Leo Ou-fan Lee

SHANGHAI MODERN

THE FLOWERING OF A NEW URBAN CULTURE IN CHINA, 1930–1945

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FOR PAUL ENGLE (1908–1991) AND HUALING NIEH ENGLE

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

This is a book about the city of Shanghai in the 1930s as a cultural matrix of Chinese modernity. In contrast to popular Western lore about the city, I take an insider's point of view by reading primarily Chinese materials—literary journals, newspapers, as well as works by individual authors and scholars—in order to construct a picture of Shanghai's urban culture at the height of its splendor. Such a topic would seem natural for a scholarly research project, but it proved more difficult than I first expected. When I first began exploring the subject some twenty years ago, I realized that it was all but an ideological taboo in China, while scholarship in modern Chinese studies in Western academia was preoccupied with rural villages.

This rural preoccupation is perfectly understandable, for China is still a predominantly rural country. In the modern Chinese literary imagination ever since the May Fourth period (1917–1923), patriotic sentiments invariably stemmed from, and were envisioned as, an ethos of the countryside, with the country (*guojia*) symbolically invoked as the "native land" of villages (*xiangtu*). Shanghai, the largest city in China and, as the hub of the publishing industry, the place where most of this literature was produced and circulated to the country at large, was cast in a negative light as a bastion of decadence and evil—the consequence of a long history of Western imperialism. As the treaty port par excellence—the largest of a dozen treaty ports on the Chinese coast—Shanghai became a constant reminder of a history of national humiliation.

Although the unequal treaties with the Western powers had been largely abolished by the mid-1940s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which had been founded in Shanghai in 1921, perpetuated this negative image and made it into a major target by leading a revolution that sought to "mobilize the countryside to surround the cities." Since Shanghai was also the financial headquarters of the Nationalist (Guomindang) regime, it became, in a way, the CCP's worst enemy. After the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, the material conditions of Shanghai deteriorated as its population continued to grow. Politically the city had always played second fiddle to Beijing, the nation's new capital. And for all the talk in literary circles about the "competition" between the Beijing school (Jingpai) and Shanghai school (Haipai) before Liberation, the culturally and politically hegemonic status of Beijing remained unchallenged—at least until recently.

This said, I must confess that Shanghai is a city for which I cherished few fond memories. I first visited the city in 1948 as a child and a refugee from the advancing troops of the People's Liberation Army on the eve of its victory. My strongest impression then was of its streetcars and neon signs lit by electricity. (Born in the rural region of Henan, I had never even seen an electric bulb!) I was also scared of the revolving doors in the hotel where my maternal grandfather lived. One morning I ventured out to buy some meat dumplings at a nearby food stand. On my return I got my ears caught in the fast-moving revolving door, and in a panic I lost all my dumplings—such being my first exposure to Shanghai modernity! The path toward my rediscovery of Shanghai's literary renown was paved in Taiwan and America—an intellectual journey which took nearly thirty years.

In 1949 my family moved to Taiwan, where I grew up and became interested in Western literature. As a sophomore in college I was involved in establishing a small literary journal, *Modern Literature* (Xiandai wenxue), which launched Taiwan's "modernist" movement in the early 1960s. When our first issue featured the works of Franz Kafka, I had no idea who he was, and I proceeded to translate a learned article on

Thomas Mann for another issue without the vaguest idea of his literary stature. Some twenty years later, when I was asked to write an article on modernism in Taiwanese literature, I began to reflect on this curious state of affairs: How could this brand of "modernism" have been produced in the corridors of an old university building in Taipei by a small group of college sophomores and juniors who could barely read English or any other Western language? Where did we find the works of Kafka, Mann, Joyce, Faulkner, and Hemingway? (Answer: in the small library of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Taiwan University.) We had made what we considered to be a major "discovery" at a time when High Modernism had already passed its creative prime and entered the American classroom as classics. Did Chinese writers of an earlier generation know about these modern masters when they were still alive—that is, in the period between the two World Wars? My curiosity led me back to Shanghai in order to trace these and other possible antecedents in modern Chinese literary history.

