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Abstract: In this final installment of Liu’s book, we see Shanghai at the peak of its prewar exuberance and decadence. Skyscraper architecture, every style from the West, widespread strikes—it is a time when Shanghai became both “modern” and “mass.” We follow the writers Yokomitsu Riichi, Yoshiyuki Eisuke, and others to Shanghai and back, and we learn about the many movies made in 1930s and 1940s Shanghai. We conclude with a reflective epilogue on Shanghai’s place in modern China’s and modern Japan’s cultural life, as well as self-reflective thoughts of the author on what Shanghai meant to him as a youngster growing up in Shenyang.

Demon Capital Shanghai:
The “Modern” Experience of Japanese Intellectuals¹
Liu Jianhui 劉建輝

Translated by Joshua A. Fogel

Chapter 6
The “Modern City” and the Shōwa Period

Skyscrapers and the Modern Girl

The Age of the “Modern” and the “Masses”

The establishment of modern tourism brought about the phenomenon of Japanese writers’ coming to Shanghai. This was only one compelling reason, for soon thereafter it was Shanghai itself that lured them one after the next to pay a visit. After World War I, Shanghai looked on passively at the world economic depression centered in Europe, rapidly developing its light industry and trade, and became a major urban center on a par with New York, London, and Paris. Shanghai’s own accumulation from the latter half of the nineteenth century as a semi-colonial city formed its foundation, but the immense investment of American and Japanese capital from the war years and the stunning rise of native capital both played major roles. The dramatic increase of new, domestic and foreign, capital spurred further the modernization of a city already developing, transforming the appearance of the city in the wink of an eye. We are, in a word, speaking of the coming to Shanghai of the age of the “modern” and of the “masses.”

The Appearance of Great Skyscrapers and Modern Girls

The emergence of Shanghai, the “modern city” (*modeng dushi* 摩登都市), began, generally speaking, in the 1920s. The row of neo-classical and art deco style buildings lined up on the Bund—the old Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (now the Shanghai Municipal Government), Sassoon House (now the north building of the Peace Hotel), and Broadway Mansions (now Shanghai daxia 上海大廈), among others—all symbols of modern Shanghai, were all built in this period. The group of skyscrapers along Nanjing Road symbolizing the prosperity of larger Shanghai began to emerge in outline form generally in the 1920s.

Not only tall structures, but among the entertainment establishments such as the Great World and New World, famous for their performances of all sorts of “erotic and grotesque nonsense,” greyhound races extremely rare in East Asia as a place to gamble, the Canidrome (Yiyuan baogouchang 逸園跑狗場 now the Culture Plaza) with its Hai

¹ *Mato Shanhai: Nihon chishikijin no “kindai” taiken* 魔都上海：日本知識人の「近代」体験 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2000), pp. 211-27. See also the Chinese translation by Gan Huijie, *Modu Shanghai: Riben zhishiren de “jindai” tiyan* 魔都上海：日本知识人的“近代”体验 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2003), pp. 105-13.

Alai field, the Auditorium (Zhongyang yundongchang 中央運動場, now the Luwan Gymnasium 盧灣體育館), were all, for the most part, constructed from the latter half of the 1920s into the 1930s. In addition, at its peak some three hundred shops, beginning with the “Big Four” department stores—Sincere, Wing On, Sun Sun, and Dah Sun—and the Paramount Ballroom (Bailemen wuting 百樂門舞廳), all of which played a huge role in establishing a modern commercial space along Nanjing Road, were thriving at this time; and the dance halls, large and small, symbolizing nocturnal entertainment emerged at roughly the same time period.

As for civic life in the Shanghai of this era, trends particularly for women saw the rising popularity of Western fashions in dress as well as that of the *qipao* 旗袍, influenced by Western styles and known as the “China dress,” and wearing the hair in bangs. Although bangs were for a time banned by the authorities as insidious to proper morals, under the Guomindang government bangs shot to enormous popularity as symbolic of female egotism. It was in fact female students, increasing in numbers during these years, who led these trends, not to be outdone by the “wild chickens,” those women of the night in Shanghai. The appearance of “modern girls” in large numbers was formed by means of a kind of competition between the two groups.

The nature of Shanghai at the time was deeply reflected in the glamorous *qipao* which one often sees nowadays. Based originally in the ethnic clothing of Manchu women, the contemporary *qipao* was actually invented in Shanghai of the early 1920s. With a high collar and exposing nothing of the breast, it offered traditional dignity to Chinese women, and, by contrast, with its slit up the side it did expose flesh as far as the thigh, a nod to the Western notion of looking “smart” and appealing to women’s sense of “liberation.” Thus, the unequal “direction” of the *qipao* between upper and lower halves of the body embodied the two sides, Chinese and Western, of Shanghai and was a “fusion” considered to be high class locally.

