden Church, President of the Carnegie Institute, attempting to refute his points on the outbreak of the war.⁸³

Following the US declaration of war on Germany on 8 April 1917, the Dual Monarchy broke off relations with the US, and its diplomats vacated the US on 4 May 1917, well-before Washington's declaration of war on Austria-Hungary on 7 December 1917. We may presume that Ludwig sailed out of New York as one of fifty members of the Austrian Consular service in this country, along with Ambassador Count Tarnowski, who had arrived after diplomatic relations had been broken and was never allowed to present his credentials to the State Department, Austro-Hungarian Consul-General in New York Alexander von Nuber, and Admiral P.W. Hintz, German Minister to China.⁸⁴ The *Preßburger Zeitung* mentioned on 7 June 1917 that Ambassador Count Tarnowski and Consul Ernst Ludwig had returned from America two weeks earlier and wrote about his visit to Poszony and meeting with his brother, director of the municipal nutrition bureau, Johann and of Ernst's return to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as of the following Monday.⁸⁵ Two months later, he was decorated with the War Cross (2nd class) for Civil Service on the occasion of H.M. the King's birthday and undoubtedly for his efforts in the US and then lost his nephew Hans on the Italian front to aerial bombing a month later, travelling to the place of death to carry his remains home.⁸⁶

Austria-Hungary's defeat and subsequent dissolution into a number of smaller countries was a blow to Ludwig, who identified himself both as an ardent monarchist and Hungarian nationalist. Piecing together his story after this major episode requires consulting a number of different, and sometimes contradictory sources. According to one reputable source, he was immediately taken by Hungary, was Consul-General in 1920; participated in the restoration attempt of the deposed Hungarian King Charles (March-October 1921) and lost his position; then lived in Switzerland, later Cleveland and New York; was after his diplomatic career a librarian, translator, publicist, passing away around 1930 in New York.⁸⁷

The last files in the Austrian *Staatsarchiv* and Ludwig's *personalia* are somewhat curious, involving communication about his return, or the lack thereof, of *Russian Railway Statistics*, second edition, 1912, property of the Austrian Ministry of Transportation. The *note verbale* also refers to his mission to Switzerland in January 1919 in service

of the Hungarian government.⁸⁸ On 3 February 1921, the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was informed that the missing book had been found.⁸⁹

It was shortly after his return from this trip to Switzerland that Ludwig's mother Sofie passed away in what was now known as Bratislava, 'on Tuesday, 11 November 1919, at 1am, after short suffering, in the 71st year of her life.'⁹⁰ We may speculate that this was the last time that Ludwig visited his hometown. As per the nature of Ludwig's work in Switzerland, he was responsible for the repatriation of Hungarian prisoners of war from Siberia. Speaking to the Pawtucket Times on 3 January 1921 on his arrival from Switzerland, Ludwig was quoted as estimating that 'it will cost \$1,000,000, the present-day equivalent of 17.8 mil. USD, to support the [15,000 Hungarian] prisoners in Vladivostok until the port opens, and another million to bring them home' in an article about the return of 8000 Hungarian POWs from eastern Siberia through American aid.⁹¹ According to one source, he was also a member of the Hungarian Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference.⁹²

Following his move to the United States, information on the last decade of Ludwig's life is scant; one Hungarian historian noted that he 'disappeared' from public life after the war. But he was mentioned in a large advert in the *Boston Herald* that lists him as a member of the United Investment Assurance System's Foreign Advisory Board.⁹³ In a letter to friend and poet Albert Ehrenstein on 24 May 1932, Ludwig's nemesis Erwin Zach, wrote 'a short while ago (15 March) died a colleague of mine Ernst Ludwig in New York.'⁹⁴

A number of obituaries published following Ludwig's death, identified the place and cause of death; 55, found in his furnished room at 111 East 10th Street, from a heart attack, adding that the deceased had entered business four years previously, and was a member of many important Austrian and Hungarian societies: the National Geographic Society of America, the Society Historique of France, etc.⁹⁵ Somewhat confusingly, his death certificate identifies



Figure 13: Sketch of Ludwig from his obituary, 16 March 1932

him as working at the Consulate-General of Hungary, and lists the Hungarian section of the Most Holy Trinity Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York as his final resting place.⁹⁶

