

New Narratives of Urban Space
in Republican Chinese Cities

Brill's Series on Modern East Asia in a Global Historical Perspective

Edited by

Billy K. L. So, *Hong Kong University of
Science and Technology*
Madeleine Zelin, *Columbia University*

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New Narratives of Urban Space in Republican Chinese Cities

Emerging Social, Legal and Governance Orders

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Bickers is Professor of History, University of Bristol. He works on the history of Sino-foreign relations, and of the British Empire, and he is the author of *Britain in China: Community, Culture, and Colonialism* (Manchester, 1999), *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (Allen Lane, 2003), and *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832–1914* (Allen Lane, 2011). He has also edited or coedited a number of books, including *The Boxers, China, and the World* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2007, with R. G. Tiedemann), *May Days in Hong Kong: Riot and Emergency in 1967* (Hong Kong University Press, 2009, with Ray Yep), and *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas* (Oxford University Press, 2010). He is Director of the British Inter-University China Centre and has led projects studying the history of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service and colonialism in comparative perspective, as well as the Historical Photographs of China Project (<http://chp.vcea.net/>).

Federica Ferlanti is Lecturer in Modern Chinese History at Cardiff University. Her research field is Republican history and specifically China's state building and political history during the 1930s and 1940s. She has published on the New Life Movement, state building, and civilian mobilization (*Modern Asian Studies*, 2010). She is currently preparing a monograph that analyzes politics and civilian mobilization in Nationalist China.

Antonia Finnane is Professor of History at the University of Melbourne, with a research specialization in the social and cultural history of early modern and modern China. Her publications include *Speaking of Yangzhou: A Chinese City, 1550–1850* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), winner of the 2006 Levenson award for a work on pre-twentieth-century China, and *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, Nation, History* (Columbia University Press, 2008). She is at present serving as associate editor (pre-1898 China) for the *Journal of Asian Studies*. Her current research concerns the impact of Maoism on small shops in Beijing during the periods of “socialist transformation” and the Cultural Revolution.

John Fitzgerald is Truby and Florence Williams Chair of Social Investment and Philanthropy at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. His publications include *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 1996), which won a Levenson award for twentieth-century China, and *Big*

White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia (University of New South Wales Press, 2007), awarded an Ernest Scott Prize by the Australian Historical Association for the most distinguished work on Australian history. His research focuses on Chinese political and administrative history and the history of the Chinese diaspora.

Jan Kieley is Associate Professor of Chinese Studies and Associate Director of the Centre for China Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He was formerly Co-Director and Professor of Chinese Studies at the Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies. A specialist in twentieth-century Chinese history with a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, he is the author of a number of articles and a forthcoming monograph on prison thought reform.

Michael Hoi Kit Ng is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law of the University of Hong Kong. He specializes in Chinese legal history, historical GIS, corporate and investment law. His works have appeared in the *International Journal of Asian Studies*, *Journal of Comparative Law*, *Hong Kong Law Journal* and *Annals of GIS*, among others. He has also authored a book on foreign direct investment in contemporary China, which is forthcoming from Routledge.

Brett Sheehan is Associate Professor of Chinese History at the University of Southern California. His research focuses on the intersection of business and economy with social, political, and cultural phenomena. He is the author of *Trust in Troubled Times: Money, Banking, and State-Society Relations in Republican Tianjin, 1916–1937* (Harvard University Press, 2003), as well as numerous articles and book chapters. He is currently working on a book exploring the relationship between authoritarian developmental states and capitalism in China from about 1900 to 1952.

Billy K. L. So is Chair Professor of Humanities at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and was formerly Chair Professor of History and Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Author of *Prosperity, Region, and Institutions in Maritime China* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), coeditor of *Power and Identity in the Chinese World Order* (Hong Kong University Press, 2003) and *The Treaty Port Economy in Modern China: Empirical Studies of Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley, 2011), and editor of *The Economy of Lower Yangzi Delta in Late Imperial China: Connecting Money, Markets, and Institutions* (Routledge, 2012), he specializes in Chinese economic history, historical GIS, legal history, and business history. His works have appeared in *T'oung Pao*, *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, *Journal*

of the *Economic and Social History of the Orient*, and the *Annals of GIS*, among others.

Pierre-Étienne Will is Chair of the History of Modern China at the Collège de France and is Directeur d'études at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. He specializes in the socioeconomic and political history of late imperial and early Republican China. He has published *Bureaucracy and Famine in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford, 1990; original French edition Paris, 1980; Korean and Chinese translations), *Nourish the People: The State Civilian Granary System in China, 1650–1850* (Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1991, with R. Bin Wong), several edited volumes, including *China, Democracy, and Law: A Historical and Contemporary Approach* (Brill, 2011, with Mireille Delmas-Marty; original French edition Paris, 2007), and numerous articles on the Chinese economy, society, politics, bureaucracy, law, water management, and more. He is currently completing *Official Handbooks and Anthologies of Imperial China: A Descriptive and Critical Bibliography* (Leiden, forthcoming). He heads the Collège de France Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises and is coeditor of the journal *T'oung Pao*.

Madeleine Zelin (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 1979) is Dean Lung Professor of Chinese Studies and Director of the East Asian National Resource Center at Columbia University. She served as Director of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute in 1992 and 1993 and from 1995 to 2001. Her research has focused on China's historical process of state building, elite formation, business organization and investment, and the development of early modern customary and statutory law governing private transactions. In addition to her numerous articles and book chapters, she is the author of *The Magistrate's Tael: Rationalizing Fiscal Reform in Eighteenth-Century Ch'ing China* (University of California Press, 1984), the English translator of Mao Dun's *Rainbow* (University of California Press, 1992), and coeditor and author of *Contract and Property Rights in Early Modern China* (Stanford University Press, 2004). Her 2005 book, *The Merchants of Zigong: Industrial Entrepreneurship in Early Modern China* (Columbia University Press), was awarded the Alan Sharlin Memorial Prize of the Social Science History Association, the John K. Fairbank Prize of the American Historical Association, and the Humanities Prize of the International Conference on Asian Studies. She is currently working on a book on the cultural, political, and economic forces that shaped China's early twentieth-century civil law reforms.

Harriet Zurndorfer is Senior Research Scholar at the Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. She is the founder and managing editor of the

journal *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in China* (published since 1999) and is the former editor of the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*. She specializes in the socioeconomic history of Ming-Qing China and gender history and has authored *Change and Continuity in Chinese Local History: The Development of Hui-chou Prefecture, 800 to 1800* (Brill, 1989), and *China Bibliography: A Research Guide to Reference Works about China Past and Present* (Brill, 1995; paperback, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), and many journal articles and book reviews. She has also edited *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives* (Brill, 1999) and coedited *Conflict and Accommodation in Early Modern East Asia* (Brill, 1993), *Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China* (Brill, 2001), and *Roots and Routes of Development in China and India* (Brill, 2008).

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¹ The conference is itself an outcome of a research project (code: 450407) funded by the Research Grant Council of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region, PRC.

² Su Jilang 蘇基朗 (Billy K. L. So) ed., *Zhongguo jindai chengshiwenhua de dongtaifa-zhen: Renwen kongjian de xinshiye* 中國近代城市文化的動態發展: 人文空間的新視野 [Urban Space and Cultural Dynamics in Modern Chinese Cities] (Beijing: Zhejiang University Press, 2012); Billy K. L. So and David W. Wong, eds. "Historical Mapping and GIS: Special Issue." *Annals of GIS* 18.1 (2012).

to publish exquisite photographs from their archives in Chapter 8 of this volume. Despite all of the wonderful assistance we received, we admit that errors likely remain, for which we editors and contributors are solely responsible.

B.K.L.S. and M.Z.
October 5, 2012

PART THREE

GOVERNANCE ORDER

CHAPTER EIGHT

BRITISH CONCESSIONS AND CHINESE CITIES, 1910s–1930s

Robert Bickers

As the 1911 Revolution (*Xinhai geming* 辛亥革命) erupted, a British diplomat was preparing an on-the-spot investigation of the terms on which British concessions and settlements in Chinese cities were operating, as well as conditions on the ground. Beilby Alston was heading out to Beijing as acting legation counsellor, but had recently been working on an inter-departmental Treasury committee that was considering the general question of concession leases in China. It had been a half century since the Treaty of Tianjin, which had opened up a second tranche of Chinese ports to foreign residence, and so it was a midway point in the ninety-nine-year leases granted to lot holders in the British concessions at Hankou, Canton, Tianjin, Jiujiang, and Zhenjiang. A query about the future of the British lease at Tianjin had been received from Chartered Bank, which was planning to redevelop its site and rebuild its premises there. Before making what would be a substantial investment, the bank wanted to get some clear vision of its future, for at that point its lease would expire in 1961 or 1962.¹ The propriety of holding concessions was hardly being questioned by any power, and certainly not by the British, and in the first decade of the twentieth century six substantive new foreign concessions had been established, mostly in Tianjin.² Russia, Germany, Belgium, Austria, and Italy had all joined the fray. As late as the early 1920s, settlement expansion was still the policy of the International Settlement administration at Shanghai (the Shanghai Municipal Council).³ But increasingly, concessions

¹ Technically, as we shall see, it was a sublease, not a lease.

² On the scale of these new initiatives at Hankou, see Customs, *Decennial Reports on the Trade, Industries, etc. of the Ports Open to Foreign Commerce and on the Condition and Development of the Treaty Port Provinces, 1902–1911* (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1913), 1:361–362. “Substantive” might sometimes be a misleading term: “Fancy Austria having a large concession at Tientsin. Austria with only one solitary subject and he a German and no trade except in perfumed soap and unperfumed sausages” (G. E. Morrison to Valentine Chirol, 9 December 1906, in Lo Hui-min, ed., *Correspondence of G. E. Morrison* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976], 1:397).

³ Isabella Jackson, ‘Expansion and Defence in the International Settlement at Shanghai’, in Robert Bickers and Jon Howlett, eds., *Britain and China, 1840–1970: Empire, Finance and War* (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2013).

and settlements presented complex problems that belied their seemingly simple rationale, as safe havens on Chinese soil for foreign trade.