Frequent Strikes

On the other side of the coin, the period from the 1920s into the 1930s was an era in which Shanghai played host to the dramatic rise to prominence of the “masses.” Already during the years of World War I, a large number of workers flowed into the city from the neighboring countryside, but after the war this trend was spurred on even more. This was to be expected, and statistics demonstrate that in the fifteen-year period from 1914 through 1928 inclusive, the number of new factories opened in Shanghai reached 1,229, a rapid industrialization necessitating an extraordinary amount of labor power. As a result, during the decade of the 1920s, the population of Shanghai rose by nearly 1,000,000. For 1930 it is recorded as 3,145,000. Among the over 3,000,000 people, factory and transportation laborers accounted for roughly one-third. They grew to be the largest urban “force” supporting, from society’s base, a modern city undergoing continuous expansion.

Their self-assertion, a crying out of long and hard endurance against oppression to a cruel extent from many areas of society—namely, a labor movement—was to strike, the most radical means at their disposal. Such strikes throughout the 1920s erupted virtually every year, injecting “modernity” with a new content into the urban space of semi-colonial Shanghai. When these strikes brought ideology and nationalism together, their

“modernity” contained a certain radical edge, and the May Thirtieth (1925) Incident, for example, is proof positive that these labor actions continued to grow in size.

Thus, during the thirteen-year period from 1919, shortly after the conclusion of World War I, until 1932 when the first Shanghai Incident erupted, Shanghai, while embracing many “dark aspects,” went through a period of “extraordinary prosperity”² as a modern city. All of the many “modern” phenomena that materialized in this period of time could be found in any modern city in the world in the same period, for the same temporal features of “modernity” existed in New York, London, Paris, and Tokyo. Shanghai was thoroughly different from these other cities, though, in the fact that, because of its semi-colonial nature, even though it shared “modernity,” it had certain radical, garish, and indeed dark sides to it. Even compared to Tokyo, another modern East Asian city with which it was similar in many ways, Shanghai’s semi-colonial quality stood out sharply. In the 1920s Japanese writers continued to visit Shanghai, and in many cases it was in pursuit of this radical “modernity” with its seamy, dark aspects.

Modernism Extinguished

The City as Protagonist: Yokomitsu Riichi’s *Shanghai*

In April 1928 Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 (1898-1947) traveled to Shanghai. He later recalled the incentive for this trip in an essay entitled “Seianji no hibun” 静安寺の碑文 (The inscription at Jing’an Temple):

The person who told me to go see Shanghai was Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. In the year he died [1927], he said: “You have to see Shanghai.” So, the next year I traveled there.³



Yokomitsu Riichi

Why would Akutagawa, who so hated Shanghai, have encouraged him to visit Shanghai? This is rather difficult to understand. On reflection, however, because Akutagawa had grasped the distinctiveness of Shanghai so acutely, he must have

² Nym Wales (Helen Foster Snow), *My China Years: A Memoir* (New York: Morrow, 1984).

³ In *Kaizō* (October 1937).

understood full well the attraction of Shanghai as a modern city and put his likes and dislikes aside. Indeed, precisely because he understood Shanghai so well, he felt he had no choice but to speak ill of it. Perhaps, it is only natural that he had an eye on Yokomitsu, the standard-bearer of the New Sensualists, encouraging him to visit Shanghai.

Yokomitsu remained in Shanghai for precisely a month, during which time, as we noted earlier, he walked around the city, especially the Hongkou area where the resident Japanese population was concentrated, requested materials from his old friend Imataka Keitarō 今鷹瓊太郎 (an employee of the Tō-A Kōgyō Company), and seriously collected data about Shanghai. After returning to Japan, he spent about half a year preparing his novel *Shanghai* 上海 (Shanghai), which in November 1928 began to appear in the magazine *Kaizō* 改造. A variety of characters centering on the protagonist Sanki 參木 emerge in *Shanghai*. The novel is set up in such a way as if each of them is apportioned to and representative of one of the many aspects of the city. Thus, for example, Kōya 甲谷 is an agent of semi-colonial capitalism, Osugi お杉 represents the dark side of the city's practices, Miyako 宮子 the behavior of the urban elite, Takashige 高重 of Japanese capital and power, Fang Qiulan 芳秋蘭 the Chinese labor movement and revolutionary power, Yamaguchi 山口 of East Asian decadence, as well as pan-Asianism, and the Russian prostitute Olga of refugees and the cosmopolitanism of brothels.

Sanki is the one that links them all. By deepening his relationship with each of them separately, the plot unfolds whereby each of the many aspects of city life is thrown into relief through the representative person. In this sense, the novel takes shape by having Sanki wander from place to place among the characters of the story, and thus the city of Shanghai as a whole becomes the real protagonist more than any individual character.

Movements of the Protruding Mob

There are many possible reasons for why Yokomitsu chose as the temporal background for his novel not the actual period that he visited the city but specifically three years earlier at the time of the May Thirtieth Incident of 1925. By making the May Thirtieth Incident the subject matter, he proved more effective at describing the movements of the Shanghai mob. One is perforce led to believe this because of the many and distinctive portrayals of the masses in *Shanghai*. Not only does the mob protrude into scenes, but it is depicted as if acting in concert with the movement of capital and the flow of the river at symbolic levels.

