Shanghai Modernity: Commerce and Culture in a Republican City

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One of the most active areas of research in recent years concerns the urban history of Shanghai in the Republican period. Beginning in the 1980s, scholars have gone beyond an overview of Shanghai's rise as China's leading metropolis in the hundred years after the Opium War (1839–42), and produced richly contextualized analyses on the various aspects of the city's history and society.[1]

Roughly speaking, two lines of questioning have been developed concerning Shanghai's urban history. One, inspired largely by Max Weber's writings on the city, focuses attention on guilds and native-place associations and asks questions about the relationship between state and society. This line of inquiry owes a fair share of intellectual debt to the ground-breaking research done by an earlier generation of scholars, notably by G. William Skinner and Ping-ti Ho, on urban hierarchies and merchant organizations in late imperial Chinese society.[2] The new research has been carried out mainly by social historians and political scientists interested in the social basis of urban politics. Their findings, along with works done on other major Chinese cities – Hankou prior to the rise of the Taipings (1850–64), Beijing under the rule of the northern militarists (1911–27) and Tianjin during the Republican period (1911–49), for example – constitute parts of a larger scholarly construction of the nature of late imperial and modern Chinese urban society.[3]

A second line of inquiry, drawing inspiration not from sociology but from economic history, focuses attention on the various businesses that developed in Shanghai in the Republican period. The shipping, silk, cotton and cigarette industries each received its due share of attention.[4]

1. Two outstanding examples are Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), and Christian Henriot, *Shanghai, 1927–1937: Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization* (trans. Noel Castelino) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). A significant amount of research has been done on Shanghai in recent years. See discussion below for other works.

2. G. William Skinner, "Cities and the regional hierarchy of local systems," "Regional urbanization in nineteenth-century China," "Introduction: urban and rural in Chinese society," "Introduction: urban development in Imperial China," all in Skinner (ed.), *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977). Ping-ti Ho. "The geographic distribution of Hui-kuan (*Landsmannschaften*) in Central and Upper Yangtze Provinces," *Tsinghua Journal of Chinese Studies*, No. 5 (December 1966), pp. 120–152, and *Zhongguo huiguan shilun* (*On the History of Landsmannschaften in China*) (Taipei, 1966).

3. William T. Rowe, *Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796–1889* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), and *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796–1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989). David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Gail Hershatter, *The Workers of Tianjin, 1900–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

4. See for instance Lillian M. Li, *China's Silk Trade: Traditional Industry in the Modern World, 1842–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Robert Eng,

The continuing growth of *qianzhuang* (native banks) after the rise of Western-inspired modern-style banking institutions has further sparked a fair degree of scholarly interest.[5] Much has been done to shed light on the commercial networks and the business practices that linked an elaborate system of domestic trade to an international market.[6] By and large, scholars see the rise of a new form of urban economy as a concrete expression of relationships between China and the West, and seek to determine the nature of this interaction – whether imperialist and exploitative or mutually beneficial – by examining the economic dynamics of the connection.[7]

It was not until recently that historians turned their attention to the institutional aspects of cultural industries such as printing, publishing and advertising in Shanghai.[8] In the field of literary studies, scholars have gone beyond discretely defined projects that examined the life and work of individual writers, and have begun to focus attention on aesthetic modernism as a broadly contextualized literary phenomenon.[9] In the field of art history, similarly, scholars have rejected conventional approaches to the works of leading painters, and begun serious examination of the new urban visual culture and its material foundation. The convergence of these research interests in issues of culture and commerce has led to a new appreciation of Republican Shanghai in light of the phenomenon of modernity, both as a set of new institutional arrangements and as an emerging cultural ideology.

The multitude of projects that deal with Shanghai commerce and culture treat a broad range of issues from the mundane to the sublime, from the nuts and bolts of business dealings to the most abstract and rarefied of humanistic aspirations. No single interpretive position informs

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"Imperialism and the Chinese economy: the Canton and Shanghai silk industry, 1861–1932," University of California, Ph.D. dissertation, 1978; Hou Chi-ming, *Foreign Investment and Economic Development in China, 1840–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Albert Feuerwerker, "Handicraft and manufactured cotton textiles in China, 1871–1910," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1970); Richard Bush, *The Politics of Cotton Textiles in Kuomintang China, 1927–1937* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1982); Sherman Cochran, *Big Business in China: Sino-Foreign Rivalry in the Cigarette Industry, 1890–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

5. Andrea McElderry, *Shanghai Old-Style Banks (Ch'ien-chuang), 1800–1935: A Traditional Institution in a Changing Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976); Susan Mann. "The Ningpo Pang and financial power at Shanghai," in G. William Skinner and Mark Elvin (eds.), *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974); Marie-Claire Bergère, "The Chinese bourgeoisie, 1911–1937," in John K. Fairbank (ed.), *Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 721–825; Parks Coble, *The Shanghai Capitalists and the Nationalist Government, 1927–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

6. Hao Yen-p'ing, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China: The Rise of Sino-Western Mercantile Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

7. Albert Feuerwerker, "Economic trends, 1912–49," "The foreign presence in China," in Fairbank, *Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 12, pp. 28–127, 128–207.

8. Leo Lee and Andrew Nathan, "The beginning of mass culture: journalism and fiction in the Late Ch'ing and beyond," in David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, Evelyn Rawski (eds.), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Wen-hsin Yeh, "Progressive journalism and Shanghai's petty urbanites: Zou Taofen and the *Shenghuo* enterprise," in Frederic Wakeman and Wen-hsin Yeh (eds.), *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies Monograph Series, 1992), pp. 186–238.

9. Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-*

the research designs of these various projects. Not much has been done, furthermore, to integrate the findings of the socio-economic historians on the one hand and the humanistic scholars on the other.

Implicit in this second line of inquiry, however, is nevertheless a focused concern with Shanghai as the birthplace of a new kind of urban culture in the context of a new pattern of economy, enabled in part by the introduction of new technology. This culture and economy were seen not only as the product of Sino-Western contacts, but also, in the particular forms that they took, unique to Shanghai society. Shanghai, in other words, was not simply yet another Chinese city, but the seat of an emerging form of Chinese modernity.[10] Research on Shanghai thus sheds light not so much on the nature of modern Chinese politics centred around the political dynamics between the rural and the urban as on the very question of Chinese identity evolving against the backdrop of cultural interactions between China and the West.