Alston's resulting memorandum, which outlined his initial recommendations, contained a useful survey of the overall legal position of the British concessions in China, outlining in particular the variegated nature of arrangements underpinning the strings of Little Britain's along the coast and the Yangzi River. While for diplomatic purposes Alston's note was a "Memorandum . . . respecting British concessions in China," its term covered a multitude of forms and practices. Those publicizing the British presence in China to a metropolitan or international audience wrote easily of what appeared to be a network of sites of varying size, but of seemingly equivalent status. Each had its own municipal council, British consulate, public garden, and bund. There was a club, or two, a Masonic lodge, and a cemetery. In the nearby highlands was a summer resort; somewhere close by there was a racetrack. There was a police force, enforcing a set of local bylaws and municipal regulations, perhaps a newspaper, and certainly the branch offices of the usual firms: Butterfield & Swire, Jardine, Matheson & Co., British American Tobacco, the Asiatic Petroleum Company, Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Chartered Bank. These firms steadily rotated their British personnel from port to port around their networks of offices, but some Britons and their families lived and worked for decades in a single port, forming the core of the British community in each place. This was a British world on Chinese soil, which had a multinational if not a cosmopolitan flavor, and which could be neatly packaged up for observers and potential investors and recruits, through such vehicles as the 1908 volume *Twentieth Century Impressions of Hong-Kong, Shanghai, and Other Treaty Ports of China*.⁴

In that heavily illustrated and richly-detailed book they certainly look like little versions of the colonies covered in the rest of the series, the pages showing busy urban settler enclaves cut off from their host cities, and strictly under British control. The literature on modern Chinese history has reified an odd mix of publicists' representations like this, and political discourse, making mountains out of what were, in most cases, most of the time, molehills. As this essay will argue, these concessions were generally spatially open, and British control weaker than has been assumed. They were small, and far less robust than they looked. We can

⁴ On this world, see my *Britain in China: Community, Culture, and Colonialism, 1900–49* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). On the dangers of 'cosmopolitan' as a descriptor in this context see my 'Incubator city: Shanghai and the crises of empires', *Journal of Urban History*, 38:5 (2012), 862–78.

assess this through case studies of significant confrontations over them between British and Chinese diplomats (especially as the 1921–22 Washington Naval Conference placed the renegotiation of the nineteenth century Sino-Foreign treaties firmly on the agenda), and between the concessions (and the British state) and different Chinese interests. These included Chinese municipal administrations in the cities concerned, local interests groups, Chinese concession residents, and the always far greater numbers of urban inhabitants or visitors who worked in or traversed the concessions which pocked the cities concerned.

The essay will look in turn at the underlying legal basis on which the concessions were held, and administered, and contestation of concession policies over gates and walls, at the relationship between these zones and Chinese urban redevelopment in the 1920s in particular, and at the behaviour and competence of British administrative personnel and other concession employees. The essay aims to place these concessions back into the cities in which they were sited, arguing that the relationship was not founded on any glorious British isolation, but on dynamic interaction within which Chinese interests confronted the fundamental insecurities of the British position. It also aims to link them again with the rivers and riverine networks of which they were outgrowths.

First we have to understand what they were, precisely, and how they worked. For a start the apparent uniformity masked some fundamental differences among these outposts. Indeed, the very terms used (“settlement,” “concession”) needed clarifying, for although still used interchangeably by many (as indeed they often are in Chinese today, both being represented by *zujie* 租界), there were precise technical differences. Alston found no standardized use of terms before 1861: “settlement” and “concession” were used interchangeably (so too, early on, was “ground”). Thereafter, a more regular distinction was made between concessions—sites of state-to-state leasing arrangements, and then subleasing by that foreign state to its nationals—and settlements, where land was leased directly by foreigners from Chinese owners within a zone set aside by local or international agreement. While concession leases were mostly ninety-nine years (except at Niuzhuang), settlement leases were perpetual, or for 999 years. Even there, that leasing at prevailing market rates may or may not originally have been entirely voluntary. Clearly at Hankou, in the aftermath of the 1857–1860 war, it was not.⁵ However, as Alston noted, land transfers

⁵ Britten Dean, “Sino-British Diplomacy in the 1860s: The Establishment of the British Concession at Hankow,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 32 (1972): 71–96.

in some British concessions actually followed the settlement model. In general, the international and local agreements or arrangements underpinning these urban outposts lacked uniformity in underlying principles or even in practical implementation. And not all treaty ports contained a concession or settlement, while some concessions and settlements that had been laid out in treaty, and even laid out on the ground, were never or barely developed (Nanning, for example), the reach of the treaty drafters and lobbyists outstripping the grasp of the trading interests needed to establish a viable presence.⁶ The British communities at Fuzhou or at Yantai each outnumbered that of at least three of the British concessions combined. Extraterritoriality followed Britons into any Chinese city in which they resided, and most-favored-nation clauses generally gave them a functional level of access to opportunities opened up by other foreign powers. The British concession formed part of the repertoire of British practice in China, but never an exclusive one, and never generally an exclusive one in the cities directly concerned.

The concessions needed sorting out, regardless, and garnered more attention than they might otherwise practically have deserved. Setting aside Shanghai and Tianjin, and to a lesser extent Hankou, most of these British concessions, like most foreign concessions in China, were relatively tiny. Their consideration in the urban history of China might therefore seem as lacking in effective relevance as consideration of the tiny (6.5 acre) Kowloon Walled City in the history of British Hong Kong. But even the tiniest of these concessions bears some consideration, not least because while they existed they were a feature of diplomatic life and dispute. The Chinese cities that hosted them were transgressed or perhaps we might say interrupted cities, cities with holes in them, in many respects, filled in different ways by different powers. Chinese administrative or policing sovereignty was impaired. Concession authority circumscribed, thwarted, or contested Chinese sovereignty over Chinese subjects in the concessions. If at Canton the British Concession regulations prohibited the publication of Chinese newspapers, at Shanghai the settlement became the heart of a critical new world of journalism and periodicals.⁷ Political meetings were held in the Zhangyuan (Zhang Garden). Plotters hid out in concession

⁶ On Nanning, see my chapter, “‘Good Work for China in Every Possible Direction’: The Foreign Inspectorate of the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1854–1950,” in Bryna Goodman and David Goodman, eds., *Twentieth Century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday, and the World* (London: Routledge 2012), 25–36.

⁷ See, e.g., Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872–1912* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004);

safe houses (and some, of course, blew themselves up there in October 1911 to accidental but nonetheless tremendous effect).

These concessions and settlements were in some places accorded a hugely symbolic role in the presentation of individual foreign power in China, as outposts of architectural modernity or hygienic rationality, for instance. They were usually sites of fluidity and freedom of movement, but they were in fact cities of troubled movement, in which a man might walk a straight line for a mile, passing through different laws and expectations and under different eyes, and along a single road of many names. He might pass a Sikh, a Vietnamese, a Russian, a Japanese policeman, or a Chinese constable under the orders of British, German, Belgian, or Italian nationals. Sometimes there were gates, and his stroll along a straight road might be impeded by barriers, in principle if not in practice, for these gates were usually open but kept ready to close in crisis. He would have to mind his behavior, for different bylaws penalized different acts or else penalized acts that garnered no police attention in the Chinese-administered city. The claim is made sometimes that these zones were ignored by city residents, that unless business or employment specifically took people there, then they were absent from the city as lived. But that is not a convincing argument, and in addition we know that many of the residents of these concessions were Chinese, and indeed that in many respects the concessions' primary function and the key to their success lay in the fact of Chinese residence.

That latter point is one key commonality. Even Zhenjiang's tiny British Concession was dependent on Chinese residents. In 1919 there were twenty adult foreign residents and at least twelve hundred Chinese living in the concession, with at least another two thousand entering it daily to work.⁸ Foreign-style housing and godowns stood empty as trade declined rapidly, but the security offered by the extra territorialized concession reportedly made local Chinese residents "flock" to the jerry-built housing that was built for them. The undermining of the second wave of concessions commenced almost from their establishment. In 1866 the commissioner of customs at Shanghai noted that Chinese merchants had already embraced the steamers plying the new riverine and coastal routes opened by treaty. Ningbo was undermined as a treaty port and protosettlement

Weipin Tsai, *Reading Shenbao: Nationalism, Consumerism, and Individuality in China, 1919–37* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁸ British Municipal Council, Chinkiang, *Report for the Year 1919 and Budget for the Year 1920* (Shanghai: Printed at Shanghai Mercury, 1919), p. 40.

by twice daily sailings to Shanghai, and the low \$3 return fare a Chinese trader needed to invest in to settle his business at the latter port.⁹ This augured well for Shanghai, but not for Ningbo, nor Zhenjiang, Jiujiang, and several other concessions, which were soon redundant economically, at least in terms of the early hopes pinned on them and the functions envisioned for them.

This chapter aims to help us understand these zones in the Republican period, not least in terms of the sources available to us. Usually, these areas are approached as either bridgeheads in a wider foreign occupation of China or as relatively self-contained enclaves. They are also sites of memory for the former expatriate communities.¹⁰ Little survives by way of municipal records, barring annual reports lodged in consular archives, and some other publications.¹¹ On the whole they are mostly ignored in English, despite the attention that they garnered in Chinese in both national and local histories.¹² As individual political flashpoints they have sometimes received attention—the role played by Tianjin, for example, in Anglo-Japanese relations or Hankou in Sino-British ones.¹³ As part of the wider foreign repertoire of colonial practice, they have generally received

⁹ *Reports on the Trade at the Ports in China Open by Treaty to Foreign Trade, for the Year 1865* (Shanghai: Printed at Imperial Maritime Customs Press, 1866), pp. 135–136.

¹⁰ Among other examples there are J. G. Ballard, *Empire of the Sun* (London: Gollancz, 1984) and *Miracles of Life: From Shanghai to Shepperton* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008); Desmond Power, *Little Foreign Devil* (West Vancouver, B.C.: Pangli, 1996); A. H. Rasmussen, *China Trader* (London: Constable, 1954); and Peter Stursberg, *No Foreign Bones in China: Memoirs of Imperialism and Its Ending* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002).

¹¹ H. Staples-Smith, *Diary of Events and the Progress on Shameen, 1859–1938* (Hong Kong: Ye Olde Printerie, 1938) is the only contemporary history of one of the concessions (as a concession) that I know of. There is, of course, a great deal on the concessions at Tianjin in O. D. Rasmussen, *Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History* (Tianjin: Tientsin Press, 1925).

¹² See, for example, Fei Chengkang 費成康, *Zhongguo zujie shi* 中國租界史 [History of the concessions in China] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1991); *Lieqiang zai Zhongguo de zujie* 列強在中國的租界 [The concessions the powers established in China] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1992); *Shanghai zujie zhi* 上海租界史 [Annals of the Shanghai concessions] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999); Shang Keqiang 尚克強, *Jiuguo zujie yu jindai Tianjin* 九國租界與近代天津 [The nine concessions and modern Tianjin] (Tianjin: Tianjin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008); and the *Hankou zujie zhi* 漢口租界志 [Annals of the Hankou concessions] (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 2003).

¹³ Sebastian Swann, *Japan's Imperial Dilemma in China: The Tientsin Incident, 1939–1940* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Edmund S. K. Fung, *The Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat: Britain's South China Policy, 1924–1931* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Lee En-han, *China's Recovery of the British Hankow and Kiukiang Concessions in 1927* (Perth: University of Western Australia, Centre for East Asian Studies, 1980).

due but often muted and vague analysis. In general in and of themselves, they are routinely bypassed both in specific histories of the cities concerned and in diplomatic accounts of Sino-foreign relations.¹⁴

Indeed, logic suggests, for example, that a study of the four scruffy waterfront acres that formed the British Concession at Xiamen might truly lack scholarly urgency, in and of itself. The foreign areas usually functioned as a national and international political issue in terms of the analysis of imperialism that became crucial in 1920s China and in the rhetoric and practice of anti-imperialist mobilization during the Nationalist Revolution (1926–1928). The most obvious and noteworthy episodes were the May Thirtieth Incident and Movement in Shanghai in 1925, the abandonment of the British concessions at Hankou and Jiujiang in January 1927 in the aftermath of their occupation by Nationalist forces, and the involvement of leading French Concession and International Settlement officials in Chiang Kai-shek's coup against the communists in Shanghai in April of that year.¹⁵ Abstract opposition to imperialism could be given concrete form, cause, and opportunity in the micropolitics of a British concession. The same could be argued for any sign of overtly British presence in a Chinese town or city in a time of heightened nationalist excitement, but whereas British commercial installations certainly attracted popular attention elsewhere, British concessions were a British gift to nationalist activism, a gift that kept on giving. To their enemies they formed a national network of targets for mobilization, and the May Thirtieth Movement and its aftermath saw a wave of strikes and boycotts that hit most of the cities containing British concessions or were open to British and other foreign trade.