The river rose up and flowed backward at high tide. The bows of motorboats, their lights out, swarmed up in a wave. Their rudders lined up. A mountain of cargo thrown off. The black legs of a wharf fettered in chains. A signal indicating calm winds rose over a weather station tower. The steeple above the customs house rose like smoke amid the evening fog. Coolies on barrels piled

up at the breakwater, becoming drenched. At the mercy of a phlegmatic wave, a torn black sail bent over and moving along slowly.⁴

Copper coins flowed from the coast to the hinterland. Silver coins began disappearing from the port. Brokers' carriages ran back and forth between Japanese and British banks. The gold market soared in response to copper and silver. Sanki's pen began to tire at converting to British pounds. At the recommendation of Takashige, he'd secured a position in the Sales Department of Asian Cotton Company. The Portuguese typist at his side was preparing a report concerning the Manchester markets. The American cotton market was up according to a note on the bulletin board. The Liverpool cotton market was being supported by Bombay futures. The smaller markets of Kutchakhandi and Tejimandi were in turn supporting the Bombay market. Sanki's principal responsibility in the Sales Department was to observe the fluctuations in these two smaller Indian cotton markets.⁵

The agitated mob was reflected completely upside down in the window glass. It was like the ocean bed from which no sky could be seen. Numerous heads were beneath shoulders and shoulders beneath feet. A bizarre, hanging canopy about to collapse, they rocked back and forth like so much seaweed. Sanki continued searching in the swaying mob hanging over him for Fang Qiulan's face.... The rivers formed by the surging crowd flooded by in front of him. The mob rising like spray amid two rivers clashed. Banners fell down upon the surging crowd. Pieces of cloth from the banners, caught among the mob's feet, were as if sucked up into the buildings.... He fell. Qiulan's feet running. Kicking out at the human flesh swooping down on him, he jumped up, and then crashed right into the butt of a gun. Plunging back into the surging mob gushing by, he again flowed on with the human wave.⁶

As noted earlier, the main players in Shanghai of the 1920s were capital and the masses. In consideration of this, while describing the modern city we can understand why Yokomitsu enthusiastically had to portray the gold and silk markets, as well as the masses in demonstrations. This was not simply "symbolic exchange" at the level of words, but his discovery of the true relationship between the two—his Shanghai experience—may be thought of as the most important yield of the novel *Shanghai*.

⁴ Yokomitsu Riichi, *Shanghai*, Chapter 1, in *Teihon Yokomitsu Riichi zenshū* 定本横光利一全集 (Collected works of Yokomitsu Riichi, definitive edition) (Tokyo: Kawade shobō, 1981), vol. 3. Translator's note. Although I have followed it, there is a translation of *Shanghai* (which I did consult) by Dennis Washburn: *Shanghai: A Novel by Yokomitsu Riichi* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2001). This citation comes from p. 3.

⁵ *Shanghai*, Chapter 19. Translation, p. 77.

⁶ *Shanghai*, Chapter 34. Translation, pp. 149-50.

Yoshiyuki Eisuke Views the Bourgeois City

On the topic of capital, there was one more Japanese writer who closely observed financial capital in Shanghai and the luxuries to which it gave rise: Yoshiyuki Eisuke 吉行エイスケ (1906-40). He once expressed his concerns about Shanghai in the following manner:

In sum, I strongly sense about China in many regards a political component that has the air of a kind of bourgeois nation. China, now falling under the control of the financial capital of various countries of the world, has emerged amid the fertilizer of a flower garden. Such is my present understanding of contemporary China.

Unlike typical statements by Eisuke, when one now reads his string of essays about Shanghai published in the early 1930s, it becomes quite clear what he was trying to articulate. In these lines, Eisuke throws into relief the luxurious reality of the bourgeois city and its strong political flavor with an abundance of sensitivity and grandiose expressions.



Yoshiyuki Eisuke

For a variety of reasons, Eisuke has recently undergone a reevaluation, but there remain a number of points unexplained amid his extraordinary activities in the 1920s and 1930s. For example, although he visited in April 1931, it is still unclear if he made any other visits before or after. Relying solely on a chronology, he seems to have come once or twice between March 1930 and April 1931, but this cannot be substantiated.

The mystery of this personal history, though, cast no shadows at all on his “insight” into Shanghai. To that extent what he had to say was magnificent and tinged with genuine vividness. Let us now take a look at several examples taken from his *Atarashiki Shanhai no puraiveeto* 新しき上海のプライベート (Private life in the new Shanghai), a collection of many of his reports from Shanghai.

It is not sometime in the far distant future that Shanghai will become the New York of the Far East. For example, as a three-dimensional line of the skyscrapers along the Bund takes shape and the vast number of cars overflows the gray surface of the ground,... looking down from the aluminum windows of the skyscrapers a magnificent capitalist city splits into two strata. I am able to recognize these two scenes below: the compact pavement and the cream of bourgeois science incessantly flowing.

Night begins to envelop the city, and heavily made-up women come to every street corner of it. At the scraping sound of the elevator cables, residents of the buildings feel the physiology of these large women who have made the city their haunt.

Concrete, steel, glass, and the lure of short skirts.⁷

In addition, a new batch of wild chickens born with the influx of modern customs emerge in profusion at the rooftop garden on the Wing On Department Store as well as the gardens of the Sincere and Sun Sun Department Stores all on Dama Road and entice some men fond of novelty with their erotic, Westernized, seductive powers.