In fact, it was through the timely advice of a former Shanghai resident, C. T. Hsia, that I learned about another literary journal published in the 1930s with a similar name, *Xiandai zazhi* (Modern magazine; translated by its editor, Shi Zhecun, into French as *Les Contemporains*). Thus began my long journey toward retracing the footsteps of our literary predecessors—a *recherche du temps perdu* which brought me back to Shanghai in 1981. I have visited the city half a dozen times since, and each time I was privileged to meet and interview Shi Zhecun himself at his home, and at the Shanghai Municipal Library I was able to plumb the rich collections of literary journals and other rare collections which are not found anywhere abroad. For instance, I took out a copy of Liu Na'ou's *Dushi fengjingxian* (Scenes of the city) surreptitiously during lunch break (as no material was allowed to leave the library) and had the entire volume photocopied at a nearby copy shop that had just opened—a peculiar form of revenge on my fiasco at the revolving door some thirty years earlier: if I had once lost the dumplings, I now had a copy of a rare book!

Through these early research ventures I became obsessed with an old Shanghai I had remembered as a nightmare but which now emerged on thousands upon thousands of printed pages as a city of great splendor—the very embodiment of Chinese modernity. During my research I also learned that not only had the very English word "modern" entered the modern Chinese vocabulary as a transliteration, *modeng*, coined of course in Shanghai, but, more importantly, the whole gamut of Western literary modernism was known in the 1930s, and was even made quite popular by a number of writers who published translations, essays, and their own creative writings in scores of literary journals. The ways in which they managed to start their small publishing ventures had been quite similar to ours many years later—unplanned haphazard enterprises driven by intellectual curiosity and boundless energy, though not many financial resources, on the part of a small coterie of young novices. (For a detailed description, see Chapter 4.) But the names of these modern writers were either consciously erased or largely forgotten—Shi Zhecun (b. 1905), Liu Na'ou (1900–1939), Mu Shiying (1912–1940), Shao Xunmei (1906–1968), Ye Lingfeng (1904–1975), Eileen Chang (1920–1995), to mention the few who will enter into the present book as primary protagonists. By a happy coincidence, my own research project came at precisely the moment when a few Chinese scholars were beginning to rediscover these writers. Thus I was able to escape possible ideological censure (for doing research on "bourgeois decadence") and join their scholarly ranks as a pioneer.

But this pioneering status in the early 1980s was soon challenged by a spate of research publications all focused on Shanghai's urban history and by a resurgence of American scholarly interest in this city. Despite its early start, my research now may seem to lag behind and follow a well-trodden trail of books on various aspects of Shanghai—although I maintain that not much has been written on Shanghai's urban culture. The real reason for the delay of this research project was the crisis in Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989. As a result of the massacre of demonstrators on June 4, I all but decided to abandon it in

order to focus my energies on the more urgent issues of contemporary Chinese culture over the next few years. But this delay has also been, in scholarly terms, a blessing in disguise, for the publications of other scholars working on similar topics have fertilized the field which once looked so barren when I first ventured into it. Their work has also helped me to rethink some of my earlier ideas and to form my own framework. Still, thorny interpretive problems remain, which have been complicated by the recent "theoretical" turn in modern Chinese literature and cultural studies, in which the display of textual strategies, virtuoso readings, and other forms of interventions and subversions—all based on recent Western theories—seem to have taken over the task of research itself. All a scholar needs to do, it seems, is to read a few "privileged" texts!