These problems were not always political in origin, however. Points of friction emerged that had as much to do with the organic growth of urban centers in the 1920s and the wave of urban redevelopment that marked

¹⁴ Some exceptions: Chen Yu, "The Making of a Bund in China: The British Concession in Xiamen (1852–1930)," *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 7.11 (2008): 31–38; Dorothée Rihal, 'La Concession française de Hankou (1896–1943): De la condamnation à l'appropriation d'un héritage' (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., IAO, Lyon, 2007).

¹⁵ Richard W. Rigby, *The May 30 Movement: Events and Themes* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980); Nicholas R. Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s* (Middlebury, VT: University Press of New England, 1991); Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); H. Owen Chapman, *The Chinese Revolution 1926–27: A Record of the Period under Communist Control as Seen from the Nationalist Capital, Hankow* (London: Constable & Co., 1928); and Marie-Claire Bergère, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

this decade of republican modernity. Often, simply put, concessions got in the way—got in the way of new roads, new bundings, and new visions of the cities in which they were lodged and of who should work there. There were also affected by changing environments, by the shifting silting Yangzi at Zhenjiang, for example, which literally left the concession bund high and dry. At some point, the advantages of holding them were going to be outweighed by the disadvantages. That point had probably already been reached by 1925 before May Thirtieth and its bloody aftermaths at the Hankou and Shamian concessions. Local foreign volunteers (at the former) and volunteers and foreign troops (at the latter) killed at least sixty people during confrontations in June 1925 at those ports.¹⁶ These related points form the subject of the first sections of this chapter. The final section explores the ways in which one newly available set of visual records might inform discussions: sets of photographs of treaty port cities taken between 1907 and 1940 by G. Warren Swire, a British director and later chairman of the firm John Swire & Sons.¹⁷ British concessions were one network in a mesh of interlinked foreign networks in China, including the treaty ports, mission societies, shipping lines, and the commercial networks of British firms like Swires, and others.

At the start it will be useful to lay out as precisely as possible what the British world of concessions and settlements involved. In 1921 there were forty-nine formally recognized treaty ports, thirty-three more places opened to foreign trade, and nineteen cities containing some twenty-nine foreign concessions and settlements.¹⁸ The British share of these twenty-nine formally recognized sites is set out in table 8.1 (appendix). This excludes the formally recognized, and extra territorialized, Diplomatic Quarter at Beijing, the Crown Colony at Hong Kong, and the leased territories at Weihaiwei and Kowloon, as well as such informally developed initiatives as the Kuling Municipal Council, which administered a

¹⁶ Fung, *The Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat*, pp. 40–44.

¹⁷ The British holding company John Swire & Sons operated in China through the firm of Butterfield & Swire, which acted as the agency there for other company operations, mostly notably the steamship line the China Navigation Company.

¹⁸ *The China Year Book, 1921–22* (Peking: Tientsin Press, 1922), pp. 218–222. This excludes Hong Kong and Kowloon. Another twenty-five “ports of call” on the Yangzi and West Rivers were formally recognized under various agreements. A comprehensive survey of the situation by 1905 is laid out in a report by S. F. Mayers that was subsequently issued to consulates. It had not been easy to bring the material together, or even to locate some key documents—no copy of the original Tianjin leasehold, for example, had been located in legation or consulate archives by 1914, and it was assumed there was none. See the Mayers Report, in TNA, FO 881/8747; on Tianjin lacuna, see “Second Memorandum by Mr Alston Respecting British Concessions in China,” 1 July 1914, in TNA, FO 881/10507.

privately purchased area of Lushan, the Chefoo International Committee, a Committee of Public Works at Ningbo, and others.¹⁹ Some other areas of concentrated British residence notably lacked any concession zone, such as Fuzhou and Yantai (Chefoo), while at Yingko the “Newchwang British concession” remained an active concept into the 1920s, despite lacking much if any reality on the ground. In 1898 it was reported to have mostly “subsided into the river.” In 1920 staff at the legation in Beijing wondered whether there was in fact anything that could really be called a British concession there (and the consulate had no map of it), but even so, the surviving four lots were subject to the routine to and fro of administrative correspondence.²⁰ Some concessions were never developed, such as Wuhu, where a concession was marked out in 1877. Concessions and concession life always spilled over the formal limits and boundary stones. Concession authorities built extra settlement roads, for example at Zhenjiang. And there was never enough land to spare inside a concession for that vital necessity, a racecourse. These were generally established on land purchased outside the concession area but that was thereafter assumed through practice and bluster to be within it.²¹ So, these concessions were not entirely static or confined. Their residents routinely lobbied for extensions, sometimes to no avail, but sometimes successfully (Hankou, 1898; Tianjin, 1899). Zhenjiang traders put their case forward in 1898, but they also had already built 20 miles of extra settlement roads by 1891.²² At Shanghai in August 1913, during the Second Revolution, the Municipal Council made a grab for the neighboring district of Zhabei but had to beat a retreat. At Tianjin in 1916 and 1917, the French faced a storm of protest when they attempted to secure control of the adjacent Laoxikai District.²³ Viewed in the light of such designs and episodes, there were good grounds for supposing that concessions posed a real threat to the administrative integrity of their host cities.

¹⁹ On Ningbo, see Mayers Report, pp. 13–14.

²⁰ Lord Charles Beresford, *The Break-up of China* (London: Harper, 1899), p. 35; see Barton's comments in Newchwang no. 44, 17 December 1920, in TNA, FO 228/3197.

²¹ On racing see Austin Coates, *China Races* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1984). *Hankow Race Club, Records of Placed Ponies from Autumn 1880 to Spring 1893* (no publisher, ca. 1893) offers a glimpse of the racing world there.

²² Beresford, *The Break-up of China*, p. 126; Customs, *Decennial Reports, 1882–1891*, p. 305.

²³ On Zhabei, see Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832–1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), pp. 364–370. On Laoxikai, see Songchuan Chen, “Shame on You! Grassroots Nationalism, Coercive Nationalism, and Competing Narratives of the Laoxikai Incident and the Tianjin Anti-French campaign, 1916–1917,” *Twentieth Century China* 37:2 (2012), 121–138.

It is worth also remembering contexts, that is, which concessions stood alone and which had other concession neighbors, and indeed remembering fluidity. Five Chinese cities had more than one substantive concession: Canton, Wuhan, Shanghai, Tianjin and Xiamen. In spatial terms, the restriction of the Canton concessions to the mostly reclaimed island of Shamian effectively excluded them to some extent from the municipal landscape, and to a lesser extent the same could be argued for Xiamen, as the major settlement was on Gulangyu Island (although see later discussion). Tianjin and Hankou, alongside Shanghai, were the main cities that were reshaped through the existence of multiple concessions. The British network was on the surface not the only one, for Russia, Germany, Japan, and France all secured more than one concession, but it might actually be stretching the term “network” to apply it to more than the British and Japanese holdings, and in both those cases the concessions formed part of a very wide repertoire of colonial practice in China. The French presence in China included the three concessions, and the Guangzhouwan leased territory, but was also made manifest through its network of consulates, especially in southwest China and through its medical presence.²⁴ Russian concessions were dwarfed by the importance of the Chinese Eastern Railroad and the wider presence in Manchuria. German concessions were overshadowed by the navy’s ministry-run colony at Jiaozhou (Qingdao). These different states deployed their power in China through different forms of territorial domination or alienation, based on treaty and on military power. Their concessions were less apparently central to their presence in China. Concessions still surviving at the onset of the Pacific War in 1941 were generally retroceded twice: once to the collaborationist Wang Jingwei government, generally in the summer of 1943, and secondly to the National Government. In practical terms, the first retrocession led to the incorporation of concession administrative machinery and personnel into citywide structures.²⁵

²⁴ See Florence Bretelle-Establet, *La santé en Chine du Sud (1898–1928)* (Paris: CNRS editions, 2002), and her “French Medicine in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century China: Rejection or Compliance in Far South Treaty Ports, Concessions and Leased Territories,” in Goodman and Goodman, eds., *Twentieth Century Colonialism and China*, 134–50.

²⁵ See, for example, my “Settlers and Diplomats: The End of British Hegemony in the International Settlement,” in Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds., *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai under Japanese Occupation, 1937–45* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 229–256. In practice, in Shanghai, this was a reverse takeover: the settlement and concession administrations were largely used to run the entire city thereafter.

For the purposes of this chapter, Shanghai and Gulangyu, as the two international settlements, fall mainly into another category of analysis, as do the colonies and leased territories. Shanghai, moreover, by virtue of its size, population, and the sophistication of its machinery of administration, is really a case *sui generis*. Moreover, unlike the other concessions, it alone became the core of its host city, sharply reshaping Shanghai's pattern of settlement and development. In the 1920s and 1930s, contestation of the International Settlement involved the development and implementation of the Greater Shanghai Plan and the attempt to outflank the settlement by building a new city center northwest of the city.²⁶ But even the International Settlement and its neighboring French Concession administrations have attracted in fact little by way of direct analysis up to now, aside from consideration of their political impact in the turmoil of the mid-1920s.²⁷ Although the International Settlement will not, therefore, be directly covered here, in two important ways it is vital to understanding the nature of the British concessions elsewhere: first, its model of municipal administration was copied by those establishing the new concessions after 1860 (hence, in fact, the ambiguous moniker "model settlement").²⁸ Second, it was a continuing source of personnel, in particular, for the skeletal administrations that administered the small concessions. They applied to it for men, for advice, and for copies of its rules and regulations. Their annual reports mimicked its own, even though it was set on a fundamentally different standing to their administrations. By virtue of its international status, but also through simple neglect in many ways, it had secured an autonomous political standing that contrasted sharply with the situation in the British concessions, which were much more directly and effectively under consular control, even though all had elected municipal councils. Shanghai's autonomy remained a source of fond aspiration for some in

²⁶ Christian Henriot, *Shanghai, 1927–1937: Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Kerrie L. MacPherson, "Designing China's Urban Future: The Greater Shanghai Plan, 1927–1937," *Planning Perspectives* 5 (1990): 39–62; and Frederic Wakeman Jr., *Policing Shanghai, 1927–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

²⁷ Exceptions include Kerrie MacPherson, *A Wilderness of Marshes: The Origins of Public Health in Shanghai, 1843–1893* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1987), and Isabella Jackson, 'Managing Shanghai: the International Settlement administration and the development of the city, 1900–43' (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Bristol, 2012).

²⁸ "All eastern ports rejoice in their mother's jubilee," ran one of the slogans on banners that decorated the settlement during its jubilee celebrations in November 1893 (*The Jubilee of Shanghai, 1843–1893. Shanghai: Past and Present, and a Full Account of the Proceedings on the 17th and 18th November, 1893* [Shanghai: Revised and reprinted from the North-China Daily News, 1893], p. 44).

the smaller ports, but they had their supporters too, for their politics and the foreign life there generally seemed simpler and less fraught.