The department stores have already closed, and coming from the side streets into and out of the hotels and gardens, when they purchase admission and elevator tickets, in the elevator going up to the rooftop garden, girls with their hair in permanent waves disheveled, at various places on the rooftop gardens as far as the Tianyun Building 天韻樓 there are stages and movie screens and gambling rooms and tea rooms all set up. Uproarious Chinese music and the sound of silver bells ringing with each spin of the gambling apparatus and violent weapons from the fights on stage and Chinese songs like the rustling of clothes of singing geisha and the commotion caused by all the spectators....

And women covered with cosmetics pulling men by their sleeves.⁸

From “Other” to “Paradise of the Kingly Way”

The energy of Shanghai that Eisuke so vividly described, however, was destroyed for a period of time about a year after his visit to the city. The so-called first Shanghai Incident of 1932 caused by the Japanese military saw a section of the city, the Zhabei region including Hongkou where most Japanese lived, turned into a battlefield. Eisuke touched briefly on the fighting in his writing about Shanghai, but the man who raised the issue front and center and turned it into a piece of writing was Naoki Sanjūgo 直木三十五 (1891-1934) in his *Nihon no senketsu, Shanhai hen* 日本の戦慄、上海篇 (Japan's trembling, Shanghai).⁹ However, the Shanghai we have been depicting has completely

⁷ “Shanghai, erochisshu kunsuto” 上海、エロチシユ・クンスト (Shanghai, erotic art), in *Atarashiki Shanhai puraiveeto* (Tokyo: Senshinsha, 1932).

⁸ “Shanghai hyaku paasento ryōki” 上海・百パーセント獵奇 (Shanghai, hunting for the 100 percent bizarre), in *Atarashiki Shanhai puraiveeto* (Tokyo: Senshinsha, 1932).

⁹ (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1932).

disappeared in this work, replaced only by the emotions and nationalism of haughty Japanese.

It was not simply a variety of statements about Shanghai by a Japanese writer that made this Shanghai disappear. In a certain sense, the meaning of Shanghai for Japanese of the past, indeed the meaning of “Shanghai” discursively, disappeared because of the war. During the fighting, the eastern and northern districts of the concessions—namely, the American Concession—was used as a “military base” by the Japanese army to attack the Chinese army, and thus the former “neutrality” of the concessions in the end lost its independent stance as it began to be pressured by the might of the “great Japanese empire.”

For example, an identity shock emerged between “Japanese” overseas and those who had “seceded” from Japan (expatriates) who, like Kishida Ginkō earlier, constituted a fair number among the resident population of the city, as almost all—with a number of exceptions—inclined toward Japan during the war years. One aspect attesting to this change was that after the war began the duties of the concession police in the eastern and northern districts were largely superseded by the Japanese naval landing party.

Once full-scale war erupted between China and Japan from 1937, things deteriorated further. Roughly from November 1937, the concession authorities began to clamp down, under pressure from the Japanese military, on all anti-Japanese publications. Ultimately from 1939 a branch office of the Japanese military police was set up in the concessions, and all anti-Japanese activities of any kind were banned. Without the outbreak of the Pacific War following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the joint concession was completely “confiscated” by the Japanese military, and in every region in Shanghai, including the French Concession which had preserved an “independent” appearance to this point, implementation of “household registration” and the “neighborhood association system” were begun. By this time, the Shanghai we have been discussing had completely disappeared, replaced by the single enclosure of “the paradise of the kingly way.”

In these years, Shanghai as a city continued to maintain its “brisk activity” as before through the investment of capital from the Chinese hinterland away from Japan and the war. Statistics indicate that, in fact, it enjoyed unprecedented prosperity until just before the start of the Pacific War. Although this was of economic significance to Japan and many Japanese, the spiritual sense in which it had functioned until then as an “other” was largely gone.

Shanghai as a site that relativized *naichi* 内治 (domestic) Japan, a role it had continuously played for over half a century from the Meiji era, from the time that it became involved in the expanding *naichi*, no longer a subject for “romance,” and while it was a place yearned for, it was transformed into a thoroughly realistic site in which to get rich quickly. More than for modern expatriates from Japan, the great majority of Japanese were followers. In the end their existence in the city made Shanghai one of Japan’s many overseas territories. In this connection the number of Japanese in Shanghai during the war is said to have reached as many as 100,000, but it remains highly doubtful the extent to which past relations between the two could be rebuilt.

Aside from a few exceptions, “Shanghai” remarkably faded from the conscious world of the Japanese.

* * * * *

Epilogue Japan as Seen from Shanghai

“Longed for Shanghai”

The ship sets sail from here. It’s an enjoyable trip over the sea,
To Shanghai which I’ve seen in dreams.
Courageously we cross the South China Sea.
The street-vendor’s flute crying in the evening fog,
The flying albatross weeping.
A red lamp quivers invitingly.
Shanghai! Longed for Shanghai.

We’re going to the Mainland, a rose-colored dawn,
The white sail of youth ascends,
Verdant willow on the Yangzi River.
Dama Road and Sima Road blossom like flowers at night.
A red lamp quivers invitingly.
Shanghai! Longed for Shanghai.