I am by no means averse to theory; in fact I welcome it as intellectual challenge. The work of Walter Benjamin has proved especially relevant to my endeavor, as my final reflections in Chapter 1 clearly show. But I still prefer to do my work "from the ground up" by establishing first a context of Shanghai's urban culture before I attempt to reconfigure the texts into a meaningful set of readings. Owing to the rich materials I have gathered (both written and visual) and present to my intended readers—both academics and non-academics—I have chosen to write in an essay-like style and in a language that is not burdened with theoretical density. Contrary to the usual practice of laying out my theoretical arguments in the first chapter, I instead lay out Shanghai's urban background by a method that combines factual description with my own narration. Each of the other three chapters in Part I takes up an area of "cultural production"—print culture, cinema, and literary journals—which is illustrated with more materials and approached from different interpretive angles. My purpose is to construct an urban cultural context in which the various literary texts discussed in Part II might make more sense. Since most of these texts are not yet translated, hence new and unfamiliar to Western readers, I have included a few long paragraphs of my own translations. In the final part of this book I offer some general reflections and arguments that serve to round off my pic-

ture and bring my story into the late 1990s—to Hong Kong at the time of its "return" to the motherland. If it can be said that 1930s Shanghai has been reincarnated in Hong Kong since the 1950s, I believe that Hong Kong will in turn contribute to the rebuilding of Shanghai into a cosmopolis for the twenty-first century.

In the long and protracted course of research and writing, I have incurred more intellectual debts than I can ever list in the usual acknowledgments section. Still, I would like to thank the following foundations and institutions for their generous support: the Guggenheim Foundation, the Wang An Fellowship in Chinese Studies, the Committee on Scholarly Exchange with the People's Republic of China, as well as various faculty research grants from the University of Chicago, UCLA, and Harvard. The East Asian Library at the University of Chicago, the Harvard-Yenching Library, the Hoover Library at Stanford University, and above all the Shanghai Municipal Library and the libraries at East China Normal University, Fudan University, and the Shanghai Writers' Association have provided a wealth of materials for a literary scholar who loves to play archival detective. A number of scholars and friends in China have been especially helpful in spite of the considerable difficulties I have inadvertently caused them: Shi Zhecun, for his generosity of spirit and intellectual guidance; Xu Chi (1914–1996), poet and self-styled modernist, for his invaluable reminiscences and his precious photographs; Wei Shaochang, Ying Guojing, and Chen Zishan, for leading me through the material and human maze of doing research in Shanghai and for introducing other young scholars to me; and Yan Jiayan, for compiling the first collection of *Xin ganjuepai xiaoshuo xuan* (Selected stories of the neosensationalist school), published in time to provide me with a much-needed primary source. The names and works of numerous other Chinese and American scholars on Shanghai whom I have consulted I gratefully list in the notes. But I must single out Sherman Cockran, Arif Dirlik, Po-shek Fu, Bryna Goodman, Benjamin Lee, Lydia Liu, Frederic Wakeman, Wen-hsin Yeh, and Yingjin Zhang for their comments, suggestions, and research assistance, and the two anonymous readers who approved this manuscript for publication. I am especially grateful to the many graduate students I have had the good fortune to teach and to learn from in the seminars, workshops, and courses given at Chicago, UCLA, and Harvard; in particular I have benefited greatly from the research assistance and writing of Heinrich Fruehauf, Chen Jianhua, Robert Chi, Xincun Huang, Meng Yue, Ming Feng-ying, Daisy Ng, Emanuel Pastreich, Shu-mei Shih, and Ban Wang. Chapter 3 was further enriched by the timely assistance of Andrew Field of Columbia University and by hard-to-find materials from Po-shek Fu and Sheng Changwen. Two undergraduate students at Harvard, Ezra Block and Anthony Greenberg, valiantly took on the task of checking rather obscure Western sources, such as the stories of Paul Morand, at Harvard's Widener Library. Chen Jianhua, my chief research assistant, has been involved with this manuscript at every step of its preparation, including the arduous task of compiling the glossary and locating the photographs.

A much-shortened version of Chapters 1 and 9 appeared as a paper in a special issue of *Public Culture*. An earlier version of Chapter 3 appears in *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922–1943* (Stanford University Press, 1999), edited by Yingjin Zhang. A revised version of Chapter 2 is included in a collection of conference papers titled *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond, 1900–1950* (University of California Press, 1999), edited by Yeh Wen-hsin. Both are used with the permission of the publishers.