8.1. *Concessions and Cities*

Each British concession had its elected council, normally three to five members in number, and each council compiled its own annual report. On the surface it all looked *pukka*. But there are limits to how seriously we can take either the councils or their reports. At Xiamen, the council outnumbered its residents by some five to one.²⁹ At Jiujiang, the thickness of the report suggests a salaried secretary with much to prove and much time in which to try to prove it. The ratio of electors to councillors was marginally better at Zhenjiang, and slightly more orthodox at Jiujiang. These councils functioned on the basis of land regulations that incorporated a set of bylaws.³⁰ Promulgated as each concession was established, these were later revised and reestablished on the basis of formal Orders in Council, and they covered the constitution of the council and its remit, the eligibility of electors and councillors, and so on. An annual meeting of ratepayers and land renters approved the budget. The councils had powers to raise funds from land or property taxes, license fees (taverns, hotels, dogs), and charges on use of the bund and were used to build and maintain roads and jetties, law and order, drainage and sanitation. They established water supplies, lit the streets, perhaps maintained the cemetery, and usually maintained a prison. Each employed some form of police force and secretariat. It was the British consul's responsibility to call the annual meeting, over which he presided. He had final right of approval over all resolutions at the meeting and new bylaws, although this could be appealed to the minister in Beijing. Elections to the councils were rare, local residents and representatives of firms taking it in turns to hold a post that generally demanded little work. At Hankou in 1920 there were 13 European employees, including 4 policemen overseeing 35 Sikhs and 98 Chinese. At Jiujiang just 1, and 23 Chinese (police and warders). At Zhenjiang there was 1 Briton (concurrently chief of police

²⁹ As this sole resident was the Inspector of Police, he and his family were ignored when figures were given about residency within the concession.

³⁰ Details of clauses in the land regulations that follow in this paragraph and the next are taken from *Hertslet's China Treaties*, 3rd ed. (London: HMSO, 1908), vol. 2.

and council secretary)³¹ and 24 Chinese. At Xiamen, 1 Briton and 10 Chinese. At Shamian in 1927 there were 3 Britons employed, 20 Sikhs, and 54 Chinese.³² Most of the Chinese staff in the concessions were police, though that might be an overly generous term for many of them.

The land regulations make the power of the consular establishment clear, although none as explicitly as Jiujiang's, where the British minister in Beijing was deemed explicitly to have the final decision on all bylaws. But there were shades of difference here, and at Hankou consular approval was not required for bylaws relating "solely to the Council or their officers or servants" (§8). Consuls could not dissolve or replace these councils and so had less direct power over them than their fellow consular authorities over all the other concessions, but in practice they had leeway to direct affairs, and they had their veto. Clearly, British interests at times were happy to let the consuls undertake the work. E. T. C. Werner at Jiujiang in 1909 was consul and concession chairman ("and General Dictator," noted the Jardine's chairman at Shanghai, sarcastically).³³ Perhaps they sometimes envied their fellow consuls. The French had absolute control over their concession police forces, although these were funded by the concessions. Perhaps they sometimes also envied the outsourcing policy of the Germans, who subcontracted development at Tianjin and Hankow to commercial bodies, such as the Deutsch Asiatische Bank at Tianjin.³⁴ On the whole, British "general dictators" were few, but, by default and because they had administrative roles to play in land transfers and concession procedures, consuls were often caught up in the minutiae of concession affairs.

The various land regulations also made the paramount position of British subjects clear, but changing treaty port realities are reflected in the changes that can be seen in some of the sets of regulations over time. (And, as the Niuzhuang consul noted in 1920, "Most of the rules have been

³¹ This man took care of anything that needed seeing to, and when he served with the Chinese Labor Corps, during the First World War, his wife acted in his stead (IWM, Tinkler papers, RMT to Edith Tinkler, 16 December 1925; British Municipal Council, Chinkiang, *Report for the Year 1917 and Budget for the Year 1918* [Shanghai: Shanghai Mercury, 1918], p. 1).

³² Details from Shameen Municipal Council memorandum, "Proposed Rendition of Shameen," 17 February 1927, in TNA, FO 676/83.

³³ David Landale to Sir John Jordan, 24 September 1909, in TNA, FO 228/2147.

³⁴ Mayers Report, p. 16; Cord Eberspächer, 'Colonialism on Equal Terms? Negotiating the German Concession in Tianjin 1895–1897', paper presented at the Conference on "Treaty ports in Modern China", University of Bristol, 7–8 July 2011.

disregarded at one time or another as arbitrary or unreasonable).³⁵ Originally explicit in restricting residence and lease holding to British subjects, Hankou's regulations were revised in 1867 to allow non-British treaty power nationals to hold leases in a move designed to help the concession develop after a slow start.³⁶ At Tianjin, the 1866 regulations specified not only that land could only be held by British nationals, or other treaty power nationals, but that if those non-Britons transgressed the regulations and bylaws, then their lots and property could be subject to forfeit (§4). The same penalty applied to any Chinese subjects who might be found to have secured lots. The 1871 Shamian regulations promised no such draconian penalty for non-Britons, although they still required the same undertakings (§16), but the original regulations had prohibited Chinese residence as well as lease holding on pain of confiscation.³⁷ Jiujiang's 1902 regulations extended eligibility to vote to householders and land renters, but these were carefully defined as including "foreign" nationals only, which term included Britons, treaty power nationals, and their recognized subjects (§32). Hankou's regulations (1902; §17) permitted either Britons or treaty nationals to vote and serve, as did those of the British Tianjin Municipal Extension (1899; §13), and there even to serve as chairman subject to the British minister's approval.³⁸ (These regulations also extended developments in the English 1894 Local Government Act to concession suffrage, and permitted women otherwise eligible the vote, but not the opportunity to stand as councillors [§11]). The issue of the status of Russian and German nationals after 1917 muddled these rules. Both lost extraterritoriality, and then stateless Russians later came under full Chinese jurisdiction.

Chinese residents on Gulangyu were allowed representation through two of their number, to be proposed by the Daotai, but no vote (1902; §2). At Tianjin and Gulangyu, the fact of existing Chinese residence had to be accommodated. The 1919 Land Regulations of the amalgamated British areas there enshrined a requirement for a simple majority of British nationals to be represented on the council, and after 1927 this was revised

³⁵ Newchwang no. 44, 17 December 1920, TNA, FO 228/3197.

³⁶ By 1905 70 percent of the original concession lots were British held, but only 41 percent of the 1898 extension lots were (Mayers Report, pp. 14–15).

³⁷ H. S. Wilkinson to Marquis of Salisbury, 25 January 1888, in *Correspondence Respecting the Leases of Lands in British Concessions in the Treaty Ports and Lease of Such Lands to Chinese Subjects and Other Foreigners, 1877–1893*, Foreign Office confidential print, p. 45, in TNA, FO 405/55.

³⁸ But such was Customs Commissioner Gustav Detring's preeminence in Tianjin and its municipal affairs that this clause could not but be included.

as five Britons and five Chinese.³⁹ At other concessions the economics of Chinese residence were also accommodated, though circumscribed. At Hankou, construction of shops and houses for Chinese occupation was permitted in one demarcated area (Bye-law, §21)—the 1898 extension—subject to approval, conditions, and a license fee, but also subject to a termination clause: all licenses were to expire by the end of 1925.⁴⁰ At Zhenjiang, regulations introduced in 1891 strictly regulated Chinese occupation of properties, and Chinese occupied only blocks of housing allocated to them.⁴¹ The reality will have been, as it was elsewhere, that land was in fact owned by Chinese, but through British agents. This practice often suited British officials, for it inflated the size of their own presence in the concessions, which was an important factor in diplomatic negotiations, and it suited leaseholders, for it was profitable.⁴² British defense of this underlying principle of British occupation, however impaired it was by that point, remained an issue into the 1920s. Without it, the argument for retaining concessions was sharply undermined.

Alston's concern in 1911 and 1912 lay in the inconsistencies of leases. The concessions and settlements were themselves on perpetual lease, unlike the Weihai or Kowloon leased territories, which were to be held by the British for ninety-nine years. However, the Crown leases (or properly subleases) granted to British nationals in the concessions were of ninety-nine years' duration from their establishment.⁴³ At Shanghai, however, leases were perpetual. The British position in the concessions contrasted with that of all other treaty powers, which generally followed the model of perpetual leases. The issue then raised in 1911 was: how might greater security of tenure be provided in the British concessions, and at what, if any, cost to the leaseholders (especially given current and probably future land values)? And given that even current land values could logically suggest a very large windfall for the British government if it charged for lease renewal, what might be done with such a sum? This is in many ways an

³⁹ F. C. Jones, *Shanghai and Tientsin* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 122–123.

⁴⁰ Hankow no. 16, 24 February 1921, in TNA, FO 228/3184.

⁴¹ British Municipal Council, Chinkiang, *Report for the Year 1919 and Budget for the Year 1920*, p. 16.

⁴² Jones calculated that at a minimum 50 percent of property in the British Concession at Tianjin in 1938 was Chinese owned, excluding that registered in British or other foreign names, which would increase that figure (*Shanghai and Tientsin*, pp. 126–127).

⁴³ This applied even to those granted sometime after the establishment of the concessions. Leases were granted lasting only to the ninety-ninth year from that initial point, not ninety-nine years from their grant.

insular debate, in that it is entirely about British practice and had little effective impact on Chinese realities, at least none at that time. There are two points to note, however. The first lies in the reported widespread negative attitude of leaseholders toward the changes proposed, which highlights the ambiguous relationship between the British state and its nationals in China, and the second lies in the ever-present but generally muted debate about Chinese residence in the concessions.

British interests were, Alston found, opposed to paying anything for lease renewals. Any increase in value was entirely “due to the exertions of past and present lot-holders,” they claimed. Well, it was also due to the “protection and assistance” afforded by the various arms of the British state in China, Alston retorted, and as the British in China paid nothing by way of any imperial taxation, they received these services gratis. Too true, they cheerfully replied, showing, he thought, how “perfectly indifferent” they were to the burden thereby borne by the British domestic taxpayer. Instead of seeing themselves first and foremost as Crown tenants, they asserted their perfectly proper but separate rights to consular protection as British nationals in China. It bears repeating that the interests of British nationals and the British state in China need to be distinguished, and that in many cases those interests were, if not in active conflict, then rarely wholly and securely in parallel. Even where British consuls held sway over concession administrations, and the Crown held the underlying lease, British lot holders and residents were not agents of that state, and they resented that state when it attempted, as they saw it, to impose burdens on them. Their relationship to state power was markedly different to that of Japanese communities toward the Japanese consular establishment, which was much more directive of the activities of its subjects in China.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See Mark R. Peattie, “Japanese Treaty Port Settlements in China, 1895–1937,” in Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 166–209, as well as Erik Esselstrom, *Crossing Empire’s Edge: Foreign Ministry Police and Japanese Expansionism in Northeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009). This is not to suggest that there was not a variety of positions and interests within the Japanese communities, for there was, not least between lower-middle-class traders and larger commercial interests, but that Japanese consular power was much greater and wielded more consistently (Christian Henriot, “‘Little Japan’ in Shanghai: An Insulated Community, 1875–1945,” in Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot, eds., *New Frontiers: Imperialism’s New Communities in East Asia, 1843–1957* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 146–169; Joshua A. Fogel, *Articulating the Sinosphere: Sino-Japanese Relations in Space and Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Barbara J. Brooks, *Japan’s Imperial Diplomacy: Consuls, Treaty Ports, and War in China, 1895–1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000).