We sailors earn our living on stormy seas,
Singing a little tune as we cross the China Sea under moonlight.
The flying fish in the sea, migratory birds,
The roaring, stormy sea makes our hearts dance.
The dreamlike harbor is close now.
A red lamp quivers invitingly.
Shanghai! Longed for Shanghai.

This piece, entitled “Shanghai kōro” 上海航路 (Sea route to Shanghai), was composed in 1938 by Saijō Yaso 西條八十 (1892-1970), a poet of the Shōwa period (1926-89) and well-known composer of popular songs.¹⁰ In fact, in the Shōwa period, numerous songs, over twenty in all, were composed in Japan with Shanghai as the theme. Examples would include the following: “Shanghai kouta” 上海小唄 (Ballad of Shanghai; lyrics by Kadota Ruika 門田涙花 and music by Satsuki Sei さつき生), a song from the play, *Shanghai yawa* 上海夜話 (Shanghai evening chat) of 1927, starring Kajiwara Kajō 梶原華嬢, at the Ichiza Theater; “Saraba Shanghai” さらば上海 (Farewell Shanghai; lyrics by Shigure Otowa 時雨音羽 [1899-1980] and music by Koga Masao 古賀正男 [1904-78], 1932), theme song to the movie *Shanghai* produced by the Nikatsu Corporation; “Shanghai miyage” 上海みやげ (Shanghai souvenir; music by Hattori Ryōichi 服部良一 [1907-93], 1938), based on lyrics by Saijō Yaso; “Shina no yoru” 支

¹⁰ Lyrics by Saijō Yaso and music by Takeoka Nobuyuki 竹岡信幸 (1907-85), “Shanghai kōro” (1938).

那の夜 (China nights; music by Takeoka Nobuyuki and lyrics by Saijō Yaso, 1938); “Shanghai dayori” 上海だより (News from Shanghai; music by Mikai Minoru 三界稔 [1901-61] and lyrics by Satō Sōnosuke 佐藤惣之助 [1890-1942], 1938); “Shanghai no machikado de” 上海の街角で (On a Shanghai street corner; music by Yamada Eiichi 山田榮一 [1906-95] and lyrics by Satō Sōnosuke, 1938); “Shanghai kaeri no Riru” 上海歸りのリル (Lil returned to Shanghai; lyrics by Tōjō Jusaburō 東條壽三郎 [1920-2003] and music by Tokuchi Masanobu 渡久地政信 [1916-98], 1951), a major postwar hit for a time.¹¹

Aside from those decidedly war-related items, what is repeatedly intoned in these songs is, as we see in the song cited above, “Shanghai.” The longing felt for Shanghai is sung of in such lyrics as: “Rira no hanachiru” リラの花散る (The lilacs have all fallen and scattered),¹² “Yume no Shibarō” 夢の四馬路 (Sima Road in my dreams),¹³ “Tsuki mo etoranze” 月もエトランゼ (The moon is a stranger, too),¹⁴ and “Tanoshi uta no machi” 楽し唄の街 (City of happy songs),¹⁵ among others.

The dark side of Shanghai that we have thus far seen was neatly swept away, and lovely tales of sadness and joy between men and women were told and retold. Shanghai “invited” them like a “red light” swaying. There was, of course, a kind of manipulation going on here to create songs as such, but this manipulation also gave expression to the truth about the Japanese “mindset” vis-à-vis Shanghai.

The Two “Faces” of the West

From the middle of the nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth, Japanese indeed continued to entertain a sense of longing for Shanghai for about one hundred years. What this entailed changed over time, and many were the dreams that were made of it. Thus, through the Meiji Restoration, Japan and the Japanese were largely attracted to the “modern” aspect of Shanghai. After the Meiji Restoration, however, they appear to have been lured by its “anti-modern” aspect. This division is ultimately, of course, for convenience sake in clarifying my argument; in fact, a “longing” for or “lure” toward existed in both eras. In the “confusion” brought about by the intersection between the two, many people’s “blood became excited.”¹⁶

¹¹ Translator’s note. Thanks to those who have posted them on Youtube, these songs can be heard, often in the original recordings or from scenes from movies in which they were performed. (JAF)

¹² Satō Sōnosuke, lyrics, and Yamada Eiichi, music, “Shanghai no machikado de” (1938).

¹³ From “Yogiri no burūzu” 夜霧ブルーズ (Night fog blues), words by Shimada Keiya 島田馨也, music by Ōkubo Tokujirō 大久保徳二郎, theme song to the Matsutake 松竹 movie, “Jigoku no kao” 地獄の顔 (Face of hell, 1947).

¹⁴ From “Shanghai burūzu” 上海ブルーズ (Shanghai blues), words by Kitamura Yūzō 北村雄三, music by Ōkubo Tokujirō (1939).

¹⁵ From “Shanghai yofune” 上海夜船 (Shanghai night boat), words by Saijō Yaso, music by Hattori Ryōichi (1941).

¹⁶ From “Yogiri no burūzu,” cited above.

While treating the changes that transpired over time, I have using the great “transformation” borne of the Meiji Restoration in the relationship between Shanghai and Japan and the Japanese who were always trying to locate their new dreams on this soil. To make this process clearer, let me now rehearse the argument thus far.