The two lines of inquiry sketched above rarely mix in the designs of contemporary research projects on China. This absence of internal dialogue points to major differences in both intellectual concerns and analytical problems central to the study of Republican China. This article does not attempt to mount an effort to integrate the two, but to draw attention, instead, to this fundamental divergence in basic conceptual assumptions. Issues of state and society, of course, were closely connected to those of culture and commerce in Shanghai in the early 20th century. But the fact remains that the history of modern Shanghai is still a tale of two cities. By drawing attention to the differences in scholarly concerns that led to the construction of two such different entities, it may be possible to gain a more sophisticated appreciation of the historical Shanghai that continues to elude everyone.

Republican Shanghai

In Weberian sociology, the bourgeois transformation of the European political system has often been traced to the unique qualities of medieval cities and their tradition of civic autonomy.[11] Within this framework, Weber saw traditional Chinese cities primarily as military and administrative centres dependent upon the state for their importance. He drew sharp contrasts between Chinese cities and their European counterparts, and suggested that the former, unlike the latter, had never been able to function as a new source of dynamics that eventually transformed the rest of society.

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Century Chinese Cities (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Leo Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), and "Literary trends 1: the quest for modernity, 1895–1927," in Fairbank, *Cambridge History of Modern China*, Vol. 12, pp. 451–504. See also Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Beijing, 1937–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), and Po-shek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

10. The most important statement on this subject is perhaps Leo Lee's forthcoming book. *Shanghai Modern* (tentative title).

11. Max Weber, *The City* (trans. and ed. Don Martindale and Gertrud Neuwirth) (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958).

Modern Shanghai, however, was no replica of a traditional Chinese city. A treaty port administered simultaneously by three separate municipal regimes, Shanghai in the first half of the 20th century emerged to become China's largest metropolis for trade, finance, manufacturing, publishing, higher education, journalism and many other important functions, performed by a growing population increasingly diversified into multiple classes of different incomes and interests. The city, because of the creation of the foreign concessions, contained enclaves beyond the immediate reach of the Chinese state, which permitted sections of it to become havens of dissent.[12] In much of the recent scholarship on Shanghai, therefore, one of the leading questions has evolved around whether the city, as a bastion of Western influence, bourgeois wealth and working class activism, was capable of transforming a largely traditional Chinese political system long under the dominance of the inland capital to the north.

Was Republican Shanghai a powerhouse sufficiently charged to change China? Did the trade and diplomacy that flourished on the China coast in the century after the Opium War prepare the ground for the rise of a new political system, such as Western-style democracy? With Mao's persistent declaration that his revolution amounted to a rural Chinese conquest of the Westernized city, many had come to see Shanghai in terms of its political failure rather than success. In case after case, researchers conceptualized their projects as an examination of what the city lacked rather than what it possessed, drawing attention to key political arenas in which the city appeared to have shown weakness rather than strength.

On the important question of why the Shanghai bourgeoisie, despite its wealth and political activism, failed to launch Republican China on a course of democratic transformation, Marie-Claire Bergère has drawn attention to the weakness of the Chinese state, and argued persuasively that it was this frailty that accounted for the corresponding weakness of the Chinese bourgeoisie.[13] In the context of a global capitalist system, according to Bergère, the nascent Chinese bourgeoisie needed a powerful national government to make decisions on important matters such as tariffs, labour laws, currency regulation, raw material acquisitions and trade agreements to help protect its interest against foreign rivals. The rise of the Shanghai bourgeoisie was thus hindered rather than aided by the absence of an effective Chinese state in the 1920s.

Bergère goes on to note that democracy in the domestic context did not simply result from a mere lifting of the state's coercive presence. In an admirable exercise of conceptual rigour, she draws clear distinctions between democratic institutions built on bourgeois values of individualism, and gentry-merchant self-governing bodies that had arisen in the

12. On student protest, see Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China, The View from Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). On organized crime and "compradore of violence," see Brian Martin, *The Shanghai Green Gang: Politics and Organized Crime, 1919–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). On the pleasure quarters of the city that thrived under a divided municipality, see Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

13. Marie-Claire Bergère, *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie, 1911–1937* (trans. Janet Lloyd) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

early 20th century to assert their communal rights to local autonomy. Although Shanghai's bankers formed voluntary associations to take action on matters of common concern, Bergère shows that the Shanghai bourgeoisie, despite the wealth it had enjoyed in the economic boom during the aftermath of the First World War, was unable either to sustain itself economically or to articulate a viable political vision for the nation as a whole. The golden age of the Chinese bourgeoisie thus closed without an enduring legacy, whether in the form of political institutions or political culture, that might otherwise have contributed to the democratic transformation of China.

On the question of workers and the Chinese revolution, official Chinese Marxist historiography had conventionally depicted the party's early attempts to unite the workers and the intellectuals in the 1920s as efforts that ended in betrayal and tragedy. This urban strategy of revolution, which consisted mainly of strikes and mass organization, differed significantly from the party's subsequent road to success via peasant mobilization and guerrilla warfare. Although many urban workers later joined the New Fourth Army, they occupied a much less prominent place than the peasant soldiers and the Eighth Route Army in accounts of Mao's revolution.[14]

Recent scholarly research, inspired in part by E. P. Thompson's work on the making of the English working class, endeavours to show that it would indeed be difficult to point to the emergence of a working class with its own consciousness among Shanghai's factory workers.[15] Shanghai's labour force was divided, according to Emily Honig and Elizabeth Perry, along particularistic lines of native-place origin.[16] Honig shows that these divisions led to the development on the peripheries of the city of working-class neighbourhoods that resembled the inhabitants' native villages. Such residential patterns in turn contributed to the articulation of sub-ethnic divisions among Shanghai's immigrant population.[17] Perry draws attention to the high level of strikes and militancy among Shanghai workers, and suggests that it stemmed from communal tension as well as solidarity. The strikes, which were mobilized on the basis of social networks instead of communities of belief, bore no definite relationship to the articulation of new political demands.[18] Labour and politics, in other words, stood in an uncertain relationship to each other, because the workers, despite their capacity for militancy, lacked a clear sense of larger political purpose and were consequently susceptible to ready manipulation by dominant political parties.

14. Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

15. These works take as their point of departure the earlier contribution by Jean Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labor Movement, 1919–1927* (trans. H. M. Wright) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968).

16. Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

17. Emily Honig, *Creating Chinese Ethnicity: Subei People in Shanghai, 1885–1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

18. Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*.

Honig and Perry, by putting emphasis on native-place ties, presented the picture of a traditional society fragmented by rural or provincial identities, which remained strong even as the villagers found themselves in an urban setting. The "deparochialization" of sojourning merchants that William Rowe described for 19th-century Hankou thus hardly ever took place among the migrant labourers of Republican Shanghai.[19] Nor did these men – unlike the middle-class bankers and merchants studied by Bryna Goodman – ever lend their native place associations to the mobilization for modern nationalism.[20] Despite their Shanghai residence and occupations, migrant workers, according to Honig and Perry, remained encapsulated in their provincial cultural milieus. Their politics, if they had any, was derivative of their ethnicity. Some, such as the migrant workers of northern Jiangsu origin, came to be regarded, indeed, as the tradition-bound "Subei" people in the new surroundings of modern Shanghai. This Subei identity, despite its constructed nature in such a semi-foreign urban context, was ascribed rather than acquired, hence expressing parochialism rather than attributes of an opposite sort. Few rural provincials, by Honig and Perry's reckoning, were able to disengage themselves from the norms and ties into which they had been born.

This picture of village-style localism among Shanghai's metropolitan labour force was further employed by David Strand, who extended it to include other sectors of Shanghai society, to explain the absence of democracy.[21] Strand turns his attention first to the political history of the city. He suggests that in Republican Shanghai there were political movements as well as leadership networks that harboured democratic aspirations, despite the presence of older Chinese cultural elements. Democracy, however, ultimately failed as a new form of institutionalized political order – not because endeavours for its realization were lacking, but because the process was frustrated by the absence of a strong and oppressive state.

Pursuing a counter-intuitive line of argument, Strand treats the state's capacity for violence as functionally useful, for it would have imposed uniformity through oppression on a social landscape fragmented by traditional ties. Where Ernest Gellner sees the forces of industrialization as liberating European peasantry from the insularity of their village lives, Strand sees the modernizing state performing a comparable function in breaking down social barriers erected by traditional ties in an urban setting.[22] The modern state, in attempting to gain greater control over society, Strand reasons, would surely spur the various segments of society

19. On deparochialization, see Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City*.

20. Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

21. The following discussion is based on David Strand, "Conclusion: historical perspectives," in Deborah S. Davis *et al.* (eds.), *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 394–426.

22. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1983).

to unite in oppositional politics, thus transcending their parochialism. In this view, the modernizing state, despite its hegemonic intention, could paradoxically assert a democratizing effect by levelling embedded social differences. Strand, like Bergère, thus rests his explanation of the failure of Shanghai democracy on an analysis of the weakness of the state.

"Modern" versus "Traditional"

Much of the scholarship described above can be characterized as attempts to gauge whether a new type of urban economy had laid the foundation for the emergence of a new form of Chinese polity. Reflecting an ultimate concern with the relationship between state and society, scholarly debates along these lines have evolved around the issue of whether there emerged, in Shanghai, socio-political features that could be seen as comparable to the rise of civil society and a public sphere in the West.[23]

It is certainly a question of major importance as to whether or not Shanghai ever functioned in ways that served to democratize China. Those who pursue these projects, to the extent that they focus their attention on the dynamics between a modernizing Shanghai and a less forward-looking China, have by and large framed the interactions as a national question within the Chinese domestic context. Implicit in this line of inquiry, in other words, is an identification of Shanghai as a *Chinese* city analysed against processes and values that are presumed to be of universal validity. Shanghai parochialism and the weakness of its bourgeois institutions were seen, by implication, as indicative of an overall *Chinese* inability to achieve democratic transformation.

But Republican Shanghai, by virtue of its commerce and culture and with its foreign concessions, was as much a product of global forces as of national politics. The "national" approach, with its focused attention on politics and institutions, risks overlooking not only the transformation of the material foundation of urban life that was brought about by the forces of commerce, but also the very phenomenon of Shanghai modernity, which developed in the foreign concessions under the authorities of the British, the Americans and the French, and, in the words of Leo Lee, was tangible in the surface glamour of a commodified popular culture and its hybrid images that mixed the East and the West.[24]

Much as Republican Shanghai was a part of China, it was, at the same time, a city shaped and defined by global forces that linked developments across national boundaries. For its Chinese contemporaries, early 20th-century Shanghai was indeed a setting where many could not but find their inherited and established Chinese way of life problematic. There

23. See the essays by Frederic Wakeman, William Rowe and Mary Rankin in Philip C. C. Huang (ed.), " 'Public sphere'/'civil society' in China? Paradigmatic issues in Chinese Studies, III," *Modern China*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April 1993).

24. Leo Lee, "The cultural construction of modernity in Early Republican China: some research notes on urban Shanghai," paper presented at the conference "Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond," University of California, Berkeley, 2–4 June 1995, pp. 28–29.

was no "normalcy" sanctioned either by tradition or consensus. What used to be seen as a "natural" way of life came under scrupulous scrutiny and required entirely new justifications. The valorization of the "modern," meanwhile, forced urbanites to set aside the familiar and to try on new styles brought in as the latest fashion from the outside.[25] Urban existence involved not only a totally changed sense of time, but also an expanded imaginary space that reached foreign shores. Such fundamentally different experiences entailed new social practices and redefined boundaries of community identities in a way that ultimately led to the very reconstitution of Chineseness itself. How these forces manifested themselves is vividly captured in the following episode from a turn-of-the-century piece of popular fiction.