The question of Chinese residence in British concessions was shaped by the original treaties and land regulations, inflected by practical economics and greed, and shaped by plain racism. Under the 1858 and 1860 treaties, the British Crown secured the concessions, and lots were to be leased to British nationals only. Alston viewed this as stemming from a misunderstanding of the reasons for Shanghai's successful growth to that moment—a point that was made very clear when the Shanghai bubble burst in 1865 after the end of the Taiping Rebellion and there was movement out of the International Settlement of large numbers of Chinese residents who were able to return to homes in the Yangzi cities that they had fled. Chinese residents had often been seen and written of as a pestilential burden. The loss of huge numbers of both the “better class” as well as the poorer classes of residents was a blow to the settlement's economy, but it thereby taught a lesson other concession land renters noted, and some like the Zhenjiang and Jiujiang renters in 1877 soon petitioned the legation to be allowed to tap into this potentially lucrative market. This was refused, but the restrictive clauses in leases proved a “dead letter,” as subletting to Chinese commenced regardless.⁴⁵ Wariness about unrestricted Chinese residence and about muddying British exclusivity in the concessions also stemmed from the intense practical difficulties encountered in 1843 and after, when Britons found it almost impossible to secure land or property in the newly opened cities. This was in large part a legacy of the all-too-recent conflict and was only resolved at Shanghai by the demarcation of a separate zone of British residence outside the city itself.

To complicate things further, in time, residence patterns became quite diverse, if not perverse. No Britons (unambiguously recognized as such) lived in the Xiamen concession, for all preferred the island of Gulangyu. Many British residents in Shanghai lived in the French Concession, or latterly outside both zones in areas that were later claimed by the settlement authorities.⁴⁶ At Canton many Britons lived on the Henan (Honam) side of the river, not at Shamian. As the sole concession holders in most ports

⁴⁵ Bickers, *Scramble for China*, pp. 151–186; see item 1 and enclosures in *Correspondence Respecting the Leases of Lands in British Concessions in the Treaty Ports*, pp. 1–5. Acting Consul L. C. Hopkins, Jiujiang, to Marshall, 20 August 1890, details the extent of Chinese residence by that point (*Correspondence Respecting the Leases of Lands in British Concessions in the Treaty Ports*, pp. 67–68).

⁴⁶ These were the “outside roads” areas such as Hongqiao. These claims to sovereignty were effectively contested by the Chinese municipal authorities, but neither administration dislodged the other. The consequences are narrated in Frederic Wakeman Jr., *The Shanghai Badlands: Wartime Terrorism and Urban Crime, 1937–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

for some fifty years after 1843, the British housed many foreign nationals who were often loath to take advantage of the concessions established by their own governments in the 1890s or 1900s. Foreign nationals other than Britons could lease land providing that they undertook to sign a declaration, endorsed by their own national representative, and that they abide by the British land regulations. With the establishment of the new concessions at the turn of the century, some Britons sometimes found themselves living under, for example, Russian administration, a situation not welcome in those Russophobic decades. In fact, some at Hankou found themselves dispossessed by their new French or Russian masters. Others, at Tianjin, chose to reside in the pleasant, tree-lined German concession.⁴⁷

If the issue of who was a Chinese subject grew less clear during the Republic, the issue of who exactly was a British subject had never been clear. For the British presence in China had from the start included Nanyang Chinese from British colonies and would later include Hong Kong residents. But who exactly was a Hong Kong resident? And from the start also, Cantonese allies of the British had moved into the treaty ports with them as compradors, as linguists, and in other roles. How far in practice they came under the British umbrella was a vexed question for consuls. As trade grew, such problems only increased. British lot holders at Xiamen, for example, included Nanyang Chinese. And when the British consul general at Canton refused to allow the Hong Kong-registered Bank of East Asia to lease a lot in the Shamian concession in 1924 on the grounds that it was not a British company, he lost their challenge to the decision in the British Supreme Court at Shanghai.⁴⁸

Three issues in the 1920s that kept consuls and diplomats busy and generated local heat about the concessions will be discussed next: first, attempts by concession authorities to install gates that could bar entry in times of crisis; second, resistance to wider urban redevelopment schemes launched by the city administrations that directly impinged on the concession area; third, the political and professional incompetence of foreign and Chinese concession personnel. As a result of these three issues, riots, boycotts, and other forms of protest kept the peculiarities of the concessions at Jiujiang or Xiamen on the desks of the minister at Beijing.

⁴⁷ Beresford, *The Break-up of China*, pp. 144–149; Rasmussen, *Tientsin*, p. 95.

⁴⁸ See correspondence in TNA, FO 228/3193 and FO 228/3194.

8.2. Gates

A first assumption might be that the concessions were somehow physically demarcated by walls or fences. Chinese cityscapes are of course notable for their walled compounds, city walls, and gates.⁴⁹ But whereas buildings on most foreign lots were placed in walled compounds, the concessions themselves were usually spatially open. Although originally designed as residentially exclusive, and whereas, for example at Shanghai, they might be laid out to direct movement of Chinese along some roads and not others, it was not until the Taiping Rebellion that physical security of the settlement there became an issue. This was met with the installation of gates and the adoption of strict restrictions on the movement of Chinese within the settlement at night. Passes were required, and lanterns mandated. Shanghai was hardly alone in this. Hankou's insecurity in 1861 led the British consul to order construction of a wall around the concession area site.⁵⁰ The 1871 Shamian Bye-Laws required that Chinese carry lanterns in the hours of darkness (§19). The Anglo-French occupation of Canton was barely a decade in the past at that point, and fears of Chinese popular attacks on foreigners had been raised by the Tianjin massacre in 1870. Hankou's 1896 and 1902 Bye-laws also mandated lantern carrying (§23; §12), and again recent unrest (the 1891 Yangzi riots, and the Boxer uprising) may have been a factor. These two approaches—physical and legal—were later echoed at other concessions.

Although Chinese residence became a fact of life at the concessions, without which it was estimated, in 1892, that land prices would collapse to a quarter of their value, it was always residence on sufferance.⁵¹ There were limits to how far Chinese residents, let alone visitors, were able to enjoy access to public facilities such as open spaces. Exclusion of Chinese residents from a British social club might be ethically dubious, but exclusion of residents from public facilities and space was indefensible. So, it was defended by resort to the land regulations, their precise delineation of British, treaty power national, and Chinese rights and their limitations

⁴⁹ Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ Dean, "Sino-British Diplomacy in the 1860s," pp. 75–76. The wall would also help clarify the extent of the area.

⁵¹ Acting Consul Bennett, Zhenjiang, to Foreign Office, 20 September 1892, *Correspondence Respecting the Leases of Lands in British Concessions in the Treaty Ports*, pp. 73–74. At that point there were 1,383 Chinese residents at Zhenjiang and 37 foreign nationals (Consul Carles, Zhenjiang, to Mr. O'Connor, 15 December 1892, *Correspondence Respecting the Leases of Lands in British Concessions in the Treaty Ports*, pp. 74–76).

despite, or rather particularly because of, Chinese residential reality in the concessions. The police patrolled the bunds, moving people on, preventing them from standing to stare at European residents or resting on the bunds and seats. Moreover, concession authorities, through their police forces, used “deportation” or “banishment” orders as one of their categories of punishment, which was then reinforced by the offense of “returning from deportation.”⁵² (In legal terms this was an improvement, for example, on the early Shanghai practice of rounding up indigent Chinese and shipping them over to Pudong.) We might also remember that totals of Chinese residents in these concessions might be slightly augmented by those imprisoned in concession jails. And at Shamian, the bylaws required a register of Chinese servants, the better to help identify who was allowed on the island and who was not. An attempt to introduce this at Zhenjiang in 1923 was vetoed by the consul as too blunt.⁵³ After the Gelaohui riots in 1891, the authorities at Zhenjiang purged the concession of Chinese establishments. Jiujiang seems to have been unusual in that its gates and indeed walls long predated 1911. By 1922 they were routinely closed at 10 P.M. and opened at daybreak. “Breaking into Concession at night” was a crime, reported as such in the annual reports. On the city side of the Zhenjiang concession a similar arrangement was put in place in 1893, four gates being erected that year, and a fifth in 1900.⁵⁴ New gates were built in 1911 and 1912 to control access to the bund. So swiftly was the river shifting, however, that they were all but redundant within a decade and “little more than an emblem.”⁵⁵ Access to Shamian across the two bridges was always restricted, and the gates were also closed at night.

Gating off through law might have helped the daily policing of the concessions, but the spatial openness became a source of anxiety again in 1911, and gates became sites of conflict in two concessions, Hankou and Xiamen, in 1918 and 1919. As fighting raged in Hankou after October 1911, makeshift wooden barriers were hurriedly erected across all openings

⁵² Hankou “banished from the concession” 160 Chinese in 1919 (British Municipal Council, Hankou, *Report for the Year 1919* [Hankow: Printed at Central China Press, 1920], p. 19); there were six returnees punished for this offense at Jiujiang in 1919 (Kiukiang Municipal Council, *Report of the Kiukiang Municipal Council for the Year 1919* [Hankow: Printed at the Central China Press, 1920], p. 5).

⁵³ There was also oblique comment about how this might in fact lead to the public identification of Chinese mistresses of foreign residents (Consul E. H. Sly to Teichman, Private, 14 June 1923, in TNA, FO 228/3189).

⁵⁴ Chinkiang no. 15, 13 July 1921, in TNA, FO 228/3189.

⁵⁵ R. H. Clive (Amoy), memo, “Amoy Boycott and Foreshore Question,” 25 January 1922, in TNA, FO 228/3182.

from the city onto the two roads that marked the southern boundary of the British Concession. Gates were also erected at Zhenjiang—“very strong double gates of stout iron bars each with a span of some twenty feet.”⁵⁶ By March 1912, British army engineers had replaced the Hankou gates with what were described as three “re-enforced wooden gates” that were “part of the permanent defences of the Concession.” They proved, it was claimed, “of incalculable benefit,” and—a familiar refrain—benefited not least Chinese “merchants and gentry” who fled to the concessions when order broke down in the city.⁵⁷ By July 1918, these had been reinforced with a 2,400-foot-long fence and 300 foot of wall and iron railings, with eight gates, three of them into the Chinese city.⁵⁸ The gates were, however, in ordinary times a hindrance to the free flow of traffic, and by 1919 the Municipal Council and city administration wished to replace them with new gates that could better accommodate traffic passing through the streets. The city administration had received calls from “public associations” calling for the removal of the gates in their entirety, but the concession authorities vetoed this, agreeing to compromise on the installation of less restrictive gates. But when the concession moved unilaterally to replace them in September 1919, it provoked both the posting of Chinese police pickets to prevent the work, as well as a popular agitation against the very idea of allowing gates, for, as slogans posted publicly announced, “This is our Hankou. . . . No one else can build here.” Fearful of provoking a major incident, the British consul vetoed further work until things were clearer, for the Chinese authorities claimed that the gates were placed outside the concession boundary. As it turned out, this was in fact the case.⁵⁹

At Xiamen, five gates and walls were erected for the first time in September 1918 when civil strife in the city was expected. They were accompanied by notice boards in Chinese declaring “British concession: No admittance except on business.” For good measure, a flagpole was also erected, from which the Union flag flew. These measures were, it seems, resented from the start (not least also initially by members of the British Municipal Council, who objected to having to pay for work ordered to be undertaken by the British consul and military authorities). The particular point of conflict that emerged was over the prevention of traffic along the

⁵⁶ Rasmussen, *China Trader*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Hankow no. 104, 20 September 1919, in TNA, FO 228/3184.