In his historical novel, *Ryōma ga yuku* 竜馬がゆく ([Sakamoto] Ryōma is coming), Shiba Ryōtarō 司馬遼太郎 (1923-96) conjectured about the mindset at the time that Sakamoto Ryōma 坂本龍馬 (1836-67) first traveled to Nagasaki: “The clouds of Tosa appeared from Mount Ishizuchi, but the clouds of Nagasaki came flowing from the distant East China Sea.” The East China Sea in this instance included Shanghai on its other shore, and Sakamoto Ryōma tried to find the “future” of Japan there. At least, author Shiba Ryōtarō apparently came to this recognition. It is hard to say how true such a statement may be, but the episode as described by Shiba has a highly symbolic meaning. That is, the Shanghai at which Ryōma gazed at the time across the sea embodied a “modernity,” albeit incomplete, from Japan’s distant perspective. With over twenty years of management by the Western powers, it was as well a semi-forced phenomenon centered in the Concessions. To a certain extent, capitalism had already permeated the city, and by hook or by crook a modern urban space was in the process of being forged.

As we touched on in the first chapter, from two years earlier Takasugi Shinsaku and numerous other Japanese samurai, all deeply concerned about the same “future,” had already experienced modernity in a variety of forms at the same time that they had come to investigate it in Shanghai. Not only did they “evince surprise at the prosperous spectacle” attained by Western civilization, but they also clearly recognized this within the structure of Concession “Shanghai” oppressing walled-city “Shanghai.”

Neither of these two faces of the “West” that emerged so close at hand could be looked on nonchalantly by Japanese warriors who eventually began to focus their gaze on the “outside” world. By the same token, as an expected result rooted in its capitalist nature, semi-modern Shanghai continually extended its tentacles to geographically nearby Japan as it intersected with the concerns about it raised by these warriors. In concrete terms, this would mean that, although a great deal of information about the West was transmitted to Japan, the knowledge conveyed in the many Western works translated into Chinese by missionaries not only opened the eyes of Japanese to “Western civilization,” but also offered a perspective on or an image of the nation modeled on the various Western powers. In this sense, as noted in chapters two and three, the very existence of Shanghai at the time served as a triggering device for “modernity” in Japan and influenced in no small way its new jumping off as a “state.”

The Dream of Escaping Japan

Now, the role played by Shanghai for Japan began to change rapidly once we enter the Meiji period. Once Japan itself began to champion the cause of “civilization and enlightenment” and to introduce modern institutions directly from the West, Shanghai as a “stopover point” effectively ceased to have meaning. There was, though, a more basic reason for this. For Meiji Japan which was promoting a cohesive “nation-state” based upon nationalism, semi-colonial Shanghai “modernity” which utterly lacked a national identity indeed posed a kind of “threat” and ceased completely to serve as the

“front lines” of Western civilization and hence be an object worthy of respect, as it had been in the past.

While Shanghai continued to convey to Japan in the late Edo period all manner of information about the “modern state,” its significance for Japan changed completely with the formation of the Meiji state. Shanghai now transcended the nationalism of the “modern nation” in a sense; it belonged to no particular nation—not China, not Japan, and not the nations of the West. It was completely “free” and new terrain, though burdened with this altogether new role. Seen from the more “closed off” Japan where the leadership of the modern state was gradually becoming stronger, it became an object in which romance was vested, a land suitable for the realization of one’s dreams of “adventure.”

Although Shanghai from the 1870s ceased to exert much formal influence on Japan as “state,” for many Japanese who dreamed of “escaping from Japan” this chaotic, “modern” city was undeniably the closest “site of refuge” as well as the closest “paradise.” From the Meiji period forward, then, numerous Japanese traveled to Shanghai, but aside from a small group sent publicly to advance onto the mainland, what most visitors sought on this soil was a form of “modernity” unlike that of their “homeland” (*naichi* 内地). Indeed, it essentially functioned as an instrument to relativize the far more “uniform” Japan.

From Adventure to Modernity

In this way, then, Japanese from the Meiji era forward, who were oriented toward denying Japanese-style modernity and trying to escape from it, were attracted to the “anti-modernity” or “anti-nation-state” that Shanghai constituted. Yet, as a general classification, Shanghai was used in each era to fulfill differences in romance, taste, and modernity. In various settings, these three items, of course, overlapped, and one cannot necessarily delineate among them clearly. The dreams that Japanese located in this place, though, did change subtly as Shanghai developed in stages as a city.

In the Meiji period, for example, as sites at which the same “civilization and enlightenment” was evolving, a variety of ties between Shanghai and Japan developed. Shanghai, though, was increasingly becoming the object from which Japanese might “set out on an adventure on the Mainland.” As we noted in chapter four, in almost parallel fashion both Japan and Shanghai were pursuing “Western modernity.” The directions in which the two advanced, however, were altogether different: the former firmly a “nation-state,” and the latter with the vague identity of a city with “mixed Chinese and foreign residence.” Thus, many Meiji Japanese who sought escape held onto numerous “dreams” that they could never realize at home and pursued them in the “new terrain” of the Chinese Mainland, in particular the “international city” of Shanghai.