In chapter 16 of the novel *Wenming xiaoshi* (*A Short History of Civilization*), Master Yao, a provincial degree-holder, takes his son and three disciples, all of old-fashioned landed gentry background, to Shanghai for a visit.[26] The goal was to broaden the intellectual horizon of the young men by showing them first-hand signs of Western civilization, which they had come to admire earlier upon acquiring paraffin lamps and other foreign gadgets in their country homes. Over a breakfast of dumplings and *shaomai* in a teahouse near their inn in the International Settlement, therefore, Master Yao announced the curriculum that he had planned for his disciples. Each day they were to spend their morning and afternoon seeking out friends, and visiting bookshops, publishing houses and at least two new-style schools to familiarize themselves with the course offerings. In the evenings they were to attend a variety of theatres to savour the latest in story-telling and theatrical presentations. They would end the day by eating late meals in selected restaurants, where connoisseurs enjoyed regional cuisine and "Western food." At weekends they were to ride in horse-drawn carriages to view the sights and hear the sounds of the city. They were also to attend the gatherings at Zhang Garden (Zhangyuan), where speeches were delivered amidst political rallies.[27]

But the teahouse, as a micro-organism of the city, turned into a classroom even as Master Yao spoke. A newspaper hawker, loaded with the day's *Shenbao*, *Xinwenbao* and *Hubao*, approached their table no sooner had they finished eating. As the five pored over the papers, a fight broke out at the next table following a tense session over tea – an instance of *jiangcha* ("talk tea," or informal mediation of disputes) that had apparently ended in failure. The country gentlemen looked up from their newspapers to find a young woman in her 20s in the company of three

25. Leo Lee suggested that this constant effort to keep up with time was one of the key characteristics of modernity. See Leo Lee, "In search of modernity: some reflections on a new mode of consciousness in twentieth-century Chinese history and literature," in Paul A. Cohen and Merle Goldman (eds.), *Ideas Across Cultures: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of Benjamin I. Schwartz* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies. Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 109–136.

26. Li Boyuan, *Wenming xiaoshi* (*A Short History of Civilization*) (Reprinted Beijing: Tongsu wenyi chubanshe, 1955), pp. 99–105.

27. *Ibid.* p. 100.

men, who – against all Confucian expectations about proper decorum – "not only shared the same pot of tea but were also busily engaged in an excited discussion."[28] The woman, whose casual style of clothing, gaudy display of jewellery and immodest manner of speech frustrated the provincial gentrymen's attempts to speculate on her identity, turned out to be a former new-style school student and a mistress to the man sitting across the table, who was employed as a clerk in a Western trading firm. The other two were the couple's original introducer, a coach-driver who made money by facilitating such illicit liaisons, and a runner in the detective's office of the Shanghai Municipal Police, who presided as the figure of authority. The young woman did not simply dominate the presentation; she underscored her points by pounding on the table, causing her many gold bangles to clash against each other. Presently, she leapt out of her seat to grab her estranged lover by his vest. The detective rose swiftly to his feet. Unable to separate the couple, who by then were entangled in a fight, he dragged them both down to the street, where two waiting policemen, "one Chinese and the other a foreigner with red turban and dark face,"[29] stepped forward and took the couple away to appear before the foreign judges of the municipal court.

This entire scene, with sexual relationships undefinable in conventional terms and a cast of unfamiliar characters staged in a new setting following a novel script, intrigued the young provincial disciples who were eager to find a plausible account of it. Master Yao, baffled by the immorality of the intrigue and fearful of its corrosive influence on young minds, however, refused to answer questions about what had happened. But "from other tables" in the teahouse there arose various voices – fragmentary comments delivered in a desultory fashion, offering reactions to what they had just witnessed. The disciples, aided by these voices, were thus able to weave an account about occupations and relationships beyond their provincial experience. Gradually they recalled ideas such as "free marriage" and "anti-foot-binding associations" that they had read about in newspapers in the past. They were also left to ponder the significance of what they had heard and seen without the mediating voice of their teacher.

The teacher, repelled by the incident, motioned the waiter to bring the bill. Just as he tried to rush the group out of the teahouse, however, a tall man of darkened complexion appeared at the entrance, clad in a Western-style suit, a straw hat and a pair of brown leather shoes, and carrying a walking stick. The newcomer was instantly hailed by an acquaintance seated in a corner wearing an old cotton gown with patched-up holes, who was later identified as Huang Guomin, literally "yellow-skinned countryman." When the Western-suited man removed his hat, he revealed a "full head of hair tied into a bun, rather different from the short hair of the foreigners,"[30] thus showing his true identity as "a transformed Chinese" to all observers in the teahouse.[31]

28. *Ibid.* p. 101.
29. *Ibid.* p. 102.
30. *Ibid.* p. 103.
31. *Ibid.*

Huang Guomin proceeded to strike up a conversation with the Western-suited Chinese and the two shared thoughts on clothing, hairstyles and daily lives. The newcomer reported that "ever since I adopted Western-style clothing, I have changed all my habits of eating, drinking, sleeping and walking" in order to become thoroughly Westernized.[32] He now ate two meals a day and resisted the temptation of snacks in between. He had had a disastrous experience trying to take a cold shower in the Western style and now made serious though futile efforts to take a bath every day. And he made a point of reminding himself, whenever he was to decide on whether to have a haircut, of what the foreigners had to teach about physical health.

Although chapter 16 ends without drama or tension, the episodes described above are parts of a much larger account that skilfully depicts China's early encounter with the West as seen through the eyes of provincial gentrymen from Shanghai's hinterland. Earlier in the novel, in their large mansions in the countryside, the youths are shown leading secluded lives behind high walls, catching glimpses of the West via paraffin lamps and treaty-port newspapers. Although paraffin lamps were ten times brighter than the oil lamps used by the majority of their fellow townsmen, these youths learned that the foreigners in Shanghai used electric lights that were ten times brighter still. And though they had access to Shanghai periodicals, they knew that their newspapers, by the time they reached them via the local county seat, had spent at least a week travelling by cart and boat, while Shanghai residents routinely read papers no older than overnight.

The trip to Shanghai, then, was a journey to a place with a different kind of time. As they sat in the teahouse, these youths watched the scenes depicted in the newspapers firsthand. This immediacy rendered the provincial teacher, who had wished to fashion a curriculum, utterly ineffectual. His pupils were brought face to face not only with the appearance of new social roles and the rise of unimagined public authorities, but also – as in the case of the "transformed Chinese" – with the very transmogrification of the Chinese appearance from head to toe, in basic patterns of everyday activities.