⁵⁸ Hankow no. 125, 15 August 1918, in TNA, FO 228/3184.

⁵⁹ The affair is covered in correspondence in TNA, FO 228/3184.

bund, not least as the bund, partially reclaimed in 1878, technically lay outside the concession. In 1921, when Butterfield & Swire attempted to rebuild their bundside jetty, the issue was brought to a head. Demands were made for the demolition of the walls and gates and removal of the notices, and when the company under consular direction, and protected by a Royal Navy ship, began the work, it was subjected to what became a prolonged boycott. Its equipment was sabotaged, and the situation by 1922 reached an impasse. Well, concluded the consul, as the gates were "futile," they really could be lived without.⁶⁰ In mid-March 1922, demolition of the gates and removal of the signboards commenced once the British had a promise of sorts from the local authorities that this move would bring an end to the boycott. But despite the "futility" of the gates, the otherwise reasonable consular report recommended retention of the installations at the back of the concession as a "face-saving compromise." Gates, like lawns and public gardens, were accorded a symbolic value in British eyes. They were clearly physically more visible than the marker stones that once laid out concession or settlement boundaries, but their chief importance seems to have become a psychological one, tied up with notions of British prestige and with perceptions of "face," about which, surely, nobody was ever more concerned than the British.

Tightening up access to Shamian, which needed no wall, provoked a month-long strike against the British Municipal Council in July and August 1924. In 1920, the British and French consulates had implemented new rules to prohibit the storage of goods by non-resident traders seeking to take advantage of the safety of the concession during times of civil strife. The ostensible aim was to prevent the island from becoming the target of looting if law and order completely collapsed. In July 1924, new "traffic regulations" were introduced to restrict Chinese access to the island through the gated bridges. Only those with approved passes were to be admitted, and the aim was to prevent use of the concession as a thoroughfare and to keep the bund and its seats free from Chinese users. The new rules were rushed in after an attempt to assassinate the governor general of French Indo-China in the concession.⁶¹ The concessions' Chinese police deserted as part of the protest, which saw the withdrawal of all concession labor and the picketing of the entrances to the concession

⁶⁰ R. H. Clive (Amoy), memo, "Amoy Boycott and Foreshore Question," 25 January 1922; Amoy Telegrams, no. 25, 2 March 1922, and no. 27, 15 March 1922, in FO 228/3182.

⁶¹ With the exception of amahs accompanying foreign residents' children up to late afternoon ("Shameen Traffic Regulations," 21 August 1924, in TNA, FO 228/3193).

led by communist activists. It was only settled by a partial climb down by the councils.⁶² Gated Shamian had quickly become blockaded Shamian (and not for the last time), and a seemingly local matter attracted widespread international press coverage. The little local difficulties of concession administration became politicized and internationalized issues, for the politics of revolutionary Canton clearly and swiftly took up the issue, and were inflamed by it; even island Shamian was not divorced from its host city.

8.3. *City Redevelopment*

Gates, then, were generally a later development than might be assumed, aside from the period of the Taiping emergency. They acquired an active political life later still, as urban nationalism found ready targets in the physical infrastructure of the foreign presence in China. The gates at Hankou had become an inconvenience resented by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and others by 1919. Tightening up access at Canton proved politically incendiary. But, we must also factor in simple urban development as well as complex urban politics. By the 1920s the concession at Xiamen had become an urban area for a municipal administration operating in an era of sustained urban redevelopment. As *Huaqiao* (華僑, overseas Chinese) investment flowed into Canton in the 1920s and 1930s, the city was swept by construction and development projects.⁶³ In 1927, plans for a new harbor-front road to be built on reclaimed land alongside the city's harbor edge were discussed by British officials. This wide new bund would cut across the access to the waterfront of the British lots. In both these cases, consular assumptions about the propriety of British actions in the past and the legal foundations of their position proved incorrect. Misplacing gates at Hankou by a few feet was an embarrassment, but it demonstrated how easy it was for British officials to misunderstand the comparatively recent and contingent nature of much that they thought

⁶² For more on the strike, see C. Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-ying How, *Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920–1927* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 107–108; TNA, FO 228/3193; Liang Guozhi 梁國志, “Guangzhou Shamian yangwu gongren de gaikuang jibagong jingguo” 廣州沙面洋務工人的概況及罷工經過 [The Circumstances and Strikes of Workers Employed in Foreign Firms in Shamian, Canton], in 廣州的洋行與租界 *Guangzhou de yanghang yu zujie* [Foreign firms and Concessions in Canton] *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* No. 44 (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 183–189.

⁶³ Carolyn Cartier, *Globalizing South China* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 136–138.

well-fixed in treaties and agreements. The haphazard development on the ground of the concession “system”—although it is debatable whether it can truly be called that—is instructive. There was a dearth of accurate information. Memories were short and fallible, and staff turnover in consulates and businesses was high. Consulate records went up in flames (at Shanghai in 1870 and at Zhenjiang in 1889), or else were infested with insects or damaged by mold. Or, they were simply destroyed in the early 1920s.⁶⁴ When the archive survived and was investigated, the results could be surprising. The Xiamen concession actually proved effectively to have no firm legal foundation at all and not to deserve the title “concession,” for there turned out to be no provision in the 1852 arrangements for a grant in perpetuity to the British.⁶⁵ And while the micro details of the local agreements and bilateral treaties were hardly ignored by local Chinese and British officials, in the era of popular nationalist contestation, British claims that were not apparently legally watertight could be a significant liability. The British were embarrassed by Xiamen questions at the Washington Conference in 1922, such local spats providing fuel for Wellington Koo’s bid there to roll back extraterritoriality and the foreign concessions.⁶⁶

There was a sustained legalistic attack on the foreign position in the early republic, associated with Koo, and with Chinese students like him studying international law overseas, principally in the United States. Chinese diplomats had been as little aware as the British of the fine and precise detail of the dizzying array of local agreements underpinning the concessions. Researchers such as Koo, Bao Mingqian (Joshua Ming Chien Bau) and Tai Ensai (En-sai Tai) found themselves relying on foreign diplomatic archives and records to build their case against the foreign infrastructure in China.⁶⁷ Build it they did, however. While they generally accepted the argument that judicial reform within China was the *sine qua non* underlying treaty revision, they set to work arming negotiators and officials with fine detail rescued from foreign archives. Koo’s move at Washington did not succeed, but by raising the issue of wholesale treaty revision head

⁶⁴ Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, pp. 377–378.

⁶⁵ Amoy no. 35, 10 July 1930, in TNA, FO 228/4301.

⁶⁶ See also Legation no. 541, 26 August 1922, in TNA, FO 228/3189.

⁶⁷ Vi Kyuin Wellington Koo, *The Status of Aliens in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912); En-sai Tai, *Treaty Ports in China (A Study in Diplomacy)* (New York: Columbia University Press Bookstore, 1918); M. J. Bau, *The Foreign Relations of China: A History and a Survey* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1921). On the wider context of judicial revision see Xiaoqun Xu, *Trial of Modernity: Judicial Reform in early Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

on, he brought into the light the legal and other inadequacies and irregularities that characterised much of the position of the concession-holding powers, the British not least of all.⁶⁸

Part of the issue also lay in the fact that the ground shifted beneath the feet of the British. They had arrived by water, barrelling off the steamers in 1861 to lobby the consuls for grant of a lot, preferably bund-side, but any lot would do. They mostly lived afloat on their hulks at Zhenjiang for five years after 1861, across the river from the concession area, for the swiftness of the current on the south bank of the river where the concession was laid out made its actual realization and smooth working a considerable challenge. They were quicker ashore and building at Jiujiang and Hankou, but not without facing some measure of opposition.⁶⁹ At none of the ports did they have control of the harbor or anchorages. Their limits were fixed to a boundary along the “river bank” (in most original lease documents)⁷⁰ or tidal foreshore, but thereafter lay under Chinese jurisdiction, generally exercised through the Maritime Customs. Chinese sovereignty over conservancy issues and its waterways was tested and confirmed in the face of British challenges over customs actions concerning substantial damage caused to the Zhenjiang bund by a Butterfield & Swire hulk, the *Cadiz*, after 1874.⁷¹ The evolution and development of municipal facilities by the concession administrations could also fall foul of this fact. Chinese resistance to Zhenjiang’s attempt to modernize its sewage system in 1921 was framed in the language of rights protection and Chinese sovereignty.⁷²

Demarcating the shoreline became a key development task, and the bunding of the riverbank or harbor side was vital, not least given seasonal tidal differences and the average daily tidal range, which on the Yangzi ports was dramatic. The achievement involved in building these bunds was much celebrated, and their iconographic status has been analyzed. They look fine and strong in John Thomson’s 1872 photographs of Hankou and Jiujiang, but their reality was often gimcrack, and less energy was put

⁶⁸ On Koo at Washington see Stephen G. Craft, *V.K. Wellington Koo and the Emergence of Modern China* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 61–71; on the wider pattern see Dong Wang, *China’s Equal Treaties: Narrating National History* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 35–61.

⁶⁹ Dennys and Mayers, *Treaty Ports of China and Japan*, pp. 421–424 (Zhenjiang), pp. 429–444 (Jiujiang and Hankou).

⁷⁰ See Mayers Report, appendix 1.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Fairbank et al., eds., *The I.G. in Peking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 1:231, n2; Stanley F. Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs* (Belfast: Mullan, 1950), pp. 434–444.

⁷² Chinkiang no. 32, 26 October 1921, in TNA, FO 228/3189.

into the ponds and land behind the bunds and the lots. (And at Jiujiang they failed to build a direct connection to the city.) Lot holders did not wish to pour funds into construction. Individuals were often looking to short-term returns on their investment, to making their £20,000 and getting out back home.⁷³ The measures taken were often therefore a compromise between necessity and tight budgets. So bunds decayed or collapsed, or were a source of anxiety.⁷⁴ But no bund would have stayed the Liao River at Niuzhuang, as it eroded seven of the eleven British lots and left two of those remaining “anything but secure” by 1891, and the approach of the “Chengjenchow” spit on the Zhenjiang concession after 1905 was plain to see and little effort was made to prevent it, for the port’s trade hardly justified the expense.⁷⁵ More dramatically, if more occasionally, nearly all the concessions were troubled by major floods. Effective management of this threat was beyond the capacity of any single concession and needed government agencies, such as the Haihe Conservancy Commission at Tianjin, which could act across the region as a whole.⁷⁶ Foreshore questions took up much consular time and energy. A concession was only as good as its access to the water, but the water was not the concessions’, nor was the foreshore, and the water could not be tamed.