This book is dedicated to the memory of the late Paul Engle (1908–1991), American poet and founding father of the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, who taught me how to read Eliot and opened my eyes to true literary cosmopolitanism; and to Hualing Nieh Engle, his beloved wife and co-founder of the International Writing Program at Iowa and herself a distinguished novelist, whose love and concern have sustained me through all these trying years.

SHANGHAI MODERN

· p a r t o n e ·

THE BACKGROUND OF URBAN CULTURE

chapter one

REMAPPING SHANGHAI

> The sun had just sunk below the horizon and a gentle breeze caressed one's face . . . Under a sunset-mottled sky, the towering framework of Garden Bridge was mantled in a gathering mist. Whenever a tram passed over the bridge, the overhead cable suspended below the top of the steel frame threw off bright, greenish sparks. Looking east, one could see the warehouses of foreign firms on the waterfront of Pootung like huge monsters crouching in the gloom, their lights twinkling like countless tiny eyes. To the west, one saw with a shock of wonder on the roof of a building a gigantic NEON sign in flaming red and phosphorescent green: LIGHT, HEAT, POWER![1]

So begins Mao Dun's famous novel *Midnight* (Ziye), subtitled *A Romance of China in 1930*. The city in the background is of course Shanghai. By 1930 Shanghai had become a bustling cosmopolitan metropolis, the fifth largest city in the world[2] and China's largest harbor and treaty port, a city that was already an international legend ("the Paris of Asia"), and a world

of splendid modernity set apart from the still tradition-bound countryside that was China. Much has been written about Shanghai in the West, but the corpus of popular literature which contributed to its legendary image bequeathed a dubious legacy. For aside from perpetuating the city's glamour and mystery, it also succeeded in turning the name of the city into a debased verb in the English vocabulary: "to shanghai" is "to render insensible, as by drugs [read opium], and ship on a vessel wanting hands" or "to bring about the performance of an action by deception or force," according to *Webster's Living Dictionary*.[3] At the same time, the negative side of this popular portrait has been in a sense confirmed by Chinese leftist writers and latter-day communist scholars who likewise saw the city as a bastion of evil, of wanton debauchery and rampant imperialism marked by foreign extraterritoriality, and a city of shame for all native patriots. It would not be too hard to transform this narrative theoretically into a Marxist, Maoist, or even postcolonial discourse by focusing on the inhuman exploitation of the urban underclasses by the rich and powerful, both native and foreign.

Although I am naturally drawn to the "political correctness" of such a line of interpretation, I am somewhat suspicious of its totalizing intent. Mao Dun, an avowed leftist writer and an early member of the Chinese Communist Party, inscribes a contradictory message on the very first page of his novel. Whereas Shanghai under foreign capitalism has a monstrous appearance, the hustle and bustle of the harbor—as I think his rather purple prose seeks to convey—also exudes a boundless energy: LIGHT, HEAT, POWER! These three words, together with the word "NEON," written originally in capital letters in English in the Chinese text, obviously connote another kind of "historical truth": the arrival of Western modernity, whose consuming power soon frightens the protagonist's father, a member of the traditional Chinese country gentry, to death. In the first two chapters of the novel, Mao Dun in fact gives prominent display to a large number of *material* emblems of this advancing modernity: cars ("three 1930-model Citroëns"), electric lights and fans, radios, "foreign-style" mansions (*yang-fang*), sofas, guns