These changes, induced by the import of Western goods and propelled by the creation of Western-inspired institutions such as newspapers and new-style schools, were subversive to the old ways in norms as well as in styles. The *Wenming xiaoshi* chapter thus vividly captured the deeply diffused sense of shock in the early stage of China's encounter with the West in Shanghai. Apart from the wonders of electric lights and the novelty of horse-drawn carriages, there were, in full view in the public places of the city, happenings that could only be understood as open violations of moral norms, blatant transgressions of gendered roles and foreign assertions of political authority, along with the absurd sight of a

32. *Ibid.*

Chinese imposing Western discipline upon his resisting body. What happened around the provincial gentrymen called into question virtually all of the familiar aspects in their everyday existence, both as a result of changing social conditions and of these strikingly new cultural encounters.

As is suggested by the actual physical movements of the provincial youth in the story, Shanghai emerged in the eyes of contemporaries both as a new centre of gravity pulling the country into its orbit and as a source of change projecting its influence outward towards the surrounding countryside. The flow of ideas and goods went in both directions. Provincial youths travelled to the centre in search of a Westernizing education, a broadened intellectual horizon and a better view of the West's material splendour. Many others meanwhile travelled in the opposite direction, working busily to distribute Shanghai newspapers and imported goods throughout the hinterland.

Cultural encounters between China and the West have often been seen as clashes between cultural systems that were utterly incompatible.[33] Joseph Levenson, in his seminal work on Confucian China and its modern fate, argued compellingly that there were inherent contradictions between "being modern" and "being Chinese."[34] In light of recent scholarship, however, this viewpoint does not take into sufficient account the cultural effects of trade and the mediating role played by commercial interests. The case of Shanghai shows, in fact, that there was more to the relationship between China and the West than mere clash and contest. Much of Shanghai's urban culture in the Republican years, from the elite to popular levels, was the result of incessant attempts to bring about the indigenization of the foreign and the domestication of the novel. These processes were visible, for example, both in the cultural packaging of material goods, such as the advertising of foreign goods by Chinese merchants in the domestic market, and in the normative refashioning of critical social institutions such as the family, which were placed on a new ideological foundation. These newly shaped phenomena reflected the working not so much of national factors such as politics and institutions as of global forces of commerce and finance, which resulted not only in the commodification of culture but also in the rise of new social interests and occupational classes that radically redefined what it meant to be "Chinese." It was inevitable, then, for the "national" to acquire a new set of meanings within the context of a dialectical relationship with the "global" – meanings that exceeded a simple stark contradiction between identities and values.

33. For a recent formulation of this position, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

34. Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), Vol. 1. See also Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

Advertising

In a fascinating paper on the rise of advertising for Chinese-manufactured goods in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s, Xu Dingxin, a senior researcher with the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, showed how these advertising practices contributed to the appearance of a "Nanjing Road Phenomenon" on the busiest street in the International Settlement during the Republican period.[35] Nanjing Road was the birthplace, according to Xu, of a novel commercial culture that combined new styles of product display, new standards of quality control and new attitudes in customer service. These changes turned shopping into such a pleasant experience that Shanghai residents subsequently viewed a shopping trip not as a chore but as a diversion, not as an economic transaction but as a cultural consumption. As bargaining and window shopping became leisure-time activities, the entire commercial district of Shanghai also developed into a lavish entertainment complex of restaurants, theatres, cinemas and amusement halls. Nanjing Road thereby acquired natural fame as the leading shopping district in the country. Commerce and consumption also acquired a certain glamour that was closely associated with a modern way of life.

The pull of Nanjing Road began much earlier, when country folk, for example, were told about it and came to the foreign concessions to see the electric lights, the horse-drawn carriages and the high-class courtesans who set the latest trends in clothing and hair styles. Already by the turn of the century, the fame of Nanjing Road stemmed not only from the concentration of large numbers of jewellers and silk merchants, but also from the availability of novel imports procured from far-away places. Competition was keen, and next-door neighbours were also business rivals. A variety of means were devised as shop owners vied for the attention of prospective patrons. In addition to smiling clerks and attractive merchandise, banners were flown and signs were put up on the streets in front of the shops to announce special discounts and to affirm the quality and durability of the products. Even before the rise of modern advertising, in short, Nanjing Road was already the hub of a thriving commercial culture. But the "Nanjing Road Phenomenon" of the 1920s – and here I differ with Xu – was no mere intensification of traditional forms of commercial activities. Something qualitatively different intervened, and the phenomenon, on closer analysis, was not just about the promotion of goods, but also about the production and consumption of images.

Modern advertising played a crucial role in this juncture. Thanks to the use of the mechanical printing press and the rise of a new printing industry that originated in the West, Shanghai merchants and manufacturers availed themselves of such unconventional media as mass-produced

35. Xu Dingxin, "Ershi sanshi niandai Shanghai guohuo guanggao cuxiao ji qi wenhua tece" ("National goods advertising in Shanghai and its distinguishing features, 1920s and 1930s"), paper presented at the seminar on "Consumer Culture in Shanghai," Cornell University, July 1995.

posters, calendars, pictorial and textual advertisements in newspapers and journals, and the radio to propagate their messages.[36] The result was that the "Nanjing Road Phenomenon" was far more than a simple aggregation of all the shops. It was, instead, a collage of images and signs about these sources of modern merchandise. As representations, these images were disengaged from immediate physical association with the goods they represented. They could be seen in the countryside as well as in cities throughout the lower Changjiang valley. Shanghai, viewed at a distance, thus emerged as the very centre of glamour, luxury, comfort and modernity. A whole industry of guidebooks and tour maps about it arose in conjunction with the circulation of these images, enticing an growing number of provincials to come to the city and see these urban wonders for themselves.