According to statistics compiled by the Japanese Consulate in Shanghai, there were 4,973 Japanese living in the city as of February 1906 (Meiji 39)—by no means a high number. Looking at their professions, though, from employees of the great banking houses to courtesans in the tea houses, many different sorts of people had taken up residence in the city. Many of them—as suggested by the case of Kishida Ginkō—had come to this “free” terrain to “make a name for themselves.” Their “success stories” served to beckon newer “adventurers” to make the trip.

In the Taishō era, in addition to these groups of “adventurers,” a new group of visitors appeared who sought the enjoyment of urban life in chaotic Shanghai. Behind all this, when the modern city of Shanghai which came into existence in the latter half of the nineteenth century entered this era, an increasingly thriving environment unfolded with the investment of domestic and foreign capital and increased population. And, the preeminent pleasure quarters in the entire world emerged there. In addition, roughly from the latter half of the Meiji period, with the development of the new “institution” of tourism in both China and Japan came a brief era of comfortable travel between the two.

The establishment of tourism made travel possible not for one’s livelihood as in the past, but for the enjoyment of travel itself. It also made Shanghai that much “closer” for Japanese writers and other intellectuals. In this connection, then, in the Taishō era various instances of “decadence” in Shanghai, as we saw in chapter five, suddenly appeared. While the “adventurers” and “decadents” ceaselessly made their way to Shanghai, in the Shōwa era we find Japanese fascinated by the “modern” space that now suddenly emerged there, trying to turn this new “imaginative energy” developing for them in Shanghai into a source of nutrients for themselves.

A “modern” space in Japan—first and foremost in Tokyo—flourished at about the same time. Shanghai, however, as we have noted several times, possessed a certain radicalness, a certain garishness, as well as a dark side, to its modernity due to its Creole nature and to the “mass” and bustling labor movement that had developed so rapidly there. One “found” there a rare kind of “modernity,” and one could bring this back to Japan as a source of “nourishment,” as was the case for a number of Japanese writers, such as Yokomitsu Riichi whom we examined in chapter six.

Shanghai as “Other”

Thus, in the century from the 1840s through the 1930s, Shanghai played many different roles for Japan and the Japanese. Although these roles were complex and cannot easily be summarized, in a word one might say that it served as an immense, external “other” continually relativizing Japan as a state and Japanese as individuals. Because of this immense “other” just across the sea, Japan greeted “modernity” earlier, and individual Japanese who crossed the sea could experience a richer way of life.

Needless to say, there may have been many other spaces that served as “others” over the course of this century for Japan. Yet, seen from the length of the period under discussion and from the scale of those who made the voyage, Shanghai holds a surpassing place. Although it may be a stretch, the clarity of the relationship between Shanghai and Japan constitutes an important key toward understanding modern Japan. Thus, tracing the Shanghai experiences of individuals and locating the changes in the mindset of modern Japanese are utterly essential tasks. For a long period now Shanghai has been described by many people, but for all the above reasons the depictions continue. To be sure, many more stories must be told.

* * * * *

Afterward

This story goes back my youth. It was the early 1970s and the Cultural Revolution had not yet come to an end. As a measure aimed at addressing the severe shortage of foodstuffs in China at the time, a rationing system like that used during the war with Japan was adopted. If you wanted to purchase ordinary, everyday items—to say nothing of durable consumer goods—one had to have a ration coupon for the item. It was extremely difficult to obtain such coupons, and depending on the case at hand it might take years to acquire one.

One day my father, through some connection I was unaware of, got a ration coupon for a “Yongjiu” 永久 (“everlasting”) automobile. The “Yongjiu car” was so famous at the time that every Chinese knew of it. The maker was, needless to say, the Shanghai Automobile Manufacture Company. Obtaining a coupon for such a “famous car” was a major event in our household. Quickly a family meeting was convened, and someone argued at great length about how the car would be used. Of course, the first to be deprived of the right to make use of the car was me, a mere elementary school student at the time.

While all this was transpiring, the actual “Yongjiu car” was delivered to our home. This was cause for a huge tumult. The number of people in the immediate vicinity who came to look at the “famous car” was endless, and it went on for days. They all stared in wonderment, all mouths saying “made in Shanghai.” It was not that Shanghai was the only city in China, but more on the order of its being so far away from us, as if a foreign land beyond our reach. For a short time, because of this car, I traveled to many local places and was the envy of my friends, and indeed I was quite proud of my “connection” to Shanghai.

My family lived in the city of Shenyang in China’s northeast. It was a key transportation point through which one had to pass if going from the northeast to the south. During the Cultural Revolution, urban youth in China upon graduating from high school were sent down (*xiafang* 下放) to rural villages to steel themselves in body and spirit. Shanghai youth for the most part were “sent down” to the far northern corner of China, Heilongjiang Province. One time at the lunar new year, they came through our city on a train heading toward their hometown of Shanghai. Each time they passed through, their behavior became a topic of conversation. Although a relatively small number of people, they occupied an entire train, and they had milk chocolate (also made in Shanghai) which always seemed to be in their mouths and which we could not have afforded everyday. What surprised those of us living in such an out-of-the-way place most of all was that boys and girls were nonchalantly kissing in public.