(a Browning), cigars, perfume, high-heeled shoes, "beauty parlors" (he uses the English), jai alai courts, "Grafton gauze," flannel suits, 1930 Parisian summer dresses, Japanese and Swedish matches, silver ashtrays, beer and soda bottles, as well as all forms of entertainment, such as dancing (fox-trot and tango), "roulette, bordellos, greyhound racing, romantic Turkish baths, dancing girls, film stars."[4] Such modern conveniences and articles of comfort and consumption were not fantasy items from a writer's imagination; on the contrary, they were part of a new reality which Mao Dun wanted to portray and understand by inscribing it onto his fictional landscape. They are, in short, emblems of China's passage to modernity to which Mao Dun and other urban writers of his generation reacted with a great deal of ambivalence and anxiety.[5] After all, the English word "modern" (along with the French *moderne*) received its first Chinese transliteration in Shanghai itself: the Chinese word *modeng* in popular parlance has the meaning of "novel and/or fashionable," according to the authoritative Chinese dictionary *Cihai*. Thus in the Chinese popular imagination Shanghai and "modern" are natural equivalents. Therefore the beginning point of my inquiry will have to be: What makes Shanghai modern? That is, what constitutes its modern qualities in a matrix of meaning constructed by both Western and Chinese cultures?

The question may be posed to different audiences and may receive different responses. Westerners in Shanghai in that period would have taken the answer to such questions for granted: their presence in their privileged treaty port environs was what made this urban modernity possible. For the Chinese residents, by contrast, the responses would have been much more complex. Politically, for a century (from 1843 to 1943) Shanghai was a treaty port of divided territories. The Chinese sections in the southern part of the city (originally a walled city) and in the far north (Chapei district) were cut off from each other by the foreign concessions—the International Settlement (British and American) and the adjacent French Concession—which did not come to an end until 1943, during the Second World War, when the Allied nations

formally ended the concession system by agreement with China. In these extraterritorial zones, Chinese and foreigners lived in mixed company (*huayang zachu*) but led essentially separate lives.[6] The two worlds were also bound together by bridges, tram and trolley routes, and other public streets and roads built by the Western powers that extended beyond the concession boundaries. These boundaries were marked by stone tablets, which were hardly noticeable in the labyrinth of streets and buildings that signaled the Western hegemonic presence: bank and office buildings, hotels, churches, clubs, cinemas, coffeehouses, restaurants, deluxe apartments, and a racecourse. They not only served as public markers in a geographical sense, but also were the concrete manifestations of Western material civilization in which was embedded the checkered history of almost a century of Sino-Western contact.[7]

The Sino-Western contact had in no small way shaped modern Chinese history since—even before—the Opium Wars, as it brought about not only Western invasions and imperialism but also successive reform efforts by the Chinese elite at the national and regional levels. This is of course a familiar narrative. What has not received sufficient scholarly attention until recently are the *material* aspects of Western civilization, which the more reform-minded Qing officials and intellectuals in the second half of the nineteenth century apparently appropriated as part of the "utility" component of their reform discourse, as summed up in the famous motto first coined by Governor Zhang Zhidong: "Chinese learning as essence, Western learning as utility." These material aspects of Western modernity, according to Tang Zhenchang, a leading scholar on Shanghai history, proved easier to accept than the "spiritual" aspects, and the response of Shanghai natives to these material forms of Western modernity followed a typical pattern of shock, wonder, admiration, and imitation.[8] In fact, most of the facilities of modern urban life were introduced to the concessions soon after the mid-nineteenth century: banks (first introduced in 1848), Western-style streets (1856), gaslights (1865), electricity (1882), telephone (1881), running water (1884), automobiles (1901), and trams (1908).[9] Thus, by the beginning

of the twentieth century, the Shanghai concessions already had the infrastructure of a modern city even by Western standards. By the 1930s, Shanghai was on a par with the major cities of the world.

What made Shanghai into a cosmopolitan metropolis in cultural terms is difficult to define, for it has to do with both substance and appearance—with a whole fabric of life and style that Marxists used to call "superstructure." While obviously determined by economic forces, urban culture is itself the result of a process of both production and consumption. In the case of Shanghai, the process involved the growth of both socioeconomic institutions and new forms of cultural activity and expression made possible by the appearance of new public structures and spaces for urban cultural production and consumption, mostly in the concessions. Aspects of the former have been studied by many scholars,[10] but the latter remains to be fully explored. I believe that a cultural map of Shanghai must be drawn on the basis of these structures and spaces together with their implications for the everyday life of Shanghai's residents, both foreign and Chinese. In this chapter I therefore map out some of what I consider to be the significant public structures and spaces which had a crucial bearing on the figures and texts I shall study later in this book.