Advertising via cheaply reproducible modern media, in this sense, was not only the principal means with which the commerce on Nanjing Road was transformed into a modern phenomenon; the images and signs thus produced were the staple of a commodified popular culture that helped to define the nature of Shanghai modernity. The "modern" here, however, pertained not quite so much to the substantive aspects of the symbols – to the origins and the meanings of the specific signs – as to the means of their reproduction and consumption in a chain of economic transactions. Media advertising engendered a system of signs and images in which the latter were dislodged from their social context. This altered, but did not obliterate, the substantive significance of the symbols themselves. Shanghai advertising, as the following examples show, involved in practice both the mobilization of established genres of communication towards the production of new meanings, and the adoption of new-style media to circulate age-old ideas. Although the means were markedly modern, the cultural components that supplied the content were of mixed temporal and spatial origins.

Carlton Benson's study of the transformation of popular story-telling (*tanci*) in Shanghai focuses in part upon the commercial advertising of Laojiuhe, one of the city's largest fabric shops that specialized in silks and furs for an affluent clientele. The firm not only hired a professional story-teller to broadcast its advertisements on radio, but also sponsored the publication of a collection of popular songs that promoted the apparel as an essential part of the good life.[37] This one-man performing operation, which went on the air almost as soon as commercial radio became available in Shanghai in the late 1920s, was among the city's very first private advertising agencies. The advertisers selected the genre of story-

36. On the use of posters and calendars for advertising, see Sherman Cochran. "Marketing medicine and advertising dreams in China, 1900–1950," paper prepared for the conference on "Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond, 1900–1950" at the University of California, Berkeley, 2–4 June 1995.

37. Carlton Benson, "Story-telling and Radio Shanghai," *Republican China* (April 1995); also Xu Dingxin, "National goods advertising," p. 10. For an original and full treatment of the subject, see Benson, "From teahouse to radio: storytelling and the commercialization of culture in 1930s Shanghai," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1996.

telling precisely because it was a well established form of popular entertainment that had been an integral part of urban life for decades. The form itself, however, was inevitably transformed as a result of this manipulation. Benson shows that while story-telling began at the turn of the century as an interactive performance presented in teahouses by travelling female entertainers and attended by a predominantly male audience from the immediate neighbourhood, it changed into a different kind of genre altogether after its migration to radio. Story-telling on the radio facilitated the rise to stardom of a dozen or so male performers who, as disembodied voices, now reached tens of thousands of female listeners in the privacy of their homes. These women, previously isolated in the boredom of their sheltered lives, thus became part of a network of consumption via story-telling on "broadcast radio." A new social space was opened up and a new "listening public" (*tingzhong*) was constituted into an implied subject as a result of this new medium of intimate anonymity.

Although Laojiuhe, a well-established shop that operated initially out of the old Chinese part of the Shanghai municipality, was selling familiar lines of products, the advertisements that it sponsored nevertheless sought to make the use of silk gowns and fur coats into an indispensable part of modern life. In the printed song collections, the pictorial images that accompanied the verses often featured fashionable young women with bobbed hair and high-heeled shoes, clad in silk or fur, walking light-heartedly down a street lined by Shanghai's multi-storeyed buildings. These women typically carried home bags of new purchases; the visual images were in themselves celebrations of this moment of consumer triumph. The radio advertisements of the store, similarly, sang the delight of sisterhood when modern women shopped together with discriminating taste at Laojiuhe's attractively furnished emporium. Modern women found a new arena of relative autonomy when going on shopping excursions, the songs suggested. Such acts of shopping were integral to a newly found modern sense of female identity.

When the products to be promoted were new or unfamiliar to the prospective customers, by comparison, advertisers did not simply broadcast the pleasure of shopping. They presented, instead, a picture of a "modern Shanghai" in which their products occupied a prominent place. This new style of life was often promoted in terms of progress and advancement.

Susan Glosser's research on You Huaigao's attempts to sell dairy products, especially milk, is a case in point.[38] You, the son of Jiangsu gentry, returned to Shanghai in the mid-1930s after a stint at Cornell's school of agriculture to open a dairy farm in the city's suburbs. Milk, however, was neither tea nor ice cream, and You appeared to have trouble getting the beverage accepted either for regular drinking or as a special treat. To promote his product, You became the one-man author, editor

38. Susan Glosser, "The business of family: You Huaigao and the commercialization of a May Fourth ideal," *Republican China* (April 1995).

and publisher of a weekly pamphlet which he distributed free of charge to his paid and prospective customers. In this weekly, *Jiating xingqi* (*Family Weekly*), You idealized the image of happy, prosperous urban nuclear families (*xiao jiating*), ably managed by women no less fashionably dressed than the customers of Laojiuhe. These women, however, now appeared not as care-free shoppers but as wives and mothers shouldering familial responsibilities; the drawings placed them in the interior of their homes rather than in the city's streets. Regular consumption of milk, You wrote, meant health not only for babies but for all members of the family. Yet milk-drinking was a habit still to be acquired by most Chinese. A decision to include milk as part of the dietary routine of the family thus required knowledge and innovation on the part of the lady of the house. Only a modern woman, You suggested, would be sufficiently enlightened and thoughtful to see in the unfamiliar project a major opportunity to benefit her family.

As might be expected, images of chubby babies and overflowing milk bottles adorned the pages of You's journal. In addition, it dispensed advice to housewives on matters such as how to open a family savings account and other suggestions related to "scientific" child-care and home economics. Those who bought his bottles of pasteurized milk, then, were also delivered a variety of pragmatic suggestions about what to do with the rest of their lives. You's advice was presumably intended for the all-round health, physical as well as financial, of every member of the family.

While the owners of Laojiuhe fashioned traditional luxury items such as silk and fur into images of modernity, You Huaigao promoted milk by prescribing an entirely new system of home management – so much so that it became virtually impossible to tell whether You was primarily a family reformer or a dairy farmer. Those who sold known products and those who promoted new items therefore faced different kinds of advertising challenge. If an entrepreneur happened to be dealing with something quite new, he was obliged to explain the product's use and justify its proper place in a desired way of life.

Goods in themselves, of course, did not drive cultural changes. They changed the way people led their lives only insofar as uses were found for them. For this very reason, imported gadgets, to the extent that they remained foreign, odd and exotic, continued to occupy only a marginal place in Chinese lives. Goods that played a large role in changing a whole way of life, on the other hand, were necessarily those that had become domesticated. Those of foreign origin engendered changes built around their usages in the process of indigenization. That process was often characterized by "push-and-pull" between the foreign attributes of the thing in itself and the domesticating practices that had been mobilized to acclimatize them. This tension between the foreign and the domestic was prominent in the material transformation of Chinese lives in Shanghai during the Republican period. A closer examination of the city's recurrent advertising campaigns to promote "national goods," much lauded by contemporaries as spontaneous urban expressions of anti-foreign sentiments, helps further to illuminate this critical paradox.

