



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Shanghai Sojourners by Frederic Wakeman, Jr.; Wen-hsin Yeh
William C. Kirby

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What is lacking in this otherwise careful study that convincingly relates the minutiae of local history to on-going historical and sociological debates are vivid portraits of some of these aggressive “schoolhouse politicians.” No doubt, the rather dry nature of largely administrative sources (records of institutions and the like) precluded the author from attempting to draw such portraits. Likewise, it would have been nice to catch a glimpse of the fate and subsequent career of a few of these modern school graduates, especially of the political choices they eventually made. Although according to the author “social malaise, not a high degree of political consciousness” was their predominant characteristic (p. 93), one suspects that quite a few of them became wartime Communist cadres. This however is neither confirmed nor denied by Chauncey, who says no more than “the schools produced a core of western-educated young people for which both the Nationalists and Communists would compete” (p. 70).

Although such a specialized study cannot be easily assimilated by students, the more general Chapters 1 and 2 should prove eminently suitable for class adoption. They are in my opinion the best of a volume that represents a valuable contribution to the history of the Chinese Republic.

LUCIEN BIANCO

Shanghai Sojourners. Edited by FREDERIC WAKEMAN, JR. and WEN-HSIN YEH. [Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1992. 362 pp. \$20.00. ISBN 1-55729-035-0.]

“To dwell in a place as a temporary resident or as a stranger” is one dictionary definition of *sojourning*. This book is about the culture and society of a city of strangers, the Shanghai of the Republican era. This is not the Shanghai of international sojourners – of businessmen, adventurers and refugees from around the globe – though a few of them find their way into the volume. It is primarily that of Chinese bankers, industrialists, workers, students, journalists, gangsters and prostitutes who only gradually came to think of themselves as “Shanghai people.” There was a Shanghai that, as the editors describe it, had an “exotic, disturbing, polymorphous quality” that ended when a cosmopolitan Shanghai became “securely Chinese” in 1949 (p. 14).

Taken as a whole, the volume offers what one might call chapters in the cultural history of Shanghai identity. But it is the quality and detail of all the individual articles that make it the most stimulating collection of essays in the modern China field in many years. The editors have focused the attention of a top-flight group of scholars on cultural, social and economic transformations of this great metropolis in the first half of the 20th century. These efforts have already given rise to a number of larger studies, and have served to re-direct scholarly attention to a city that before 1949 was a centre of Western academic interest in China. The volume emerged from a conference co-sponsored by Zhang Zhongli and

the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. Although no papers by Chinese authors are published here, the positive impact of contemporary Shanghai's research environment is visible throughout in the citation of recently opened archival materials.

A brief review can only outline individual contributions. The editors' introduction and the articles by Bryna Goodman and Emily Honig address the "identity" question most directly. Goodman demonstrates the strength and endurance of native place associations under changing economic and political conditions, while Honig describes the utility of prejudice (against Subei people) in the creation of a "Shanghai" identity. Jeffrey Wasserstrom explores the youth culture of political protest, and finds student tactics to be derivative, the acting out of inherited (or borrowed) scripts with sincerity.

Shanghai was a magnet for migrants as well as a stage for political theatrics because it was the modern economic centre of Republican China. The business of Shanghai was business. The rest of the papers receive their subject matter, in one way or another, from that overriding fact. Sherman Cochran's article, which is a major contribution to business history, describes the cut-throat competition in the match industry, and compares how three firms – a Chinese, a Japanese and a European – addressed the challenge of the Shanghai market. Brian Martin deals with cut-throats (*and* businessmen) of a different sort in researching relations between the Green Gang and the guardians of public order in the French Concession. In the one article that takes the story past 1949 to compare Republican and Communist Shanghai, Gail Hershatter describes the conflict between the biggest business of all, prostitution, and the forces of public morality in different eras. It is certainly true, as she concludes, that the Communist effort to eradicate prostitution was part of an effort to "reconstitute the family system" (p. 185); but it was also part of an effort to eradicate business, period.

The dominance of business (as opposed to labour) interests after 1927 is questioned in Elizabeth Perry's compelling narrative of strikes among the city's silk weavers in the Nanjing decade. If that study adds a new chapter to the history of Chinese labour movements, Wen-hsin Yeh's essay on Zou Taofen and "middle-brow" journalism brings us into the political culture of bourgeois Shanghai. This complex and rich article uses a newspaper's market-driven reportage and commentary as a mirror for the daily struggles of Shanghai's aspiring merchant and professional classes, while maintaining a focus on the progressivism that ultimately defined and (under the Communists) posthumously enshrined its editor.

Editors Wakeman and Yeh deserve great credit for conceiving, organizing and publishing this volume. It is already required reading in the field. It might some day serve as a model for the study of another city of sojourning vitality that may become "securely Chinese," the Hong Kong of the years 1950 to 1997.