As for the other characters mentioned in this article, Erwin Zach spent the majority of the last two decades of his life in the Dutch East Indies, present-day Indonesia, in Weltevreden (Bogor) and Batavia (Jakarta). Following Germany's attack on the Netherlands, he was interned in Sumatra in May 1940 and died in the January 1942 sinking of the *Van Imhoff*—artist Walter Spies, known for his contacts with Peking's artistic circles, was also among its victims. Aged 68, Zach was last seen by another survivor named Fischer 'sitting in a floating chair, looking around with dignity in his impressive white beard'.⁹⁷ Edith Kedrick Ludwig passed away in February 1945 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she was living with a niece, in all likelihood biophysicist Mária Telkes, who then worked at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.⁹⁸ Somewhat symbolically, Edith Kendrick Ludwig's obituary featured on the same page as an article *Ask[ing] Clothing for Liberated but Destitute Czechoslovakia*, the creation of which was enabled by the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy; an event that dealt a major, if not the fatal blow to Ludwig's diplomatic career.

CONCLUSION

This article has introduced Ernst Ludwig; his posting to China and the Dual Monarchy's engagement with late Qing China, his stint at the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Tientsin; literary pursuits; and protracted feud with a fellow Austro-Hungarian consular official and sinologist Erwin Zach. It provided an overview of the last two decades of Ernst Ludwig's career, the majority of which was spent in the United States.

As is often the case with similar ventures, this article falls short of providing a truly comprehensive account of Ernst Ludwig's life, and many blanks have yet to be filled in. One may be left to wonder about Ludwig the person, the fate of his diaries (if any), photographs either depicting him—the author's research has not yielded a single one—or his time in China, including travels to the country's interior, or indeed any artefacts from his time there.

These may have been lost to history or have perhaps been handed down to Ludwig's wife; their marriage was childless. Should they ever be found, a more complete story will emerge.

The author would like to express his gratitude to everyone who helped with piecing the story together, and especially to those who provided encouragement, and exhibited patience, between the time when he presented his main findings in a Royal Asiatic Society Beijing lecture on 15 April 2020, and the actual publication of this article.

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SECTION 3

Reviews and Passages

CHINA'S WORLD VIEW

BY DAVID DAOKUI LI

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024

REVIEWED BY OTARI KAKHIDZE

David Daokui Li's recent book *China's World View* aims to serve a noble cause; targeted at Western readers, it seeks to 'demystify China in order to prevent global conflict'. Such a conflict, even in a less overtly hostile form, could potentially become the most damaging one since World War II. Even though global rivalry in a bipolar world has existed for the past fifty years, the interconnectedness of the global economy today is unprecedented. As a result, even minor tensions between China and the United States would likely have far reaching consequences for the rest of the world. The key factors contributing to these tensions include not only the widespread lack of understanding about the inner workings of China, but also the distorted portrayal of the country by outsiders, who have often misinformed the international community.

China's World View is presented by an insider, an acclaimed academic economist who has great experience in informing high level decision-making in the country, even though not a government official himself. The endeavour of writing such a book carries the inherent risk, well acknowledged by the author, of being caught between a rock and a hard place. Inside China, of being perceived as 'a traitor pleasing the westerners' while outside as a mouthpiece for Chinese propaganda. Nevertheless, Dr Li undertakes the arduous task of lifting the veil of misunderstanding surrounding Chinese topics, demonstrating a coherence within the Chinese political economy in the first person. Drawing on a wealth of personal anecdotes and insider accounts, he offers invaluable insight; what might seem perplexing or baffling to foreigners is, in fact, the result of a consistent internal logic. By explaining the broader context, the seemingly unusual aspects of China begin to make more sense.

The book explores a wide range of such aspects. It begins with the governance model of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the dynamics between central and local government, then explores the economic roles played by state-owned versus private enterprises. It

then examines popular topics such as the Chinese stance on corruption, the education system, the role of the media and internet, climate change and population policy. The book outlines several foundational elements of the Chinese model, focusing on key characteristics such as the concept of an 'all-responsible government', the internal discipline maintained within the ruling Party and a respect-centred approach to diplomacy.