The "national goods" (*guohuo*) campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s had their origin in the popular boycotts against foreign goods. The most notable of the latter included, for example, the late 19th-century anti-American boycotts organized in Guangdong in protest against American exclusionary acts against the Chinese, the nation-wide anti-Japanese boycotts in the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement in 1919, and the massive anti-British boycotts of 1925 as a popular reaction against the killing of Chinese workers by the Shanghai Municipal Council police force during the May 30th Incident. The national goods campaign, which gathered momentum in the years after 1925, turned a negative campaign to boycott the foreign into a positive campaign to promote Chinese products.[39] Riding on the high tide of popular anger against the British in 1925, for instance, the Nanyang Tobacco Company sought to undercut the business of its arch rival, the British American Tobacco Company, by running advertisements that appealed to the patriotic sentiments of fellow Chinese. These urged Chinese consumers to support fellow Chinese producers and to buy "national goods." Choice and consciousness on the part of the consumers were lauded as patriotic deeds.[40]

The national goods movement, as the case of the Nanyang Tobacco Company suggests, was launched by Shanghai's new-style manufacturers and supported by the city's leading financiers. It used the language of nationalism to promote Chinese-manufactured goods, propagated, among other media, in the pages of Chinese-owned newspapers that sought to fuse mass anti-foreign campaigns with a buy-Chinese merchandising push. Whatever the effects of such efforts, their high visibility and multiple recurrences drew attention to the critical role played by Shanghai's modern business interests in the construction of a nationalist discourse.

But the nationalist language and avowed patriotism of the commercial campaigns were quite misleading at times. Sherman Cochran has shown that in a global capitalist economic system, it was difficult to determine the exact "national" content of any manufacturing process or product.[41] The Jian brothers, owners of the Nanyang Tobacco Company, in fact held Japanese passports and had developed very close business connections with Japanese suppliers in their South-East Asian operations. The company's use of patriotism in its advertising campaigns, furthermore, produced at best mixed results in various sectors of the domestic market. This was because as normative categories, the "nation" and the shared sentiments of "citizenship" were largely urban constructions that were yet

39. A Society for the Use of National Goods (Quanyong guohuo hui) was formed by Chinese leaders of Shanghai's 20 major guilds on 23 March 1915, less than two months after the Twenty-One Demands presented by Japan to China were made public. Cochran, "Marketing medicine and advertising dreams," p. 14.

40. On the boycotts, see Cochran, *Sino-Foreign Rivalry*, and Parks M. Coble, *Facing Japan: Chinese Politics and Japanese Imperialism, 1931–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1991).

41. Cochran, *Sino-Foreign Rivalry*.

to take hold in the country as a whole. Provincial consumers, Cochran shows, did not always make the connection between their choice of cigarettes and their allegiance to the country. Nationalism, like modernity, was itself a new idea born in the city.

The patriotism of the national goods movement was also misleading in another sense. There were, generally speaking, at least four sets of dichotomies commonly used by contemporaries as they tried to determine the national content of any given set of goods. A product could be either "domestic" or "imported," "native" or "foreign," when classified spatially with a line drawn along China's national borders. A product could also be either "Chinese" or "Western," "traditional" or "modern," when classified temporally with an eye on the differences between China's past and present. Thus oriented, "national goods" such as tobacco, matches or bedroom linen were "national" only in the sense that they were domestically produced and not imports. To the conservatives they could readily represent a foreign rather than a native line of products in a not so distant past. In other words, though safely "Chinese" as a result of associations with their Chinese owners and promoters, these goods were nevertheless "modern" as opposed to "traditional" in Chinese terms. They challenged rather than maintained established ways. Consequently, each one of the national goods, insofar as it entailed a criss-crossing of attributes along these spatial and temporal divisions, was a product of an active process of indigenization. Indeed, the indigenization of these goods was vigorously pursued by a new generation of Chinese entrepreneurs who did not mind mixing the foreign and modern with the Chinese and domestic. In the process of doing so, they succeeded in constructing a new material culture which they labelled "national."

Because national goods were not traditional, Chinese manufacturers of Western-style products thus became active promoters of a new style of life that often combined both Chinese and Western elements. To sell bath robes and cotton facial towels, for example, the Sanyou Company ran advertisements that directed attention to new rhythms in everyday life. One series of such advertisements, constructed around the theme of "rising early in the morning," featured images of birds and blossoms under a clear sky. These pictures were accompanied by texts that urged viewers to be sure to exercise their body, and thereafter to protect themselves from the chills of the morning dew by putting on the manufacturer's recommended brand of bath robe.[42]

Similarly, to sell bedroom linen, mosquito nets, pillow cases, window curtains and other items of interior decoration, the Sanyou company created an entire display room on Nanjing Road that was furnished like a private urban home. Calling the place "Peach Blossom Stream," the manufacturer used it both to showcase home furnishing products and to suggest new ways to arrange the interior at one's dwelling. "Peach Blossom Stream" contained multiple rooms with clearly differentiated functions. To suggest how such homes must have accommodated happy,

42. Xu Dingxin, "National goods advertising," p. 14.

Westernized families, there was even on display a doll in the form of a child in bed, peacefully asleep in a pair of pyjamas of the company's own brand.[43] The model home, with its various areas furnished as living room, dining room, bedroom, study, kitchen and so forth, and predicated upon the needs of an urban nuclear family, followed a pattern of spatial arrangement that was distinctively different from traditional Chinese gentry compounds. In its attempts to sell a full line of Western-inspired products that were promoted as "national goods," the company ended up merchandizing images of an utterly unconventional new-style home.