8.4. *Incompetence*

Simple incompetence, clearly labeled as such, is, I think, little identified by historians as one of the contingent factors driving events. Often this is because it seems a value term, rather than an objective one. But all too clearly the personnel involved in running concession administrations or their departments were poorly qualified to do so, if qualified at all, nurses and civil engineers aside. As Wellington Koo had remarked in 1912, whereas foreign missionaries, the focus of much earlier conflict were “little impeachable in their private conduct, it would be entirely a different case with foreign merchants, for in their train there are apt to be characters of all kinds and grades.”⁷⁷ These little Britain’s charmed some

⁷³ Bickers, *Scramble for China*.

⁷⁴ Customs, *Decennial Reports, 1882–1891*, pp. 304–305.

⁷⁵ Customs, *Decennial Reports, 1882–1891*, p. 16.

⁷⁶ The chairman of the British Concession had a place on the commission, but generally its foreign membership came from the consulate staffs.

⁷⁷ On nurses, see the work in progress of Rosemary Wall and Anne-Marie Rafferty on the Colonial Nursing Association, and Rafferty, “The Seductions of History and the Nursing Diaspora,” *Health and History* 7.2 (2005), 2–16; Koo, *Status of Aliens in China*, p. 355.

observers because they were so cozy, and the billets enjoyed by their clubbable municipal secretaries so lacking in onerous duty. The British areas were in general rather makeshift. Tianjin and Hankou had the largest municipal staffs, and some semblance of professional practice, but at the smaller ports the police chief was sometimes the only foreign municipal official. The quality of the personnel routinely was decried in council reports; they were indeed ‘characters of all kinds.’ Nearly all the men at Zhenjiang were dismissed in 1919. They slept on duty, and they failed to rise above “the ordinary standard of native honesty.” They were replaced by returnees from the Chinese Labour Corps.⁷⁸ Jiujiang’s force contained men “connected with the thieves’ Guild in the city” in 1919. The previous year, reported the British inspector, had been “very bad, owing to corruption and bribery connected with opium.” The senior Chinese officer and other staff were dismissed in 1925.⁷⁹ The Xiamen concession police were finally dismissed en masse in 1925, their inspector included, and not replaced. They were not missed.

In an era when a minor street brawl could escalate into a major political incident, the lazy violence of a constable and the indifferent talents of his foreign inspector were dangerous threats. One such riot blew up on 14 March 1920 at Jiujiang, but whereas it arose because a Chinese constable hit one of a large group of laborers unloading rice bags from Butterfield & Swire’s bund-side hulk, the policeman had been attempting to enforce a municipal bylaw that forbade “coolies” from resting on concession pavements. “You policemen again, kicking coolies,” said one of the firm’s Chinese employees to the British inspector, Harry Pritchard, when he arrived on the scene. Shortly thereafter the incensed crowd dragged the Briton out of the concession to the city government headquarters, along with his Chinese deputy, kicking and manhandling them all the way, then locking them up there for an hour in a wooden cage. This “rabble... of loafers and porcelain hawkers” surrounded them “jeering and shouting.” The authorities apologized profusely, gave them biscuits and cakes, and when the situation had cooled—as it had only after U.S. naval personnel cleared the bund at bayonet point—sent them back with an armed escort.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ British Municipal Council, Chinkiang, *Report for the Year 1919 and Budget for the Year 1920*, p. 40.

⁷⁹ Kiukiang Municipal Council, *Report of the Kiukiang Municipal Council for the Year 1918* (Hankow: Printed at the Central China Press, 1919), p. 3; Kiukiang Municipal Council, *Report of the Kiukiang Municipal Council for the Year 1919*, p. 4.

⁸⁰ Kiukiang no. 6, 17 March 1920, no. 7, 20 March 1920, and enclosure, “Deposition of Harry Pritchard, Inspector of Municipal Police, Kiukiang”; Consul Kirke to Lampson, 27 March 1920; all in FO 228/3172.

Pritchard was “by no means a tactful individual and is liked neither by foreigners nor Chinese,” reported the consul. He left the concession for good within a few weeks, but the police force had been entirely undermined by the incident and was failing to function. The need to reestablish the force and demonstrate to the “coolies” that the British were determined to police the concession was thought paramount by Consul Kirke. It was a puzzling affair, though, he thought, perhaps reflecting the “general unrest that is shewing itself in all countries,” or even “incipient Bolshevism.” Responded one reader at the legation in Beijing: “Is it not the revolt of Kiukiang cooliedom—ever a rowdy lot, for Chinese—against rules and regulations which appear to them tyrannical and meticulous, and which are enforced by a small unarmed body of their own countrymen in foreign pay?” “Foreign dog!” shouted a boy at one of the constables.⁸¹

Contestation of concession authority by city residents and workers was not entirely new in any of the ports. The bayonet was often wielded to clear the bund at this city or that. But contestation also won out. Chin-kiang had abandoned an attempt to employ Sikh policemen, recruited in 1887, after two years, in the face of local Chinese opposition and a serious riot on 5 February 1889, which saw the destruction of the British consulate and other buildings.⁸² As at Shanghai, an attempt was made there in 1891 to prohibit the chanting of laborers when hauling loads, but as at Shanghai, this attempt to master the sounds of the concession was entirely thwarted.⁸³ In the autumn of 1909, a substantial three-month boycott of British shipping followed the acquittal in the consular court of the Jiujiang concession police inspector, John Mears, on a charge of the manslaughter of a Chinese man, found collapsed on the concession bund, his admission that he might have given the man a “poke” notwithstanding. In the British Parliament, the undersecretary of state for Foreign Affairs claimed that as Mears was a concession employee, there was nothing consuls or diplomats could do about this continued employment, which was disingenuous, given the actual relationship between consuls and concession administrations. But the man was eventually persuaded by the affected British shipping companies to resign his post, the persuasion taking the form of a large payoff.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Consul Kirke to Beilby Alston, 2 May 1920; Kiukiang no. 15, 29 April 1920; both in FO 228/3172.

⁸² Customs, *Decennial Reports, 1882–1891*, p. 308.

⁸³ Customs, *Decennial Reports, 1882–1891*, p. 304.

⁸⁴ C. F. Remer, *A Study of Chinese Boycotts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1933), p. 19; *The Times*, 1909: 23 August, p. 3; 17 September, p. 3; 23 September, p. 3; 19 October, p. 5.

British concession administrations were seemingly model settlements, rationally and efficiently run, beacons of best practice for their municipal neighbors. This was an absolute tenet of British treaty port faith. But, their thick reports disguised the often woeful state of affairs. Sanitary conditions were until recently “deplorable,” remarked the customs commissioner at Zhenjiang in 1912.⁸⁵ And what man of talent would take such positions as were available? The concessions generally took what they could get and so lived with the consequences. The bunds looked good, but sometimes the reality was no wider than that.

The actions of concession personnel, generally men of limited talents enjoying undemanding, cozy billets, recur as a problem. They were certainly not men fit for nationalist times, which required better British diplomacy at Beijing and on the ground. Incompetence and panic, and casual racism, lay behind the events on 30 May 1925 at Shanghai, which spiraled out across China. But the continual minor indignities and minor violence of small concession life took their toll on British prestige as well and impaired the freedom of action of consuls and diplomats, already finding themselves wrong-footed by China’s well-educated, charming and agile young diplomats.

The language of prestige and face surfaces in the discussions about these bund squabbles and minor emergencies. For some, the symbolic capital of the British was heavily invested in these concessions, where the flag flew over smart lawns, tidy bunds, and efficient little councils administering their Chinese acres and displaying good British practical sense, energy, and efficiency.⁸⁶ But exasperated consuls grew tired of the pointless incidents that occurred and recurred and were happy to lose their responsibilities for dealing with the inefficient police chiefs and their lackadaisical staff. Small concession inefficiencies and incidents became too dangerous in the nationalistic 1920s. Even those flagstaffs could cause boycotts and trouble.

8.5. *Retrocessions*

Alston seems to have been suckered by the lobbyists in Hong Kong and China in 1911 and 1912, and he was probably swayed too by the uncertainties of the revolution and the new Republic. In a second minute, dated 1 July 1914, he reinforced his dissent from the original proposals

⁸⁵ Customs, *Decennial Reports, 1902–1911*, p. 422.

⁸⁶ Bickers, *Britain in China*, chaps. 3–4.

of the Inter-Departmental Committee. The acquisition of this estate in China by the Crown was accidental, he concluded, and policy overall was wholly inconsistent. The Crown should take no financial advantage of the position it was in; rather, it held these lands in trust for the British trading communities.⁸⁷ So, two years' residence in China had seen him well schooled by those communities. The leases conundrum was not resolved until much more correspondence was exchanged, meetings held, and positions explored. In December 1927, a Treasury minute was published that implemented one of the policy commitments announced in Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain's 1926 "December Memorandum," which had aimed to placate Guomindang (Nationalist Party) demands at the height of the Nationalist Revolution. All interests in concession leases held by the British government were surrendered to the lessees, and the Crown thereafter no longer acted as "ground landlord," collecting annual ground rents from lot holders and passing these on to the Chinese authorities.⁸⁸

There was no sudden shift in policy about British retention of concessions and settlements, however. Overall, a decision had certainly been taken to concentrate on core interests. As British Minister Sir Miles Lampson and his team began to establish what became a fairly good working relationship with the Nationalist Government after 1928, they did move to surrender the irritant concessions that had survived the Nationalist Revolution. Hankou and Jiujiang had been surrendered in the face of populist agitation in the heady days of January 1927.⁸⁹ The absolute limits of the British use of force to protect these holdings was reached, and, recognizing the inability of marines, or foreign volunteers, to prevent their seizure without significant bloodshed and catastrophic consequences for the British position in China overall, British forces had been withdrawn. The surrender to Chinese control was ratified within weeks by the first agreement signed between the British and the Guomindang. Xiamen was discovered not to be at all properly established and was surrendered with no ceremony in 1929. Police sovereignty had actually been quietly abandoned

⁸⁷ "Second Memorandum by Mr Alston Respecting British Concessions in China," 1 July 1914, in TNA, FO 881/10507.

⁸⁸ Cmd. 2994, China, *Copy of Treasury Minute Dated the 7th December, 1927, Relative to the Leases of His Majesty's Government in the British Concessions in China* (London: HMSO, 1927). On the 1926 initiative, see Fung, *The Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat*, pp. 101–104.

⁸⁹ Bickers, *Britain in China*, chap. 4, "Dismantling Informal Empire," pp. 115–169. For a memoir of the Jiujiang events, see P. H. Munro-Faure, "The Kiukiang Incident of 1927" [1944], *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29 (1989): 61–76.

with the disbanding of the police force in 1925, so there was little real difference. Zhenjiang was let go in 1930.