More importantly, the book seeks to demonstrate that these key aspects are deeply rooted in historical tradition, descended from dynastic times and Confucian thought. Dr Li makes the argument that China's rise is beneficial for the stabilisation of financial markets, reduction of product prices and increased provision of global, public goods. He goes further, arguing that the rise of China would also be advantageous to the West as it introduces essential competition in key areas such as science, education and technology. In this context, the book challenges 'hawkish' anxieties surrounding China's growth, suggesting that a deeper understanding of its complex issues can alleviate fears that have been increasingly contributing to the most recent frictions in Sino-Western relations.

Even though aimed at western readers, this book will be of particular interest to an increasingly large number of readers in the world, who do not really belong to either camp and are seeking to move beyond the current binary narrative of the China-US polarisation. For those, like myself with an intellectual curiosity about Marxism, particularly in its institutional manifestation in the Soviet era, this book will be especially compelling.

The reader of the book is left with an impression that the Communist state-building in China is not to be understood as the radical schism from the course of history that the October Revolution represented in the Soviet paradigm, but rather as a prism-like moment, a 'refraction' within the broader continuum of Chinese civilisation. In contrast to the Soviet tradition, in which pre-revolutionary history was often regarded as irrelevant to the current affairs of the state and effectively ignored throughout the seven decades of its existence, the Chinese world view maintains a deep respect for its historical past. Dr. Li argues that, despite undergoing a profound dispersion, the importance of history remains deeply embedded in the national consciousness of the Chinese people, who are regarded as the ultimate goal of the political and economic decision-making of the

People's Republic. This idea of the enduring relevance of historical memory in shaping modern policy-making represents one of the core assumptions of the book.

If one accepts this foundational premise, many facets of China's policies and strategies can be reinterpreted through a cardinaly distinct analysis. The concept of a strong central government and one party rule, for instance, may be viewed not as a lack of political pluralism, but rather as an extension of China's long-standing Confucian tradition which emphasises the role of the state as a paternalistic moral agent tasked with maintaining social harmony. China's focus on technological development and military capabilities could be interpreted not as an aggressive or expansionist pursuit, but rather as means of ensuring national sovereignty and a defensive reaction to the colonial trauma of the 'Century of Humiliation'. China's territorial aspirations in the Pacific would not be viewed as some version of the Qing imperialist reconnaissance, but rather as an effort to recover territorial integrity disputed within the current world order.

The book affirms that China's participation in the post-WWII international order has been characterised by an unprecedented commitment to international law and its active pursuit of respect on the global stage. In order to demonstrate this, Dr Li uses the nature of China's territorial agenda as an example, as it is shaped by engagement with, and adherence to, the established rules of the international legal system. For example, he cites that even though China could make just, historical claims to vast territories, such as the ones annexed by Tsarist Russia, it focuses on seemingly smaller disputes, such as those concerning the South China Sea, as it is the post World War II international legal framework that governs those disputes.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a firm proponent of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: Mutual Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity 相互尊重主权和领土完整; Mutual Non-Aggression 相互不侵犯; Mutual Non-Interference in Internal Affairs 相互不干涉内政; Equality and Mutual Benefit 平等互利; Peaceful Coexistence 和平共处, China has consistently sought to balance these principles in its diplomatic responses to contemporary geopolitical crises. As an example of this, the author cites China's cautious stance regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which it based on the tenets of international law despite being under an undesirable spotlight in the international legal community,

Dr Li makes a compelling case for history, both in the *longue durée* and in the context of modern institutional history, carrying substantial weight in shaping contemporary Chinese political and economic perspectives. Neglecting the foundational premise of history's significance in shaping political and economic trajectories, he argues, can result in a profound misapprehension of China's development. A purely game-theoretical analysis of Chinese strategic decision-making which exclusively relies on the assumptions of *homo economicus*, rational self-interest within the confines of traditional economic models, might overlook crucial factors that influence contemporary policy. For instance, the book argues that to suggest that China's foreign policy is motivated primarily by a desire for economic gain or diplomatic dominance without recognising the country's historical quest for respect and sovereign dignity, overlooks key drivers behind its actions. Consequently, such an approach may lead to significant misinterpretations of China's political strategies and economic choices.