Architecture and Urban Space

"There is no city in the world today with such a variety of architectural offerings, buildings which stand out in welcome contrast to their modern counterparts," wrote an old Shanghai hand.[11] The statement implies that Shanghai itself offered a contrast of old and new, Chinese and Western. This does not mean, however, that the Chinese occupied only the old sections of the city and the Westerners the modern concessions. The notorious regulation that barred Chinese and dogs from the Westerners' parks was finally abolished in 1928, and the parks were open to all residents after 1928.[12] In fact, the population in the foreign concessions was largely Chinese: more than 1,492,896 in 1933 in a total city

population of 3,133,782, of which only about 70,000 were foreigners.[13] But the contrast nevertheless existed in their rituals of life and leisure, which were governed by the ways in which they organized their daily lives. "The Chinese and foreign residents of Shanghai might mingle at work when it was mutually beneficial, but almost invariably they spent their leisure hours separately."[14] For the Chinese, the foreign concessions represented not so much forbidden zones as the "other" world—an exotic world of glitter and vice dominated by Western capitalism as summed up in the familiar phrase *shili yangchang* (literally, "ten-mile-long foreign zone"), which likewise had entered into the modern Chinese vocabulary.[15]

The heart of the *shili yangchang* was the Bund, a strip of embankment facing the Huangpu River at the entrance to the harbor. It was not only the entrance point from the sea but also, without doubt, the seat of British colonial power. The harbor skyline was dotted with edifices, largely British colonial institutions, prominent among which were the British Consulate (the earliest building, 1852; rebuilt in 1873), the Palace Hotel, the Shanghai Club (featuring "the longest bar in the world"), Sassoon House (with its Cathay Hotel), the Customs House (1927), and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (1923).[16] The imposing pomposity of the last two buildings, in particular, perfectly represented British colonial power. The massive headquarters of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank was the second largest bank building in the world at the time, designed in the neo-Grecian style by the architectural firm of Palmer and Turner.[17] "A 62-foot-wide flight of steps, originally flanked by a pair of bronze lions, one in a roaring posture, the other in repose, led from the street to the main entrance"[18]—"their noses and paws rubbed bright by passing Chinese hoping to improve their 'joss' or luck."[19] The reference to capitalist desire in this often-reported ritual of "petting the lions" is obvious: as the designated emblem of the British Empire, the bronze lions were rubbed a bright gold—symbolizing the accumulated wealth of British imperialism—and the "lucky" talisman was but another inducement to native greed.[20] The newly built Customs House, another building in the neo-Grecian style, was described by the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in 1927 while still under construction:

> The entrance portico follows a pure Doric Style, the inspiration being taken from the Parthenon at Athens. Ships and gods of the sea will be portrayed in the metopes of the frieze and much of the ornamentation will be symbolical. Vertical lines predominate from the 3rd to the 7th floor to accentuate the height, in contrast to the long, horizontal lines of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, which has a frontage to the Bund of much greater length. The major portion of the tower is simple masonry in order to give prominence to the clock.[21]

Adding a final touch to this landscape of colonial economic power, the clock was a replica of London's "Big Ben"; it has struck every quarter hour since 1893, except during the Cultural Revolution.[22]