By the end of that year the British estate had been reduced to its core, to the concession at Tianjin, and the international settlements at Shanghai and Xiamen, both of whose international status greatly complicated discussions about reform. Nonetheless, negotiations were undertaken in 1931 about their return, but were derailed by the fall-out from the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Nonetheless, consuls and settlement authorities accommodated the assertive projection of the sovereignty of the National government within the settlements across many areas previously considered wholly within the purview of the foreign authorities. Flashpoints they remained, but increasingly they were flashpoints in intra-imperial conflict, as the Japanese exerted pressure on the British with a view to dislodging them from their Chinese possessions. There were standoffs at Shanghai and blockades at Xiamen and at Tianjin in 1939–40. All fell, in the end, as the Pacific War unfolded. Aside from Hong Kong and the New Territories, none of the British system survived the conflict.⁹⁰

Staff of the former administrations harassed British officials over pension claims after 1943, when remaining privileges were surrendered in the Sino-British Friendship Treaty, as they had after 1927 and the return of the Yangzi concessions. Traders and residents had then complained about the failure of successor bodies to maintain the apparent high standards of the former British administrations. Mears and his ilk were forgotten. Other worries were highlighted. Would property prices fall? What about municipal bonds—would they be honored, where outstanding? How had the retrocession of Zhenjiang affected him, one long-time resident was asked in 1931 by a journalist, H. G. W. Woodhead, who opposed the new British policies and was reporting on the state of the former concessions. At Zhenjiang, Chinese businesses and hotels had been established in the former concession area since the handover and the ending of the restrictions on the Chinese presence. The silting foreshore was being reclaimed as a new bund, bigger in size than the original concession. The interrupted city was whole again. Well, the man replied, thinking over Woodhead's question, "I have never had clean bath water since."⁹¹

⁹⁰ See, e.g. Swann, *Japan's Imperial Dilemma in China*.

⁹¹ H. G. W. Woodhead, *The Yangtze and Its Problems* (Shanghai: Mercury Press, 1931), p. 137.



Figure 8.1. G. W. Swire, Loading cargo at Jiujiang, 1906–1907, sw12-06l.

8.6. *Concessions and Water*

This essay has shown, then, that the ground beneath British feet in the concessions was hardly firm, ethically, despite the precision of the land regulations. It was often less clearly delineated than its residents and British officials believed. It was not firmly rooted in treaty. It was certainly not firm physically in some of the concessions. We might now make an analytical virtue of this, and reimagine and resituate the concessions by thinking about them from the water, not from the land, and that can also be done by using a powerful, newly available visual source.

G. Warren Swire, grandson of the founder of John Swire & Sons, became a leading voice of the company in the 1920s and 1930s and was its chairman from 1927 to 1946.⁹² Although the firm was headquartered in London, one of its directors made a trip “out east” (in company parlance) every year. This involved visiting Butterfield & Swire (Taigu 太古) branches and installations, calling on and lobbying where needed the agents of the British state, at Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai, as well as Chinese officials and merchants, gingering up and assessing staff, inspecting new developments, and so on. Files of letters from the “Director Now Out East” are full of comment, gossip, and information about people and developments, crucial data for decision making at a distance. But Warren Swire also marked his voyages with photography, not as a snapshooter, but as a serious and technically proficient photographer. In one sense, Swire produced a large additional set of *aides-memoire*, good photographs of the company’s assets in China and their environments, as well as its shipping. He thereby also left a stunning record of riverine and coastal China and its developments between 1906 and 1940.⁹³

John Swire & Sons had their say in some concession administrations, for the company informally kept a place on the Shanghai Municipal Council, for example, but often sited their operations outside the concessions. At Shanghai, they were based on the French Concession bund and at Hankou just beyond the British limits. The company’s installations were a source of friction and boycott at Xiamen and at Jiujiang. Swire had little truck with the small treaty port people for whom the concessions provided

⁹² On Swire, see Robert Bickers, “Swire, (George) Warren (1883–1949),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, September 2004, available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39473> (accessed 30 August 2010).

⁹³ The photographs can be viewed on the “Historical Photographs of China” Web site at <http://hpc.vcea.net/>>.



Figure 8.2. G. W. Swire, Junks and hulks at Zhenjiang, 1906–1907, sw12-057.



Figure 8.3. G. W. Swire, Hankou bund and the Customs House, 1920s, sw07-069.



Figure 8.4. G. W. Swire, Shameen, Canton, 1907s, sw14-010.

an insular world and one that needed protection. His photographs put the concessions in their place, and while they do so by putting them in the place of one particular company network, there is a wider lesson to be drawn. They remind us of the central importance of the riverine and maritime communications that linked these concessions, that they were small outposts within bigger cities and harbors and were nodes within much, much wider networks of treaty ports and ports of call across China. They remind us of the ambiguous position of Hong Kong within this network, wholly linked into it, but by virtue of its place in the formal British colonial world, also looking out. They remind us that this was a world wholly connected to and functioning within wider East and Southeast Asian networks of port cities and international trade and movement.

Swire photographed the bund at Xiamen, company installations at Yokohama, the hulks at Zhenjiang, and the wharves at Bangkok. Other companies' networks would provide geographical variations on this theme, but whether it was BAT, APC, or Swires, the essential fact remains that their Chinese world was one part of a wider world of activity and interests. These small British concessions, once vital to British interests, now in the Nanjing Republic regarded by many solely as sources of dreary conflict, were as a result resituated within the scope of British diplomacy and British interests. The ships kept running, nonetheless, linking these cities with their Asian counterparts. What was even recently held fast on to, by force of threat of arms, by table banging and restatement of apparent treaty obligations, was delivered over to Chinese control, for it had comprehensively outlived its usefulness, and the British state and its allies had re-orientated their China strategy, which had always taken place in a far wider context than was imagined in the municipal building at Hankou, or Zhenjiang.⁹⁴

Conclusion

The British concessions have had several afterlives. Some were initially run as Special Administrative Districts, which retained some structures that accommodated or gave voice to British and concession leaseholder interests. The first SADs—the pun in the acronym was noted by opponents

⁹⁴ Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Imperialism in Transition: British Business and the Chinese Authorities, 1931–37', *China Quarterly*, No. 98 (1984), pp. 260–86.

of retrocession—were German and Austrian, the second wave Russian. Municipal reorganization during the Nanjing decade saw most of these vanish. None were ever established for the International Settlement at Shanghai or the British and French Concessions at Tianjin.⁹⁵ Second, they have functioned as a subject within the revived national humiliation discourse of the past twenty years, and early in that period as a byproduct of the functional analysis of the treaty ports as Special Economic Zones by social science academies during the Seventh Five-Year Plan period.⁹⁶ Most recently, they rejoined the mainstream of local urban history, in the recent volumes of the *Shanghai tongshi*, for example.⁹⁷ They have also become important sites in the heritage industry in China. Zhenjiang's old street, the Tianjin Italian district, and the revamped bund at Shanghai, form a telling part of the spate of new developments across Chinese cities aiming to capitalize on the country's growing tourist market.

This chapter has aimed to offer some thoughts about the place of the British concessions in Chinese cities. The fruits, generally, of hectic land grabs after 1842 and 1860, contested, extended, defended, mythologized, and romanticized, and also excoriated, the concessions were one defining feature of British activity in Republican China. As British diplomats retrenched in the aftermath of the Nationalist Revolution, some of these possessions were abandoned, to the great relief of many whose attention had been overly dominated by concession problems and disputes. The bathwater might thereafter have been less pristine at Zhenjiang, but the British relationship with the Nationalist Government became clearer.

The concessions offer us something by way of an entrée into their wider cities, for they were a part of these, and their attempts to demarcate themselves effectively show how porous they actually were, gates or no gates. But most essentially, too, they can remind us, not least if we approach

⁹⁵ One early contemporary outline of these developments is Harold S. Quigley, "Foreign Concessions in Chinese Hands," *Foreign Affairs* 7.1 (1928): 150–155.

⁹⁶ See, e.g., Zhang Zhongli 張仲禮, chief ed., *Dongnan yanhai chengshi yu Zhongguo jindaihua* 東南沿海城市與中國近代化 [The southeast coastal cities and China's modernization] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1996); Luo Shuwei 羅澍偉, chief ed., *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi* 近代天津城市史 [Modern Tianjin's urban history] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1993); and Pi Mingxiu 皮明庥, chief ed., *Jindai Wuhan chengshi shi* 近代武漢城市史 [Modern Wuhan's urban history] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1993). On this phenomenon of combining city-planning and urban historiography, see Haiyan Liu and Kristin Stapleton, "Chinese Urban History: State of the Field," *China Information* 20.3 (2006): 391–427.

⁹⁷ Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, ed., *Shanghai tongshi* 上海通史 [Comprehensive history of Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1999). See also, for example, Zhong Junming 鍾俊鳴, ed., Shamian: Jin yi ge shenmi miansha 沙面: 近一個世紀的神秘面紗 [Shamian: A century of mystery] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1999).

them through the visual records of a man like Swire, of maritime and riverine China, of the relentless movement of goods and peoples along the coasts and rivers, and of the movement thereby too of ideas and practices. Seen this way, the concessions serve as a reminder both of the fact of the incorporation of Chinese cities and through them, thereby, their hinterlands, into regional East Asia and international networks, and their national connectedness too along the rivers and coastal highways, the \$3 ride from Ningbo to Shanghai, and the reshaping of modern China that this new world of accelerated movement shaped.

Appendix

Table 8.1. British concessions and settlements in 1920.

City	Type	Date	Size (acres)	Population (ca. 1920)		
				British	Other foreign	Chinese
Canton (Shamian)	Concession	1859	43	347 ^{#*}		1,005
Hankou	Concession	1861	75	163	515	9,757
Jiujiang	Concession	1861	25		++	
Niuzhuang (Yingkou)	Concession	1861	9 ^{##}			
Shanghai	Int. Settlement	1843 [*]	5,519	5,341	17,966	783,186
Tianjin ^{**}	Concession ^{*#}	1860	1,013	682	1,362	33,172
Xiamen	Concession	1852	4	0		
Xiamen (Gulangyu)	Int. Settlement	1902	330			
Zhenjiang	Concession	1861	26	24 [#]		1,235

^{#*} Census of 1914, no breakdown by nationality, foreign total includes Britons and non-Britons (H. S. S., *Diary of Events*, p. 25). In 1927 there were 116 Britons, a further 311 foreign nationals, and 803 Chinese (Canton no. 6, 17 January 1927, in TNA, FO 676/83).

⁺⁺ In 1918 there were 445 foreign residents in the city, Liu Jifu 劉積福, chief ed., *Jiujiang shi zhi* 九江市志 [Annals of Jiujiang] (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2004).

^{##} As originally laid out, the British occupied a riverside strip 1,000 yards long and 1 lot wide, some 30 acres in total, but 21 were washed away; see “Newchwang,” Nicholar Belfield Dennys and William Frederick Mayers, *The Treaty Ports of China and Japan* (London: Trübner & Co., 1867), pp. 538–545; Mayers Report, p. 22, in TNA, FO 881/8747.

^{*} Established as “English ground” in 1843; became the International Settlement through amalgamation with the American Hongkew Settlement in 1863.

^{**} Population figure from 1925 (*Tianjin zujie dangan xuanbian* 天津租界檔案選編 [Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1992], pp. 86–87). This is probably greater than the 1920 figure.

^{*#} The amalgamated British Municipal Area of 1919 consisted of the original concession, the British Municipal Extension area of 1897, which had a separate council until 1919, and the Extra-Mural Extension area of 1903.

[#] Figures from 1919. British and other non-Chinese not distinguished. Most of these, barring about half a dozen, will be British, however (*British Municipal Council, Chinkiang, Report for the Year 1919 and Budget for the Year 1920* [Shanghai: Printed at the Shanghai Mercury, 1919], p. 40).