Of course, being only an elementary school pupil, I did not witness any of the behavior of the Shanghai youths with my own eyes. For me it was all rumor. After the “Yongjiu car” incident, though, I was completely overcome by the power of “Shanghai,” and not only did I assume that these rumors were all completely true, but I took exception to the criticism of the people around me in the city about the kissing and quietly longed for Shanghai, the city in which such simple and wild “human beings” lived.

As I think back on it now, the people of Shenyang who were so antithetical to the behavior of the youngsters from Shanghai, all of us had undoubtedly replaced unconsciously the “West” and “modernity” with “Shanghai.” For example, whenever Shanghai or the people of Shanghai came up in conversation, we often used the figure of speech *yang* 洋 (foreign). Literally, *yang* meant “western style,” meaning a streetscape of “western-style” stores and shops or the “western style” of a person’s speech or adornment.

Just as a “Shanghai brand” would always surpass any “domestic” product, the city and people of Shanghai were somehow always separate from China. Compared to “local” people, Shanghai people were perceived as closer to the West or to some foreign land. At least this sense was planted in my youthful mind.

I actually visited Shanghai for the first time nearly twenty years ago in 1986. I had already spent three years as a student in Japan, and using the opportunity of returning home during summer vacation, I made this solo voyage of “returning abroad” to finally travel to the “foreign terrain” on Chinese soil. I went by ship.

I boarded the *Jianzhen* 鑑真號 to make the short trip between Japan and China, following a well-trod route of many Japanese of the past, sailing up the Yangzi and Huangpu Rivers until we reached a spot near the Bund. Probably because I had already seen so many tall buildings in Japan, I was not overly impressed by the sight of the Bund which had so moved people visiting Shanghai by ship earlier. As soon as I alighted and walked for a time in the city, I was stupefied by the extraordinary, distinctive atmosphere.

Clearly alien to the traditional norm of the Chinese homeland in which I had been raised and far from the cramped order which I had experienced in Japan, I found here what might be called a kind of “modern chaos.” A huge map floated to the surface of my mind. On it was drawn East Asia with Shanghai at the center, with the Chinese homeland in which I had lived as a boy on one side and Japan in which I was then living on the other. Although not at all out of the ordinary, I sensed that this “modern chaos” of Shanghai was born of two “spaces”—the homeland and the foreign land of China—and at the time, I only knew Japan.

This Shanghai “modernity” existed nowhere in the Chinese homeland, a phenomenon it shared with modern cities in Japan and other countries, but this “chaos” was clearly something that had emerged after the collapse of modern China’s own pattern. Amid this “modern chaos” was a highly seductive “freedom” to be found neither in the Chinese interior nor in the modern cities of other countries. As I think back on it now, what made me unable to move at the time was the atmosphere of “freedom” engendered by this “modern chaos.”

Beginning with this first trip to Shanghai in 1986, I have since visited the city on many occasions, sometimes from the Chinese interior and sometimes crossing from Japan. I have tried approaching it by different modes of transport: by train, by ship, and by airplane. Each time my impression differs slightly by virtue of the approach. Also, by relying on friends I can observe Shanghai from within, and that makes my perceptions of the city all the richer.

The more these experiences mount, the more my sense of the city when I first alighted on Shanghai soil, far from requiring revising, is actually all the more enforced. Even today that map centered on Shanghai born of my youthful sense of things continues to live on within my head. In this sense, then, this book was written on the basis of my

youthful “intuition” and the “knowledge” acquired over nearly ten years of research on Shanghai. The decision to write this volume came just five years ago (1995). After listening to my talk, entitled “Mato taiken, bungaku ni okeru Nihonjin to Shanhai” 魔都体験：文学における日本人と上海 (Experiences in the demon capital, the Japanese and Shanghai in literature), at a joint research seminar at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto, Mr. Tsujihara Noboru 辻原登, an author and recipient of the Akutagawa Prize who was a member of the seminar,¹⁷ said that the content of my report might make a book, and he provided me with the contacts gained from his own work.

Thereafter, as I traveled back and forth between Japan and China like a migratory bird, I wrestled with the enormous mountain of materials on Shanghai. No matter how I worked at it, though, this mountain showed no sign whatsoever of diminishing. I have incurred a great debt during the writing of this book to the publishing department of the series Kōdansha sensho 講談社選書 (Kodansha’s Selection). Due to my extremely slow writing, my initial contact person, Mr. Fujioka Keiji 藤岡啓司, and his replacement, Mr. Matsumoto Kazuhiko 松本和彦, ultimately moved to other departments and did not see this volume to completion. I owe them apologies.

Responsibility then fell to Mr. Tokorozawa Jun 所澤淳, and on numerous occasions I had to ask him for extensions to deadlines. During this time, he both tightened and slackened the reins, leading me expertly to this conclusion. Without his warm encouragement and his knack for being able to prod me, this book would never have come to fruition. I offer him heartfelt thanks.

April 2000

¹⁷ Translator’s note. Tsujihara Noboru won the coveted Akutagawa Prize in January 1990. It is awarded in January and July every year for works by young authors, usually for first major works.