From this description it is clear that most of these British edifices on the Bund were built or rebuilt in the neoclassical style prevalent in England beginning in the late nineteenth century, which replaced the earlier Victorian Gothic and the "free style" of the arts and crafts movement. It was essentially the same style that the British imposed on their colonial capitals in India and South Africa. As the dominant style in England's own administrative buildings, it consciously affirms its ties to imperial Rome and ancient Greece. As Thomas Metcalf has stated, "The use of classical forms to express the spirit of empire was, for the late-Victorian Englishman, at once obvious and appropriate, for classical styles, with their reminders of Greece and Rome, were the architectural medium through which Europeans always apprehended Empire."[23] At the heart of this revived classicism was a celebration of empire and prosperity as symbolized in the 1897 Jubilee celebration of the sixty-year reign of Queen Victoria. By the 1930s, however, the era of Victorian glory was over: England was no longer the unchallenged master of world commerce. A new power, the United States of America, began its imperial expansion into the Pacific region following its conquest of the Philip-

pines. The merger of the British and American concessions into one International Settlement had occurred earlier, at a time when American power was still dwarfed by the might of British imperialism. But by the 1930s, Shanghai's International Settlement was the site of competing powers and architectural styles: whereas British neoclassical buildings still dominated the skyline on the Bund, other structures in a more modern style had also appeared which exemplified the new American industrial power.

Since the late 1920s, some thirty multistory buildings taller than the colonial edifices on the Bund had begun to rise as a result of the development of new construction materials and techniques in America.[24] These were mainly bank buildings, hotels, apartment houses, and department stores—the tallest being the twenty-four–story Park Hotel designed by the famous Czech-Hungarian architect Ladislaus Hudec, who was first associated with the American architectural firm of R. A. Curry before opening his own offices in 1925.[25] Hudec's "innovative and elegant style added a real flair to Shanghai's architecture," as evidenced by the many buildings he designed: in addition to the Park Hotel, the twenty-two–story building of the Joint Savings Society, the Moore Memorial Church, several hospitals and public buildings, and three movie theaters, including the renovated Grand Theater.[26] The exteriors and interiors of some of these modern buildings—the Park Hotel, the Cathay Hotel and Sassoon House, new cinemas such as the Grand, the Paramount Ballroom and Theater, and the Majestic Theater, and many apartment houses—were in the prevalent Art Deco style. According to Tess Johnston, "Shanghai has the largest array of Art Deco edifices of any city in the world."[27] The combination of the high-rise skyscraper and Art Deco interior design thus inscribed another new architectural imprint, that of New York City, with which Shanghai can be compared.[28]

New York remained in many ways the prototypical metropolis for both the skyscraper skyline and the Art Deco style. Its tallest buildings at the time—Rockefeller Center, the Chrysler Building, and above all the Empire State Building—were all constructed only a few years before

Shanghai's new high-rise buildings. While dwarfed by their height, the Shanghai skyscrapers bore a visible resemblance to those in New York. This American connection was made possible by the physical presence in Shanghai of American architects and firms. Another likely source of American input was Hollywood movies, in which silhouettes of skyscrapers and Art Deco interiors had become hallmarks of set design in musicals and comedies.[29] The Art Deco style may be said to be the characteristic architectural style of the interwar period in Europe and America; it was an architecture of "ornament, geometry, energy, retrospection, optimism, color, texture, light, and at times even symbolism." When transplanted into the American cities, New York in particular, Art Deco became an essential part of "an architecture of soaring skyscrapers—the cathedrals of the modern age."[30] The marriage between Art Deco and the skyscraper lent a peculiar aesthetic exuberance that was associated with urban modernity, as they embodied the spirit of "something new and different, something exciting and unorthodox, something characterized by a sense of *joie de vivre* that manifested itself in terms of color, height, decoration and sometimes all three."[31] When "translated" into Shanghai's Western culture, the lavish ornamentalism of the Art Deco style became, in a sense, a new mediation between the neoclassicism of British imperial power, with its manifest stylistic ties to the (Roman) past, and the ebullient new spirit of American capitalism.[32] In addition to—or increasingly in place of—colonial power, it signified money and wealth. The Art Deco artifice also conveyed a new urban lifestyle: the image of men and women living in a glittering world of fashionable clothes and fancy furniture was, to Chinese eyes, very much part of its exotic allure. The American magazine *Vanity Fair,* perhaps the best representation of this image in print, was available in Shanghai's Western bookstores and became the favorite reading of several Shanghai writers—Shi Zhecun, Xu Chi, and Ye Lingfeng in particular—which in turn lent itself to the construction of a *modeng* fantasy for the Shanghai bourgeoisie. One need only glance through a few issues of the magazine to discover how its visual (Art Deco, of course) and written contents (articles by Paul Morand, for instance) were readily

transplanted into Chinese and reappeared in a different guise in the *modeng* magazines of Shanghai.