Dr. Li demonstrates how it is incumbent upon Western decision-makers to recognise the historical context that shapes China's actions and respond accordingly. As we bear collective responsibility to preserve the hard-won outcomes of World War II, it is virtually impossible not to accept the noble goal of his book, the risk of global conflict must be avoided. At this pivotal point in Sino-American relations, perhaps reading *China's World View* and embracing its constructive message is more important than ever.

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IN MEMORY OF TESS JOHNSTON (1931-2025)

BY JULIE CHUN,

ON BEHALF OF THE RAS CHINA 2025-2026 COUNCIL



Figure 1: Tess Johnston in Shanghai (Courtesy of Julie Chun.)

My first encounter with Tess Johnston was in the early fall of 2011, when she gave a talk at the studio of Deke Er (Er Dongqiang), the photographer whose images accompanied many of her publications. Their collaboration resulted in twenty-five books that brought renewed attention to modernist architecture embedded in Shanghai and beyond, introducing new readers – and a new generation of architectural students across the U.S., Europe, and Asia – to China’s built culture.

Tess had a natural command of the room. Her talks were riveting and packed with eager audiences. With her charming Southern accent, belying her Virginia upbringing, she often punctuated her stories with what she proudly called her “toneless Mandarin”. Tess possessed a delightful sense of humor and refreshing candor that came from her core sense of indomitable confidence. With ease, Tess captivated listeners, drawing from her immense knowledge of Shanghai, a city she dearly loved and which became the primary focus of her devoted field research.

Tess was trained in the U.S. Foreign Service and first posted to Vietnam from 1967-74. At the height of the Vietnam War, she worked for the controversial U.S. wartime strategist John Paul Vann, and came under fire during the Tet Offensive. While criss-crossing Vietnam by helicopter, she was deeply moved by its lush greenery, despite the devastation of war. Her love of Asian fields and forests led her to seek a second posting in Asia a decade later – in China, where she lived for 35 years, witnessing how numerous green fields morphed into urban jungles.

Tess first arrived in Shanghai in 1981, employed by the U.S. Foreign Service. She later served in various capacities at the U.S. Consulate General in Frankfurt and at the U.S. Embassy in East Berlin. Yet it was her fascination with Shanghai that brought her back in 1989, where she remained a resident-explorer for decades.

I was fortunate to see Tess often at her beloved Old China Hand Reading Room on 27 Shaoxing Lu (now no longer extant), and at RAS China during our years at the Sino-British College. Tess was one of the founding members of the modern RAS China, re-established in Suzhou in 2006 as a continuation of the historic North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (1858-1952), and relocated to Shanghai in 2007, where it is sustained. Tess gave frequent lectures and led countless walking tours for our members throughout the city, illuminating the details of buildings, from the grand to the humble, that she had uncovered in her research and writing.

Tess served as a voting member of the RAS China Council from 2007 until her return to Washington DC in 2016. Visitors to the RAS China Library and Reading Room will find vast volumes of books stamped with her name as donor. Beginning with her own publications, she donated 259 total volumes on Chinese art and design, along with treasured out-of-print books.

Before returning to the United States, Tess bequeathed some of her most valuable books and archives to RAS China. Her legacy is preserved not only in the volumes she gifted, but also in her personal papers, listings, and documentation, which have since been digitized and are made available through our library website: <https://raslibrary.org/2025/05/15/tess-johnston-personal-archive/>

Tess's image, name, and words are omnipresent throughout the RAS China newsletters, journals, and archives. Her presence remains visible and tangible, a testament to her boundless contributions, her

wisdom shared in Council meetings, and the permanent imprint she left through each book she so generously gave to inspire us.

Tess Johnston passed away on September 14, 2025, at the age of 93, just days shy of her 94th birthday on September 17. We at RAS China celebrate the vibrant and dynamic life Tess Johnston lived so passionately, and the generosity of spirit she extended to all who were fortunate enough to know her. It is with the fondest memory that her legacy continues to live on at RAS China.

Julie Chun is the RAS China Art Focus Convener (2013-present), an RAS China Council Member (2014-present) and the RAS China Librarian (2025-present). In past years she has also served RAS China as Vice President (2016-2019) and Journal Editor (2018).