It is notable that the company named its display room after a sixth-century Daoist wonderland.[44] It was characteristic of national goods advertisements to mix the visually new with the textually conventional, and the foreign with the traditional, so that companies like Sanyou were among the major sponsors behind the production of a whole new genre of commercialized art for advertisements that mixed cultural elements of diverse origins.[45] Artists on the payroll of the company worked in teams and produced commercials following a variety of formulas. Advertisements in the *meiren* (beauty) genre, for instance, featured young Chinese women in *qipao* as well as in Western-style clothing. These figures were placed in landscapes punctuated by Suzhou-style moon gates as well as Italianate marble benches. They promoted a whole range of goods from electric space heaters to powders and pills. They appeared on calendar posters, cigarette cards and in magazines that contained, sometimes right on the next page, yet another advertisement featuring, for example, a photographed segment of a Han stele that helped to announce the imminent publication of a new book.[46] As the result of the mass production and the proliferation of these images, Shanghai urbanites took part in a visual culture that was a virtual emporium of cultural motifs with diverse styles juxtaposed in close proximity.

The advertisements for national goods were not only part of a larger effort to change the old ways of life and to indigenize the foreign. Commercial advertising, by dislodging cultural motifs and styles from their original contexts, emptied them of their embedded social meanings and thereby turned them, for purposes of commercial packaging, into dislocated signs and symbols of exchange. The national goods movement, by this measure, was not only instrumental in the indigenization of a foreign line of goods, but also played a key role in the commercial production of a new urban consumer culture that was both modern and Chinese. The process of this production followed no fixed formula; it was responsive to local initiatives as well as to global

43. *Ibid.* pp. 14–15.
44. *Ibid.* p. 14.
45. Kuiyi Shen, "Comic, illustrations, and the cartoonist in Republican Shanghai," paper presented in the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, 13–16 March 1997.
46. Ellen Johnston Laing, "Commodification of art through exhibition and advertisement," paper presented in the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago. 13–16 March 1997.

imperatives. Eventually, with the forces of commerce working incessantly towards that end, the "transformed Chinese," who in the eyes of turn-of-the-century observers had seemed so blatantly absurd with his plans for daily showers and Western-style clothing, was by the early 1930s naturalized into an ordinary urban consumer of perfectly respectable national goods.

Conclusion

Shanghai modernity, as the above discussion suggests, owed much of its emergence to the workings of commercial interest through the city's cultural industries. The images and texts produced by printing, publishing and advertising targeted women as well as men as the implied subjects of this popular culture of consumption. The use of female images, meanwhile, constituted in itself a sub-genre in the production of commercial art. A key feature of Shanghai modernity in the Republican years was precisely this commodification of a new image about women and the feminine.[47]

One may very well ask, in this connection, what was the relationship between this new form of commodity culture and a new urban society? What, in other words, was the social foundation of Shanghai modernity? Recent research has shown that together with the rise of a new pattern of economic life and the creation of new cultural institutions, there arose in Shanghai during the Republican period a new class of white-collar professionals who held jobs in the city's modern sectors and who formed nuclear households. The idealization of the *xiao jiating* (nuclear family) versus the *da jiazu* (extended lineage) in the pages of *Shenghuo Weekly*, one of the best-selling popular journals of the early 1930s, corresponded to the popularity of this new form of family organization in the urban setting, which was evidenced elsewhere in the law codes, court papers, state practices, social science surveys and newspaper reports of this time.[48] In addition, white-collar employees such as those who worked for the Bank of China formed residential corporate communities that paced themselves to the ticking of the mechanical clock. The creation of such corporate compounds with modern conveniences helped to enhance the bank's image as one of the most enlightened and progressive institutions in the city.[49]

47. For treatment of the issue of gender in the context of Shanghai, see Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); and Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

48. Wen-hsin Yeh, "Progressive journalism and Shanghai's petty urbanites." For a full treatment of the subject of "small family," see Susan Glosser, "A contest for family and nation in Republican and Early Communist China, 1919–1952," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1995. See also Kathryn Bernhardt, "Women and the law: divorce in the Republican Period," in Bernhardt and Philip C. C. Huang (eds.), *Civil Law in Qing and Republican China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

49. Wen-hsin Yeh, "Corporate space, communal time: everyday life in Shanghai's Bank of China," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 1 (February 1995), pp. 97–122.

Within the modern sector of the city's economy, the ideal of the small family took its proper place as a building block within corporate compounds such as those constructed by the Bank of China, thereby laying the foundation for a new urban middle-class society. New ideas about home were bound up with new ideas about work. While urban men were fashioned into office workers and business employees, urban women were transformed into household managers and keepers of domestic bliss. The culture of consumption that emerged in Republican Shanghai was predicated, in this sense, upon a general acceptance of this new order, which entailed both a new articulation of the gendered differences between men and women, and a modern conception of the spatial demarcation between the public and the private, between work and home.

Thanks to the packaging and distribution of these images and ideals by the forces of commerce and cultural industry, the appeal of an idealized *xiao jiating* and a white-collar position went far beyond the small number of people who were actually able to lead this kind of life. "Modernity," as it captured the imagination of an emerging urban constituency in the Republican period, touched upon the norms and practices of everyday existence in a widening circle of Chinese society.

These developments, as they altered the basic structure of urban life, changed the way a growing number of women and men spent their time, allocated their private resources, arranged their personal lives, and gained access to the public domain of information, ideas and goods. It is beyond the scope of this article to address the social and political consequences of these changes. But although Shanghai might not have been the birthplace of Chinese democracy, Shanghai modernity certainly entailed major changes in the way public power and authority intersected with private lives. Urban culture and society in Shanghai may well have fallen short by the yardsticks of contemporary Parisian cosmopolitanism. It is just as misleading, on the other hand, to characterize the city's social milieu mainly in terms of native-place parochialism.

The full ramifications of the emergence of modern Shanghai, of course, await further study. To the extent that it is recognized how the global forces of commerce and culture dislodged Republican Shanghai from its age-old Chinese context, it would be well to expand study of the city's politics and institutions beyond the framework of a simple Weberian dichotomy between tradition and modernity. There are certainly more ways than one to reconceptualize descriptive categories of such fundamental analytical importance. Whatever the agenda and assumptions, the task should be approached with a heightened sensitivity about culture not just as objectified sets of fixed traits, norms and characteristics but as evolving practices in a living context centred upon historical subjects.