Whereas this gilded decadent style may be a fitting representation of the "Jazz Age" of the "Roaring Twenties" in urban America, as glorified in the fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald, it remained something of a mirage for Chinese readers and filmgoers, a world of fantasy which cast a mixed spell of wonder and oppression. The Chinese term for skyscrapers is *motian dalou*—literally, the magical big buildings that reach the skies. As a visible sign of the rise of industrial capitalism, these skyscrapers could also be regarded as the most intrusive addition to the Shanghai landscape, as they not only towered over the residential buildings in the old section of the city (mostly two- or three-story structures) but also offered a sharp contrast to the general principles of Chinese architecture, in which height was never a crucial factor, especially in the case of domestic architecture. No wonder they elicited responses of heightened emotion: in cartoons, sketches, and films, the skyscraper is portrayed as showcasing socioeconomic inequality—the high and the low, the rich and the poor. A cartoon of the period, titled "Heaven and Hell," shows a skyscraper towering above the clouds, on top of which are two figures apparently looking down upon a beggar-like figure seated next to a small thatched house.[33] In another by the famous artist Zhang Guangyu, two country bumpkins are talking against the backdrop of the Park Hotel, their dialogue peppered with local dialect expressions:

> *Country bumpkin A:* "Such a tall building, what's it for?"
> *Country bumpkin B:* "You sure know nothing, this is for the time when the water of the Huangpu River swells up!"[34]

A book of aphorisms about Shanghai includes the following entries: "Shanghai has big foreign buildings of twenty-two stories high; it also has thatches like coffins. Only with this [combination] can it manifest the 'Oriental color' of this 'Paris of the East'"; "The neurotic thinks that in fifty years Shanghai will sink beneath the horizon under the weight of these big, tall foreign buildings."[35] These reactions offered a sharp contrast to the general pride and euphoria expressed by New Yorkers, as described by Ann Douglas.[36]

To the average Chinese, most of these high-rise buildings were, both literally and figuratively, beyond their reach. The big hotels largely catered to the rich and famous, mostly foreigners. A Chinese guidebook of the time states: "These places have no deep relationship to us Chinese . . . and besides, the upper-class atmosphere in these Western hotels is very solemn; every move and gesture seems completely regulated. So if you don't know Western etiquette, even if you have enough money to make a fool of yourself it's not worthwhile."[37] This sense of alienation from Western places does not prevent the author of the guidebook, Wang Dingjiu, from waxing ecstatic about the *modeng* cinemas and dance halls and, in the section on shopping, about all the stylish clothes, foreign-made shoes, European and American cosmetics, and expensive furs for sale in the newly constructed department stores. It seems as if he were greeting a rising popular demand for consumer goods by advising his readers how to reap the maximum benefit and derive the greatest pleasure.

Department Stores

Whereas the deluxe Western hotels catered mainly to a Western clientele (although a Chinese crowd of thousands greeted the opening of the Park Hotel), a number of multistory department stores in the International Settlement—in particular the "Big Four" of Xianshi (Sincere), Yong'an (Wing On), Xinxin (Sun Sun), and Daxin (Sun Company), all built with investment from overseas Chinese businessmen—had become great attractions for the Chinese. With their escalators leading to variegated merchandise on different floors, together with dance halls and rooftop bars, coffeehouses, restaurants, hotels, and playgrounds for diverse entertainments, these edifices of commerce combined the functions of consumerism and recreation. (The playground design may have been influenced by the famous "Da shijie," or "Great World," which may